



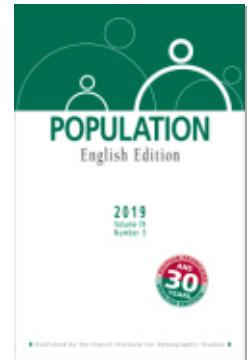
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Jean-Marc ROHRBASSER* and Jacques VÉRON*

The Marquis de Sade and the Question of Population

The writings of the Marquis de Sade have escaped the notice of historians of demographic thought. Jean-Marc Rohrbasser and Jacques Véron correct this oversight with a detailed examination of four major works by the 'Divine Marquis'; they demonstrate that Sade's views on population form a coherent and distinctly original system. The discussion identifies convergences with the writings of other major figures in the history of ideas, including one familiar to demographers, namely the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus.

In 1799, barely a year after Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, Paris saw the publication of *La Nouvelle Justine*, a novel written several years earlier by the Marquis de Sade, in which the iconoclastic author sets out his unconventional ideas on population. Combining advocacy for atheism and materialism with his peculiar mystique of pleasure, Sade, assuming the role of *philosophe*, reaches conclusions that are occasionally close to those of Malthus, although they proceed from diametrically opposed premises.

However extreme Sade's theses may appear, motivated as they are by his passion for *libertinage*, they nevertheless exhibit a high degree of theoretical consistency in keeping with his philosophical positions (Beauvoir, 1972). Sade's writings may be shocking, but one must also recognize, as Delon (Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2017) suggests, their systematic irony and the attempt to push the boundaries. Despite his reputation as a literary outcast, Sade belongs unreservedly to the literature of his time; and as Ehrard (1983) pointed out, 'the time has come to recognize his work's literariness in order to assess its true stature' (p. 241).

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Editor's note: Unless otherwise indicated, translations are by Bernard Cohen. Readers may wish to pursue their interest in Sade with the following English-language editions of his works: *Juliette*, translated by A. Wainhouse (New York, Grove Press, 1971); *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Writings*, translated by A. Wainhouse and R. Seaver (New York, Grove Press, 1971); and *Philosophy in the Boudoir*, translated by J. Neugroschel (New York, Penguin, 2006).

Without occupying a central position in Sade's universe, the question of population is addressed in numerous works, including *Aline et Valcour*, *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, and *L'Histoire de Juliette*; the discussions are sufficiently detailed to outline a theory of demographic regulation. Arguing against the pro-populationist *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment, Sade rejects the belief that what he calls human 'propagation' is a necessary law of nature.

The philosophical dimension is fundamental to Sade's writings, as pointed out by Belaval (1976), Macherey (1990), and Deprun (1990); yet, for a long time, it received relatively little critical attention (Jeangène Vilmer, 2005). Sade's considerations regarding population, which are largely derived from his philosophy, have gone unnoticed in the history of demographic thought. Sade's approach to population growth is intimately linked to his philosophical positions, particularly his approach to the dialectics between order and disorder, and between vice and virtue.

After reviewing Sade's philosophical positions, we explore his vision of humankind as a species with no special status relative to other species; of nature as a force of destruction indispensable for the perpetuation of life; of human 'propagation' devoid of any purpose; and finally, of *libertinage* as a means of limiting population growth. The paper concludes with an examination of Sade's opposition to measures to benefit the poor. In this respect, as in the case of population growth, Sade's writings can be seen in light of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, even if the two authors' philosophical and theological premises could not be further apart. The aim is not to compare Sade's views with those of Malthus, but rather to refer to the latter's ideas when perspective is required.

I. Nature indifferent to the human species

1. An ethics of pleasure

Sade's fictional characters undoubtedly serve as the author's mouthpieces; their pronouncements can only be understood in relation to his philosophical positions. Delon and Deprun, who edited the standard three-volume Pléiade edition of Sade's works, have identified the sources of his characters' philosophical 'disquisitions', including Baron d'Holbach's *Système de la nature* [*System of Nature*], which Sade sometimes copies at length. The principal theses developed by Sade express an unconditional materialism, albeit in a rogue version shaped by his emphasis on a brutal, cruel form of sexuality. He differs in this respect from other materialists like La Mettrie, Helvetius, and Diderot, who all drew inspiration from an Epicureanism filtered through Spinoza.

The Roman poet Lucretius, a disciple of the Greek philosopher Epicurus, set out an ethics of pleasure linked in part to the gods' indifference to human affairs. Writing in the first century BCE, Lucretius expounded, in his poem *De rerum natura* [*On the Nature of Things*], the materialism at the heart of

Sade, a life in confinement

Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de Sade, was born in Paris on 2 June 1740, the son of a noted libertine, and spent most of his childhood in Provence. In 1750, he enrolled at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris and 5 years later began his military career as a sub lieutenant in the infantry. At the age of 23, Sade married Renée Pélégie de Montreuil, whose mother would be instrumental in ensuring his multiple terms of incarceration. Shortly following his marriage, and after a string of delinquent and impious acts, Sade was confined in the prison tower of Vincennes before being assigned to residence in Normandy. He subsequently continued a life of debauchery, until a further scandal in 1768 led to a string of imprisonments and banishment to the family chateau in Provence. Soon thereafter, following yet another scandal, he was sentenced to death *in absentia*, fled abroad, and was incarcerated outside of France, in Savoy. In 1777, Sade was again a prisoner in Vincennes, and 7 years later he was transferred to the Bastille. From 1786 to 1789, Sade wrote an epistolary novel later published under the title *Aline et Valcour ou le Roman philosophique écrit à la Bastille un an avant la Révolution* [*Aline and Valcour, or the Philosophical Novel Written in the Bastille One Year Before the Revolution*], which relates the tale of two crossed lovers in exotic settings including what one critic called a 'Rousseauist utopia' (Goulemot, 1994). Released after the fall of the Bastille, Sade divorced and established a relationship with an actress that was to last until his death. He participated in the Revolution as an active member of the radical Piques section in Paris. In 1791, he published anonymously *Justine ou les Malheurs de la vertu* [*Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*], which brought him considerable notoriety. The year 1795 saw the publication of *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* [*Philosophy in the Boudoir*], presented as a 'posthumous work by the author of *Justine*'. From 1791 to 1797 Sade wrote a sequel to *Justine*, which was published as *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la Vertu, suivie de l'Histoire de Juliette, sa Sœur* [*The New Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue, Followed by the History of Juliette, Her Sister*].

Arrested again in 1801, Sade was incarcerated in the Sainte-Pélagie prison in Paris, transferred 2 years later to Bicêtre prison, and then to the Maison de Charenton, a mental hospital outside Paris that held 'the insane of both sexes' (Mesmin d'Estienne, 2008, p. 25), where he died in December 1814.

Sade's publications cited:

- *Aline et Valcour ou le Roman philosophique écrit à la Bastille un an avant la Révolution*, À Paris chez la veuve Girouard, 1795. (Referred to below as *Aline et Valcour*.)
- *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, 1795. The book was published anonymously with a false location, 'À Londres' (London), and an imaginary publisher, 'Aux dépens de la Compagnie', as was often the case. (Referred to below as *Philosophie*.)
- *La Nouvelle Justine ou Les Malheurs de la vertu, suivie de l'Histoire de Juliette, sa sœur*, 1797 (or 1799). Once again, the place, date, and publisher printed on the title page were fictitious. While the title page indicates 1797, the actual date of publication could be 1799 (Delon, 1998). (Referred to below as *Nouvelle Justine* and as *Juliette*.)
- Jean-Jacques Pauvert began republishing the complete works of Sade in the 1950s, and a three-volume critical edition of the principal works was released in the Pléiade collection in the 1990s. All page references are to the Pléiade edition in French.

Epicurean philosophy that posits the absence of any intentionality in nature. Following in this tradition, Spinoza's refutation of teleology was to influence the materialist philosophers of the 18th century. Spinoza rejected 'the notion commonly entertained, that all things in Nature act as men themselves act, namely, with an end in view [...] and] that God made all things for man' (Spinoza, 1677, pp. 26–27). For Spinoza, the action of 'God, that is, Nature'⁽¹⁾ is

(1) 'aeternum namque illud, & infinitum Ens, quod Deum, seu Naturam appellamus, eadem, qua existit, necessitate agit' (for that eternal and infinite Being that we call God or Nature [*Deum, seu Naturam*] acts with the same necessity by which it exists). Other occurrences of the expression 'God, that is, Nature' are found in the same section of the *Ethics* and in the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (Spinoza, 1670).

incommensurable with the action of men—who, in their ignorance, attribute to final causes what in actuality derives from a strictly human manner of thinking, which is totally foreign to the deterministic workings of a nature indifferent to humankind.

Spinoza is cited only once, with a reference in *Juliette* to his ‘wise principles’ (p. 195), but his influence appears to be pervasive. There are several references to the materialist philosopher La Mettrie, who held that because life is short, one should not dwell on pain and distress, but rather seek to maximize pleasure.

It may be of interest to compare Sade’s conceptions with those of his contemporary Malthus in that both assign an essential role to nature, but in radically different ways. Malthus (1798) speaks of ‘the book of nature, where alone we can read God as he is’ (p. 351), and sets out a comprehensive theodicy to justify providence and encourage compliance with a moral code (Rohrbasser and Véron, 2017). Sade’s materialism, on the other hand, permits and indeed encourages pleasure-seeking behaviour.

Atheism is not necessarily associated with pleasure-seeking. Schematically, materialistic atheism may follow the path of vice or the path of virtue; the latter leads to the paradox of the ‘virtuous atheist’ discussed, in the purest Epicurean tradition, by Pierre Bayle and others. Bayle, a Protestant philosopher, argued that an atheist may live a virtuous life and that a Catholic could commit all manner of crimes (Bayle, 1683, pp. 303–306; 1702, pp. 3137–3140). Sade deliberately chooses the path of vice, which leads him to proclaim that all passions are good: because passions are the products of nature, far from opposing nature, they facilitate nature’s actions. For Sade, pleasure follows the ‘path of crime’, where crime is understood to be any action generally considered to be criminal but which, he claims, actually conforms to the laws of nature.

Leaving his individualistic approach to pleasure to one side, Sade turns to his vision of society as a whole, with considerations on human population and its ‘movements’.

2. Humans have no exceptional position in nature

Sade’s novels are filled with his character’s philosophical disquisitions, some of which deal with population. Rejecting biblical tradition, he holds that humans are merely one species among others, that man can claim no exceptional status, and that his existence corresponds neither to a design of providence nor to any intention of nature. The contingent nature of man’s presence on earth is clearly expressed in *Juliette*, in comments on the moral education of young ladies: ‘it’s not for our sake that everything was made, because, even if we didn’t exist, everything would still exist. What are we in the eyes of nature? And how can we value ourselves so highly?’ (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 241).

In the same vein, a character in *Aline et Valcour* says that we, as human beings, are ‘subject to the same accidents as the other animals’; and that nature

was not created for us, irrespective of what vanity would have us believe. Man would like 'to believe that the sun shines and that plants grow for the benefit of our precious species', but Sade holds that the idea of an exceptional position is illusory in that 'nature could do without us, [just] as easily as the class of ants or flies.' Human actions are unimportant: 'Even without a single man on earth, everything would happen just the same.' In this conception of the world, nature is indifferent to 'the multiplication of the species', and its 'total extinction would not upset any of nature's laws' (Sade, 1795a, 588–589).

Similarly, in the fifth dialogue of *Philosophie*, Sade challenges human pride, asking why man considers himself the king of creation when he is only one 'production' among others. One passage in the dialogue addresses the position of man on earth; Sade urges humility because there is nothing to distinguish man from plants and animals, from apes and elephants. Like all other species, man is 'placed on this globe only by accident' (Sade, 1795b, p. 144) and is governed only by the laws of nature. The fate of humans, like other species, is to be born, mature, decline, grow old, and then fall into nothingness.

3. Nature, vice, and destruction

Nature's indifference to humanity's fate, Sade argues, releases men from any moral law. If there exists no moral order, then there can be no distinction between virtue and vice: this is the fundamental thesis underlying Sade's philosophy.

Therefore everything in man is vice; vice alone is the essence of his nature and condition; he is vicious (*vicieux*) when he puts his interest above others'; and he is vicious even in the midst of virtue, because such virtue, such sacrifice to his passions, is either only a manifestation of pride or the desire to enjoy a more complacent form of happiness than the path of crime would bring. (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 307)

As even the 'most beautiful of virtues' is ultimately nothing but a vice, and vice rules the world, Sade makes it 'the first law of nature' (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 307). This conception of the virtues and vices radically revisits La Rochefoucauld's position that 'even if vanity does not entirely overthrow the virtues, it shakes them all to their foundations' (La Rochefoucauld, 1675, p. 168) or 'the virtues are bordered by vices' (La Rochefoucauld, 1665, p. 204). Whether separated or intermingled, vices and virtues are a human embodiment of nature's intrinsic ways: 'it's by a perfectly equal mixture of what we call *crime* and *virtue* [Sade's emphasis] that [nature's] laws cohere' (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 331).

The very mechanism of nature is a cycle of destruction and creation. Vice alone, when embodied in crimes, enables the destructions that guarantee a renewal of nature. Death is consubstantial with life, and vice is its principal agent. 'A totally virtuous universe couldn't last for a minute; the wise hand of nature brings order to birth out of disorder, and without disorder, [nature] would achieve nothing' (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 331).

Evil is justified by its utility value, as it forms an integral part of ‘nature’s designs’. In this respect, Sade is radically opposed to a providentialist view of the world, i.e. a ‘divine order’ as expounded, for example, by the Prussian pastor Süssmilch (1741) in his writings on population. Accordingly, for Sade, the scourges of diseases, wars, and famines exist to effect the destruction that will permit a new order to emerge. These scourges, as in Malthus, are part of the essential laws of nature, but for Sade they are not the direct consequence of an imbalance between population and resources. Malthus, on the other hand, argues that while nature effects an equilibrium between population and means of subsistence, destruction does not seek a renewal via creation, but rather acts as a check on the multiplying power of human population:

The vices of mankind are active and able ministers of depopulation. They are the precursors in the great army of destruction and often finish the dreadful work themselves. But should they fail in this war of extermination, sickly seasons, epidemics, pestilence, and plague advance in terrific array and sweep off their thousands and tens of thousands. Should success be still incomplete, gigantic inevitable famine stalks in the rear and with one mighty blow levels the population with the food of the world. (Malthus, 1798, pp. 139–140)

Malthus thus describes a causal linkage with war: ‘the commission of war is vice, and the effect of it misery’ (Malthus, 1798, p. 52). Vice accordingly plays an active role, and its consequence is the equilibrium between population and resources. For Sade, destruction is a necessity in itself and its own justification. That being the case, ‘why should someone who senses himself born to destroy resist his inclinations?’ (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 332). Sade reverses the order of values by identifying evil with man’s resistance to ‘nature’s aims on ourselves’, which are to encourage us to destroy:

[I]f one of the first laws of nature were not the destruction of all beings, then surely I could believe that one offends this unintelligible nature by carrying out this destruction. But since there is not a single process in nature that does not prove that destruction is necessary to her, and that she succeeds in creating only by means of destroying, then surely any being who carries out destruction does nothing other than imitate nature. (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 450)

From this viewpoint, the propagation of the human species is inconceivable outside of the process of destruction, without which ‘nothing would be born, nothing would be regenerated’ (Sade, 1795b, p. 91).

4. Human propagation has no ultimate purpose

For Sade, humankind’s presence on earth being merely fortuitous, the future of our species hardly matters: whether we create or destroy, or must destroy to create, is a matter of indifference. In the same way as for other species, the propagation of humans follows no plan and therefore need not be encouraged:

[Nature] hasn't the least need for propagation and would not interrupt her course nor grieve any more over the destruction of the human race—the worst that could ensue from a refusal to propagate—than if the entire species of rabbits or hares were to vanish from the globe. (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 240)

Propagation of the human species is not one of nature's laws; it is merely tolerated: 'It is wrong to think that propagation is one of the laws of nature; only our pride made us imagine something that silly. Nature allows propagation; but we must be careful not to misinterpret her tolerance as an order' (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 240). In a footnote to *Juliette*, Sade goes so far as to affirm that no destruction of human beings could have the least consequence:

O mankind! You think you are committing a crime against nature when you oppose propagation or when you destroy it, and [yet] you do not dream that the destruction of a thousand times, ten million times as many men as there are on the surface of the earth would not draw from nature a single tear nor lead to the slightest deviation from the regularity of her course. (Sade, 1797/1799b, pp. 240–241)

If there is neither divine intent nor law of nature, if there is neither virtue nor vice, argues Sade, then the growth of a population cannot follow any moral imperative: '[regarding nature]: we no more serve her by propagating than we offend her by not propagating' (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 240). That being the case, Sade holds that those 'whose only idea is propagation' are 'imbeciles' and, absent any proof of the utility of populating the earth, there can be no 'outrage whenever one deviates from this stupid propagation' (Sade, 1795b, p. 90).

Sade also addresses the question of population in theological terms. He asks how the existence of God could be compatible with the propagation of the human species. Implicitly referring to the dogma of original sin, he affirms that men 'have a greater certainty of being damned than saved'. How, then, could a just and omniscient God place humankind in such a position? If the existence of each human being leads only to misery, a God who necessarily knows this fate could only be a 'monster' or a 'barbarian' because his freedom would enable him not to create man. If he did so knowingly, he cannot be a good God. In these circumstances, 'the propagation of our species becomes... the greatest of crimes, and nothing would be more desirable than the total extinction of humankind' (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 512). It would even be 'a service rendered to nature' (Sade, 1795b, p. 48). Sade adds that the disappearance of the human species would benefit nature by restoring her 'creative faculty' that 'propagation' removes (Sade, 1795b, p. 54).

This is diametrically opposed to Malthus's view of the law of population as 'the end of nature in the peopling of the earth' (Malthus, 1817, p. 82). The model of population increasing at an infinitely greater pace than the means of subsistence does not call into question the ultimate end of human history. In the 1798 edition of the *Essay*, Malthus presents the principle of population in its role as driver and regulator of human history. Providence, which is referred

to in 1798 in terms of its ‘ways’ and ‘gracious designs’, appears in the subsequent edition as pursuing a ‘wise plan’ or a ‘great plan’.

To prove that propagation in no way depends on an ‘intention of nature’, Sade also develops a purely demographic argument. Comparing the duration of human life with women’s reproductive years, he interprets the difference as proof that nature does not favour human reproduction at all costs. From this point of view also, propagation is not part of nature’s plan. Sade draws a parallel with the earth that is not always able to produce and therefore does not allow a maximum yield:

If nature’s intention had been for every grain of wheat to germinate, she would have given a better constitution to the earth; this earth would not lay so long unproductive—ever fertile, waiting only for seed, and whatever was sowed, the earth would yield. (Sade, 1795a, p. 588)

Like the fertility of the earth, women’s fertility is also subject to limits, as women are capable of procreation during only part of their existence. Sade undertakes a precise calculation of what he considers a woman’s childbearing years:

A woman who lives seventy years, I imagine, spends the first fourteen before she can be of any utility; and the final twenty, during which she can no longer be. That leaves thirty-six, from which one must subtract three months a year, during which her infirmities [most likely, menstruation] must again prevent her from working to nature’s ends, if she is wise and wants the fruits to be good. That leaves twenty-seven, at the most, out of seventy, during which nature allows a woman to serve her. (Sade, 1795a, p. 588)

The argument does not address the number of children a woman could bear, but rather the ‘lost’ time that would otherwise have allowed her to bear more children. If nature’s intention were to populate the earth at all costs, how could one explain the loss of so many reproductive years? Similarly, in a footnote to *Aline et Valcour*, Sade sets out a curious calculation of the duration of infecundity, in which he concluded that a ‘woman’s fecundity...would not extend to over eighty-one months out of seventy years’ (Sade, 1795a, p. 588). Under his somewhat curious line of reasoning, he considers that the 9 months of pregnancy are somehow ‘lost’ and that only the remaining 3 months of each year should be counted as fit for reproduction. He thus computes that over a woman’s 27-year childbearing period, she would have a total susceptible period of 81 months (that is, 27 years multiplied by 3 months per year).⁽²⁾ Sade returns to this theme in *Philosophie*, taking a maximum lifetime of 100 years:

[I]f women were born for the sole purpose of producing, which would surely be the case if production were so dear to nature, and taking the longest possible female lifetime, would there be only seven years⁽³⁾—allowing for the necessary subtractions—when she is capable of giving life to a child? (Sade, 1795b, p. 91)

(2) The earlier calculation resulted in a 27-year fecundity period after subtracting 3 months per year from the 36-year childbearing period.

(3) The 81 months mentioned in *Aline et Valcour* work out to 6 years and 9 months, which Sade rounds up here to 7 years.

These calculations are intended only to prove, yet again, that nature's intention is not the propagation of the human species. Sade elaborates a further argument against populationism, arguing that sexual pleasure is not bound in the least to the act of conceiving a child.

II. Sade against the 'pro-populationists'

1. Libertinage as a check on population

Malthus's reasoning is based on a necessary balance between population and means of subsistence, a major constraint for the survival of the species. But Sade, because he does not consider the existence and development of human populations an end, attaches special importance to pleasure in his conception of sexuality. Bear in mind Malthus's argument that 'the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state' (Malthus, 1798, p. 11) and therefore cannot but work towards population growth. This universal, constant passion is the very basis of the principle of population. Sade's view of sexuality is totally different; he makes a radical distinction between reproduction ('propagation' in his terminology) and sexual life and more specifically, pleasure. To take one example, he writes that if, as 'fools and pro-populationists' argue, nature's only objective was the multiplication of the human race, the 'productive sperm [could not] be placed in the loins for any purpose other than for propagation' (Sade, 1795b, p. 91). Were that the case, nature would not tolerate that the 'spermatic liquor' (*liqueur spermatique*) could be wasted by discharge other than into the 'vessel of propagation', as occurs, Sade notes, in dreams and in reminiscences. If the multiplication of the human race were nature's objective, nature would also prevent any pleasure outside of coitus for the purposes of reproduction. These two arguments, i.e. the non-productive loss of sperm and that sexual pleasure need not be connected to the act of reproduction, are therefore considered sufficient proof that pro-populationists are mistaken. As one character asks ironically:

[How could one argue that] nature desires only propagation, and that she entrusts man with seed for the purpose of propagation; and yet she allows man to waste that very seed any way he pleases, and derive the same pleasure as from productive use, and never the least harm ensues?...Desist, my friends, desist from believing such absurdities; they are an affront to common sense. (Sade, 1795b, pp. 91–92)

As 'the spirit [of nature] is by no means populationist', Sade argues that 'an attractive young lady's only concern should be *to fuck (foutre)* and never *to breed (engendrer)*' (Sade, 1795b, p. 18, Sade's emphasis).

In addition to Sade's resolute opposition to marriage, he further argues that the purpose of marriage should never be reproduction. This is expressed by Madame de Saint-Ange, a key character in *Philosophie*:

Eugénie, you must be the sworn enemy of this annoying propagation, and even in marriage, always divert that treacherous liquor whose seed only ruins our figures, blunts our sensuousness, withers us, makes us age, and damages our health. Encourage your husband to accustom himself to these losses; offer him every route that prevents him from paying homage to the shrine; tell him that you hate children; beg him not to get you pregnant. Pay attention to this point, young lady, because, I declare, I hate propagation so much that I shall immediately cease to be your friend if you ever fall pregnant. (Sade, 1795b, pp. 63–64)

Unlike the Malthusian model that makes nuptiality a central parameter in population regulation, by controlling both the intensity of nuptiality (frequency of celibacy) and the timing (age at marriage), the Sadean model attaches no importance to marriage as such.

Advocating ‘libertine sensual pleasures’ (*voluptés libertines*) as a way of life, Sade glorifies practices that Malthus would condemn as unnatural: ‘promiscuous intercourse to such a degree as to prevent the birth of children seems to lower, in the most marked manner, the dignity of human nature’ (Malthus, 1817, p. 20). Malthus speaks out against the prostitution developing in large towns and the unfortunate consequences of contacts between the sexes outside marriage that lead to a ‘diminution of the general happiness and virtue of the society; particularly as the necessity of art in the accomplishment and conduct of intrigues, and in the concealment of their consequences, necessarily leads to many other vices’ (Malthus, 1817, p. 21).

Malthus sets out two conditions for nuptiality to act as a preventive check: delaying marriage until one can feed a family, and chastity prior to marriage. ‘Of the preventive checks, the restraint from marriage which is not followed by irregular gratifications may properly be termed moral restraint’ (Malthus, 1817, p. 22).

Sade dismisses both marriage and chastity. He argues that marriage condemns both men and women to monogamy, committing a woman for her entire lifetime ‘to a man she does not know’. Even divorce fails to resolve the problem because it merely leads to another marriage, which in turn fails to guarantee happiness. Chastity is by no means a positive value to Sade’s way of thinking and is not to be encouraged on moral, religious, or legal grounds:

This false virtue that people call chastity, being surely the most ridiculous of all prejudices in that it does not contribute to the happiness of others and does infinite harm to general prosperity, because the hardships imposed by this virtue are necessarily very cruel, this false virtue, I say—being the idol before which incense is burnt because we fear adultery—must be considered by every sane person one of the most abhorrent hindrances that man has imposed on the inspirations of nature. (Sade, 1797/1799b, p. 236)

Similarly, incest cannot be considered a crime because humankind has been sustained by incest. *Philosophie* backs this with a reference to the Old Testament and to the Generations of Noah in particular. Nor is there

anything 'criminal' in adultery, which is prohibited in a country like France solely due to 'vile local considerations' (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 236). Sade argues that Thomas More's *Utopia* 'proves that women gain from engaging in debauchery' (Sade, 1795b, p. 138).

But for Sade, the most important consideration for an adulterous woman is to avoid childbirth: 'the only precaution she must take is not to conceive, or to have an abortion if those precautions fail her' (Sade, 1795b, p. 42). In the event of pregnancy, neither abortion nor infanticide are to be ruled out. In *Juliette*, the heroine is being initiated into the *Société des amis du crime* and must confirm to her initiator, Madame de Clairwil, that she has no objection to terminating a pregnancy:

'So, do you hate progeny?'

'I do. I loathe it.'

'If you were to fall pregnant, would you have the courage to get an abortion?'

'Definitely.' (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 562)

Pursuing the idea that human propagation is an abomination, the novel features the sorceress and procuress La Durand, an expert in potions and poisons, who is prepared to impart her knowledge to Juliette:

'Now, let's turn to poisons', said La Durand. 'While it may sometimes be lovely to work towards the progeny of the human species, it's more delightful to end their course.'

'Don't put these two actions on the same footing', I replied to La Durand. 'One is terrible; the other divine. It's not to make babies that we buy these [aphrodisiac] potions, but to double our lust. And as for the progeny that we absolutely hate, it's to destroy it with delight that we are going to buy what follows [i.e. the poisons].' (Sade, 1797/1799a, pp. 656–658)

Sade, noting that Aristotle recommended abortion in the case where couples have children in excess,⁽⁴⁾ sees no real distinction between abortion and infanticide. This is explicit in the following passage from *Philosophie*:

MADAME DE SAINT-ANGE: But if that misfortune were to arise, through no fault of your own, let me know during the first seven or eight weeks, and I'll get it out gently. Have no fear of infanticide; it's an imaginary crime; we're always in charge of what we carry in our bodies, and we do no more harm in destroying this kind of matter than in purging the other kind of matter, using drugs, when we feel the need.

EUGÉNIE: But what if the child is at term?

MADAME DE SAINT-ANGE: Even if it was already born, we'd still be entitled to destroy it. Throughout the world, no right is more enshrined than mothers' rights over their children. It is a truth universally acknowledged, founded on both reason and principles. (Sade, 1795b, p. 64)

(4) Michel Delon identifies the source of this recommendation in Book VII of Aristotle's *Politics*; see Sade, 1795b (1998), note 5, p. 1347.

Beyond the matter of indifference to the outcome of pregnancy, one of Sade's main arguments in favour of abortion is women's freedom to control their bodies, which is considered a matter of natural law. Further, 'an embryo... when it matures' is by no means 'a little soul, issuing from the hand of God' (Sade, 1795b, p. 64). Sade's character Dolmancé, who claims to have been freed by science from the 'God-based system' (*système déifique*), puts it this way:

But since the light of philosophy has dissipated those impostures; since the chimera of divinity has been trampled underfoot; and since, with greater knowledge of the laws and secrets of physics, we have revealed the principle of generation, and now that this material mechanism offers to the eye nothing more astonishing than the growth of a grain of wheat, we have learned from nature to overcome human error. (Sade, 1795b, p. 64)

The final argument to prove the legitimacy of infanticide is that its 'usage is universal.' Like Malthus from the second edition of the *Essay* onward, albeit for totally different purposes, Sade provides illustrations from the mores of various peoples of the world:

[V]arious savage people kill their children as soon as they are born. Along the Orinoco River, mothers, believing their daughters faced only misery—because their fate was to become the wives of the savages in that land, who detested women—immolated them immediately after giving birth. (Sade, 1795b, p. 149)

The ultimate check on propagation of the human species, for Sade, would be the generalized practice of sodomy. The legitimacy of the practice is established by its long history and widespread existence: 'There is no corner of the earth where the so-called crime of sodomy has not had its temples and devotees' (Sade, 1795b, p. 92). Sade mentions that the navigator James Cook identified cases of sodomy among the populations visited during his voyages.

From a population viewpoint, Sade's approach to sodomy is inconsistent, to say the least. On the one hand, he explains that the practice is not a check on population—a surprising claim given his aversion to the propagation of the human species; and on the other hand, Sade recommends sodomy to restrict population growth. In the final analysis, however, sodomy would not affect reproduction of society as a whole, as there would be a sort of numerical balance between practitioners and non-practitioners:

This fancy [sodomy] doubtless has no more drawbacks than the other because its result is only the refusal to create, and those who wish to procreate [literally: those with a taste for population] have resources strong enough that adversaries can never do it [population] any harm. (Sade, 1795b, p. 142)

If sodomy between males is defended on the grounds of the pleasure it procures its practitioners, heterosexual sodomy provides the added benefit of preventing pregnancy more effectively than contraceptive methods:

Some women insert sponges into the vagina; they catch the sperm and stop it from moving into the vessel where it would be propagated. Others oblige their fuckers (*fouteurs*) to use a little pouch of Venetian skin, commonly called a condom, into which the semen flows without being able to reach the goal. But of all these options, the ass (*le cul*) is surely the most delicious. (Sade, 1795b, p. 47)

In the same way as lesbianism⁽⁵⁾ and infanticide, the ‘act of sodomy’ could theoretically ‘dry up’ a population (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 242), but in the real world, while the practice is widespread, it would not be a check on population—a contradiction noted earlier—because, as Sade puts it, ‘there will always be enough men on earth, whatever the progress of sodomy’ (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 294). Further, even if sodomy proved a check on population, nature alone would be responsible:

[B]ut assuming for a moment that population is affected, wouldn’t nature be to blame, for it’s from her alone that men inclined to this peculiar passion have received not only the taste and the penchant that leads them to it, but also the defect in their constitution or make-up that renders them incapable of enjoying the ordinary pleasures of our sex? (Sade, 1797/1799a, pp. 294–295)

Sade constantly refers to what he considers the order of nature and argues that inequalities within a population, and therefore poverty, are inherent to that order.

2. Opposition to relief for the poor

Poverty, for Sade, is a matter of natural determinism and need not be relieved.

Rest assured that it troubles the order of nature when one raises from the indigent class those whom she has seen fit to put there; that nature is wise and logical in all she does, and therefore her designs on men are not ours to know or to oppose; her designs on us are proven by the inequality in [physical] strengths, necessarily followed by inequality of fortunes and conditions. (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 427)

The order of nature is presented as a strictly hierarchical social order. In *Juliette*, Madame de Clairwil cautions the heroine against ‘stupid commiseration’ or ‘pity’ for the poor. Juliette is reminded that the Greek philosophers held it ‘a crime to seek to upset the distinctions established by nature among the different classes of men’ (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 427). In *Nouvelle Justine*, Sade expresses utter contempt for the poor, describing them, without the least touch of humanity, as ‘fast-breeding vermin’, ‘pernicious human dung’, and ‘vile swarming rabble’ (Sade, 1797/1799b, pp. 1069–1070).

Though working from radically different philosophic positions, Sade, like Malthus, considers that assistance to the poor leads to an increase in their number. Further, he associates poverty with idleness:

(5) Sade uses the term *saphotisme* (sapphism) to refer to lesbianism.

We complain about beggars, and we tempt them with charity. Wouldn't we laugh at a fool who complains about being bothered by flies and who wants to drive them away by surrounding himself with honeycomb? No alms, I say: let us beware of fostering idleness. (Sade, 1797/1799a, pp. 1069–1070)

Even earlier, in *Philosophie*, the fierce attack against relief for the poor drew a parallel between flies and the poor:

[Alms giving] accustoms the poor man to assistance that drains his energy; he stops working when he counts on your charity, and, as soon as charity runs out, he becomes a thief or an assassin. People ask how to eliminate begging; yet everything is done to increase it. If you don't want flies in your bedroom, don't spill sugar to attract them. (Sade, 1795b, p. 32)

The virtue of benevolence, from a Sadean viewpoint, can be nothing other than a vice in disguise and, indeed, the mask of pride. The role of the State is not to disturb the natural order of things but to ensure the welfare of its citizens. If the State 'sacrifices the poor, it loses nothing and has much to gain.' Why should the poor be spared? There is no reason for 'almshouses'. Referring to reports on China by the 18th-century Jesuit Jean-Baptiste Du Halde, Sade associates the absence of institutions for the poor with the fact that 'everyone works and everyone is happy' (Sade, 1795b, p. 33).

Sade and Malthus may have similar views regarding the danger of generous support for the poor, but their positions on property differ radically. Whereas Malthus staunchly defends the right of property as 'the most natural as well as the most necessary of all positive laws' (Malthus, 1830, p. 72), Sade categorically condemns property, tracing the right of property to 'usurpation': 'theft is punished only because it attacks the right of property; but that right was originally nothing but a theft itself.' Arguing in *Juliette* that there can be 'no legitimately established property', Sade contends that there are no grounds for considering theft a crime and that theft ultimately restores a degree of justice between individuals he characterizes as 'the strong' and 'the weak' (Sade, 1797/1799a, p. 285).

If improving the condition of the poor entails the risk of a substantial increase in their numbers, that outcome could not fail to have major consequences in the political sphere.

3. Population size and form of government

As Blum (2002, p. 228) points out, Sade establishes a direct link between the form of government and the fertility level. While Sade argues that a good government should be concerned with the size of its population relative to the quantity of means of subsistence, his focus is less on people's actual living conditions than on the recognition that 'irrespective of the form of government, whenever the population exceeds the means of existence, that government will languish' (Sade, 1795b, p. 33).

Regarding the link between population size and the value of a system of government, Sade makes his own an observation by the Abbé Raynal in his *Histoire philosophique et politique* [*Philosophical and Political History*]: ‘A vast empire, and an immense empire, may be two great evils. Let there be few men, but let them be happy; let the empire be small, but well governed’ (Raynal, 1780, English translation, pp. 8–9). In the pamphlet ‘Français encore un effort si vous voulez être républicains’ [‘Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Want To Be Republicans’] included in the fifth dialogue of *Philosophie*, Sade draws a direct link between population size and form of government:

[T]here is no denying that it is extraordinarily necessary and extremely good policy to erect a seawall against population in a republican government and that, for the opposite reason, it [population] must be encouraged in a monarchy. In the latter, where tyrants are rich only because of the number of their slaves, they surely need men; but a large population is a genuine defect (*un vice réel*) in a republican form of government. (Sade, 1795b, p. 150)

This view of tyranny seems more a criticism of despotism than of monarchy strictly speaking. The opposition between monarchy and republic is not absolute, however, because in ‘any form of government whatsoever’, there may be ‘supernumerary beings’ that are merely ‘parasite branches that, living off the trunk, always end up exhausting it’ (Sade, 1795b, p. 33).

The parallel between population growth and the growth of a tree is revisited in *Philosophie* with the idea that action would be desirable to limit excessive growth:

Let the monarchists say that a State is great only if its population is very large: that State will always be poor if its population exceeds its means of living, and it will always flourish if, maintained within proper limits, it can trade its surplus production. Don’t you trim a tree when it has too many branches? And don’t you cut back the shoots to preserve the trunk? (Sade, 1795b, p. 150)

Failure to maintain the population ‘in a moderate state’ makes regime change inevitable: ‘Take care not to over-multiply a people where each individual is sovereign, and rest assured that revolutions are always and everywhere the consequence of overpopulation’ (Sade, 1795b, p. 150). Maintaining the population ‘in a moderate state’ thus appears to be a necessary condition for the sustainability of a republic.

Conclusion

Writing at the same time as Malthus but from a totally different viewpoint, the Marquis de Sade is also concerned by the question of population. While less focused than Malthus on developing a coherent theoretical framework, Sade nevertheless traces what could be the outlines of a combined philosophical and demographic system. In four major texts (*Aline et Valcour*, *Histoire de Juliette*,

La Nouvelle Justine, and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*), he sets out his views on population, arguing that the ‘propagation of the human species’ is an impediment to collective and individual well-being. He argues that ‘propagation’ prevents unrestricted indulgence in pleasure. Every effort should therefore be made to limit ‘propagation’, all the more so in that mankind can claim no special status in nature. This is taken to justify the most ‘amoral’ practices. Sade goes so far as to argue for the legitimacy of child abandonment and infanticide and explicitly recommends sodomy, lesbianism, and abortion as checks on population. In the Sadean model, libertinage plays a de facto role as a population regulator, without being an end in itself, given that the human species has no privileged status in the order of nature.

Like Malthus, Sade fears an increase in the numbers of the poor, and both argue against providing them any form of support, albeit on totally different grounds. Malthus defends the principle of private property as virtually tantamount to a positive law, whereas Sade considers private property illegitimate and characterizes property as theft. Sade also draws a link between form of government and population size, associating a large population with tyranny and a more ‘moderate’ sized population with a republican form of government.

Whatever the excesses of his fictional characters and whatever the occasional inconsistencies in his ideas, Sade’s profoundly original texts dealing with the ‘propagation of the human species’ warrant critical attention.

Whereas for Malthus the principle of population is ultimately a justification for moral restraint, for Sade, the pursuit of pleasure must always prevail. The dialectic that identifies destruction as an integral part of creation is fundamental to Sade’s theory of population.



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Jean-Marc ROHRBASSER, Jacques VÉRON • THE MARQUIS DE SADE AND THE QUESTION OF POPULATION

In four major texts written between 1795 and 1799 (*Aline et Valcour*, *Histoire de Juliette*, *La Nouvelle Justine*, and *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*), Sade shows a keen interest in the question of population. He develops something approaching a coherent system, in which 'propagation of the human species' is considered an impediment to well-being, both for the individual and for society as a whole. Sade contends that no effort should be spared to limit human 'propagation', arguing that the species holds no exceptional status in nature. Child abandonment, infanticide, sodomy, and abortion are presented as checks on population. Further, like Malthus at the same time, Sade fears an increase in the numbers of the poor; he expresses outright hostility to any efforts to relieve their condition. Whatever the excesses of Sade's characters, the ideas articulated in their 'disquisitions', owing to their coherence and originality, warrant serious examination. Whereas for Malthus the principle of population ultimately justifies moral restraint, for Sade, the pursuit of pleasure must always prevail. The Sadean theory of population is founded on the dialectic between destruction and creation.

Jean-Marc ROHRBASSER, Jacques VÉRON • LE MARQUIS DE SADE ET LA QUESTION DE LA POPULATION

Dans quatre de ses textes majeurs (*Aline et Valcour*, *Histoire de Juliette*, *La Nouvelle Justine* et *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*) écrits entre 1795 et 1799, Sade manifeste un intérêt certain pour la question de la population. Il élabore ce qui pourrait s'apparenter à un système cohérent. La propagation de l'espèce humaine est envisagée comme une entrave au bien-être tant à l'échelle collective qu'au niveau individuel. Pour Sade, tout devrait être mis en œuvre pour limiter cette propagation, puisque l'humanité ne peut revendiquer aucun statut d'exception dans la Nature. L'abandon d'enfants, l'infanticide, la sodomie ou l'avortement sont alors présentés comme autant de freins à la population. Par ailleurs, comme Malthus à la même époque, Sade craint un accroissement du nombre des pauvres et se montre par conséquent hostile à toute aide envers eux. Au-delà des excès auxquels se livrent les personnages des romans de Sade, dont les « dissertations » illustrent ses conceptions en la matière, les idées développées dans ces œuvres, en raison de leur cohérence et de leur originalité, méritent une véritable attention. Alors que chez Malthus le principe de population légitime en dernier ressort la contrainte morale, pour Sade le principe de plaisir doit toujours prévaloir. La dialectique de la destruction et de la création fonde la théorie sadienne de la population.

Jean-Marc ROHRBASSER, Jacques VÉRON • EL MARQUÉS DE SADE Y LA CUESTIÓN DE LA POBLACIÓN

En cuatro de sus textos más importantes (*Aline et Valcour*, *Histoire de Juliette*, *La Nouvelle Justine* et *La Philosophie dans le boudoir*) escritos entre 1795 y 1799, Sade manifiesta un claro interés por la cuestión de la población. Elabora lo que podría ser un sistema coherente. La propagación de la especie humana es considerada como un freno al bienestar tanto a escala colectiva que a nivel individual. Según Sade todo debe ser hecho para limitar dicha propagación, pues la humanidad no puede reivindicar ningún estatuto de excepción en la Naturaleza. El abandono de niños, el infanticidio, la sodomía o el aborto son presentados pues como frenos al aumento de la población. Por otra parte, Sade como Malthus en la misma época, temía un crecimiento del número de pobres y se muestra en consecuencia hostil a toda clase de ayuda que se les pudiera prestar. Mas allá de los excesos cometidos por los personajes de las novelas de Sade, y cuyas "disertaciones" ilustran lo que piensa sobre esta cuestión, las ideas expuestas en sus obras merecen toda nuestra atención, en razón de su coherencia y de su originalidad. Mientras que en Malthus el principio de población legitima como último recurso la limitación moral, en Sade el principio de placer debe prevalecer siempre. La dialéctica de la destrucción y de la creación funda la teoría de la población.

Keywords: Sade, nature, materialism, pleasure, vice, human propagation, sexuality, libertinage

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