

Cultural Sadeism

In 1975, Doan Van Toai had cause for cautious optimism. A loyal servant of what he regarded as the cause of Vietnamese self determination, the triumph of North Vietnam in their invasion of the South would finally lead to an end to what he viewed as foreign imperialism.

As he put it:

From 1945, when I was born in the village of Caivon in Vinh Long province, 100 miles south of Saigon, until I left Vietnam in May 1978, I never enjoyed peace. My family's house was burned three times in the war against the French. To escape the fighting, my parents moved from one village to another throughout my youth. Like the majority of Vietnamese patriots, they joined the resistance forces fighting the French. As I grew up, I myself saw how the peasants were oppressed by the local officials of the successive Saigon regimes, how they were victimized by the French bombardments. I learned the history of my country's thousand-year struggle against Chinese occupation and its century-long effort against Western domination. With this background, my compatriots and I grew up with a hatred of foreign intervention.

His attitude was entirely understandable, and although he never formally joined the Vietcong, he supported them, and in fact made a trip in 1971 to the United States to give lectures at Berkeley and Stanford. These lectures, of course, were intended to foster support in America for the cause of Vietnamese independence.

For his labors, he was rewarded by many stints in prison, but the price, he had cause to believe, had been worth it.

Like others in the South Vietnamese opposition movements, I believed that our Communist compatriots in the North would be more amenable to compromise and easier to work with than the Americans.

He optimism was to be horribly betrayed. It started with the realization that the Communist rhetoric was not rhetoric at all:

Several days after Saigon fell, the Provisional Revolutionary Government, formed by the N.L.F., asked me to join the finance committee, a group of intellectuals whose job it was to advise the Government on matters of economic policy. I complied willingly, taking a pay cut of 90 percent. My first assignment was to help draw up a plan for confiscating all the private property in South Vietnam. Shocked, I proposed that we should expropriate only the property of those who had cooperated with the former regime and those who had used the war to become rich, and that we distribute it in some fashion to the poor and to the victims of the war, Communist and non-Communist alike. My proposals, of course, were rejected.

The final dissolution of his belief came when he objected on a professional basis to the dictates of one of his managers, and was thrown in prison:

When I was arrested, I was thrown into a three-foot-by-six-foot cell with my left hand chained to my right foot and my right hand chained to my left foot. My food was rice mixed with sand. When I complained about the sand, the guards explained that sand is added to the rice to remind prisoners of their crimes.

When he eventually came to be housed in inhuman conditions with other prisoners—versus those of solitary confinement—he received a memorable lecture, from a senior Communist:

While I was in jail, Mai Chi Tho, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, addressed a selected group of political prisoners. He told us: "Ho Chi Minh may have been an evil man; Nixon may have been a great man. The Americans may have had the just cause; we may not have had the just cause. But we won and the Americans were defeated because we convinced the people that Ho Chi Minh is the great man, that Nixon is a murderer and the Americans are the invaders." He concluded that "the key factor is how to control people and their opinions. Only Marxism-Leninism can do that. None of you ever see resistance to the Communist regime, so don't think about it. Forget it. Between you — the bright intellectuals — and me, I tell you the truth."

He summarizes his experience as follows:

Looking back now on the Vietnam war, I feel nothing but sorrow for my own naivete in believing that the Communists were revolutionaries worthy of support. In fact, they betrayed the Vietnamese people and deceived progressives throughout the world. The responsibility for the tragedies that have engulfed my compatriots is mine. And now I can only bear witness to this truth so that all former supporters of the Vietcong may share their responsibility with me.

<http://phanchautrinhdanang.com/30thang4/A%20Lament%20for%20Vietnam.htm>

Need this have happened? The received version of the Vietnam War is that it was a civil war across a large ocean, and America never had any hope of winning it. This image is reinforced by war movies like Platoon, and Full Metal Jacket, which maximize the brutality, and decontextualize larger efforts and larger successes.

In fact, contrary to popular opinion:

--This was never a civil war. It was an invasion of the South by the North

As early as 1975, North Vietnam's own Communist-party historian admitted that the Vietcong were "always simply a group emanating from" Hanoi. In 1964 the North stepped up its backing of this proxy force by sending entire combat units from its regular army across the border. It was this growing invasion that had finally forced President

Johnson, against his own instincts, to commit American ground troops in 1965—a decision that the standard account presents as a final plunge into the Vietnamese “quagmire” but that in fact had the result of transforming the war from a counterinsurgency operation into a struggle among three conventional armies: the United States and the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN) on one side, the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) on the other.

--We won the Tet Offensive, and inflicted terrible casualties on the NVA. This was known then, but not widely reported by the media.

Tet not only destroyed the Vietcong as an effective political and military force; together with the siege of Khe Sanh, it also crippled the NVA. Like the Somme or Verdun in World War I, these big battles exacted a price in “a lost generation” of North Vietnamese youth. Small wonder that in mid-1968 General Giap made the fateful decision to scale back NVA operations to hit-and-run raids while relying more heavily than ever on the sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia.

*In the meantime, in the South, as Lewis Sorley notes in *A Better War* (1999), the Tet offensive “radically changed the outlook of South Vietnam’s populace.” Instead of provoking an uprising in favor of the Communists, its effect was “just the opposite—general mobilization in support of the government.” By the end of 1969, over 70 percent of South Vietnam’s population was rated as under government control, compared to 42 percent at the beginning of 1968. The new government of President Nguyen Van Thieu followed with a sweeping land-reform law that cut Vietnam’s tenant-farmer population from 60 percent to 7 percent by 1973.*

To be sure, all this made no impression on the American public. That was because the press had presented the Tet offensive as a stunning Communist success and a signal that there was no light at the end of the tunnel.

--The countryside had largely been pacified in 1973 when the peace negotiations were concluded. Most of the rural populace supported the US and the Saigon regime. For all practical intents and purposes, the subversion of the South by the North had been checked.

Nixon had been elected to end the war, not to win it, and his declared priority was to begin the withdrawal of American forces. Yet, paradoxically, it was success on the battlefield in 1969-70 that allowed him to draw down troop numbers and thus simultaneously respond to a public convinced that the war was not a success but a failure.

... Nixon’s real triumph came on the diplomatic front [though], when he persuaded both China and Russia to shut off the spigot of support for Hanoi. This loss, combined with the effectiveness of American bombing and the NVA’s disastrous “Easter” offensive against the South in 1972, which cost the famous General Giap his job, finally forced Hanoi to sign the peace accords waiting for them in Paris and to recognize the Republic of South

Vietnam. Nixon was now free to withdraw the last remaining U.S. troops—a withdrawal, according to the Vietnam myth, supposedly taking place under the looming shadow of defeat.

As we have seen, however, the withdrawal had actually been under way since 1969; by August 1972, there were no more U.S. combat forces left in Vietnam and a year later there were no U.S. military personnel at all. The reason, in Sorley's words, was that by then "the South Vietnamese countryside had been widely pacified, so much so that the term 'pacification' was no longer even used." Once again, this was not the picture presented by the media, to Congress, or to the American public.

--Ho was a Communist in 1930 when he founded his party. Nothing France or the US did made him any more committed as a Communist that he had been substantially his entire life.

Even before he founded the party in 1930, Ho was a committed Stalinist and Comintern agent. During World War II, his party did little actual fighting against the Japanese, concentrating instead on eliminating its Vietnamese opponents. Once hostilities with France began in 1946, Ho's regime in North Vietnam survived with help from his ideological allies, especially the Soviet Union, until Mao Zedong's victory in his own war for control of China in 1949 finally opened the way for a full-scale Communist counterattack. Like Kim Il Sung's invasion of South Korea in June 1950, Ho's war against the French in Vietnam came with Stalin's backing and Mao's support, and was part of the same effort to create (in the testimony of the former Red Army journalists Oleg Sarin and Lev Dvortsky) "new opportunities for spreading Soviet Communism further into Asia."

Presidents Truman and Eisenhower understood the stakes in Vietnam only too well. Their goal in supporting the French against Ho and the Vietminh was to prevent a repetition of what was happening in Korea.

<https://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewarticle.cfm/Who-Owns-the-Vietnam-War--11006?page=2>

At the end of the day, the hopes of Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon—not to mention those of the South Vietnamese—were dashed. They were ended not by losses on the battlefield, not by the impossibility of victory, nor by costs we were unable to sustain.

They were ended by the decision of the United States, based on protests in the streets, and associated political pressure, to abandon its commitment to the South Vietnamese, and the region generally. This meant that the North was able to achieve, through the skillful manipulation of public opinion—through deception, to be perfectly clear—in the United States and elsewhere, what it was unable to achieve on the battlefield.

What was this cost?

The claim that there was no “bloodbath” in South Vietnam is true only by comparison with what happened to its neighbor Cambodia. On top of the more than 275,000 South Vietnamese who died fighting in the country’s armed forces, at least 65,000 were murdered or shot after “liberation”—the equivalent of three-quarters of a million people in today’s United States. According to the scholar D.R. Sar Desai, the Communist regime forcibly relocated or sent to “reeducation camps” somewhere between one-third to one-half of South Vietnam’s population; perhaps as many as 250,000 died of disease, starvation, or overwork, and the last inmates were not released until 1986.

With respect to Cambodia, it is not known with certainty how many people were murdered, but it is in the millions, and somewhere between 1 in 7 Cambodians, and 1 in 4. Mountains of bones were left behind. In terms of the percentage of the population killed, it dwarfed the Holocaust.

We hear that the atrocities in Cambodia were occasioned in reaction to American bombing, but this bears little scrutiny. The Khmer Rouge was an integral part of Ho Chi Minh’s Indochinese Communist Party, and after 1970 was armed by North Vietnam.

Scholars have reached different conclusions on the effects of the bombing, but one thing is unambiguous: we cut off funding to them, and we abandoned the region. We stopped monetary and military support for a government we had hitherto supported. This move was not only supported by the “anti-war” left, it was DEMANDED by them. They viewed it as a national liberation, anti-imperialist movement just like that of the Vietcong. Clearly, this hampered greatly their ability to defend themselves.

At the risk of overstating the obvious, the version of events being preached at teach-ins and on the steps of various government buildings was not only wrong, it was DISASTROUSLY wrong. We lost something like 55,000 men dead, but achieved at that cost a stability that needed little to maintain it.

When we left, there was little need to do other than make a credible pledge of assistance to South—credible, self evidently, to the North, who justifiably feared us. If we had kept aircraft carriers within a day or two’s sailing, that likely would have sufficed. We made South Vietnam one of the best armed nations on the planet, and, again, the intent would not have been to attack North Vietnam, but to defend South Vietnam from invasion.

We failed, and we failed at a time when there was no need to fail. We failed because we quit, and we quit because people believed things that just weren’t true.

At the time, of course, there were reasons—not good reasons, for any student of Communist history, but good enough for gullible students—that the war was felt to be an unacceptable imposition on a former colony of a European power. That the loss of life was too much, and the cause hopeless.

This is what was reported, and this is what the TV cameras seemed to show. Johnson had said the war was being won, and then Tet popped up out of nowhere. Surely he must be lying about everything else too, right?

So it can be argued that the street protesters at the time were more or less acting in good faith, and genuinely believed in the justness of their cause.

However, subsequent history has proven them wrong, and they have failed to admit it. To this very day the word “Vietnam” is synonymous with failure in the same way Waterloo and Dunkirk are. It is a symbol of first recourse for the expression of futility, and overweening arrogance.

Everything is always going to be “another Vietnam”. Afghanistan was going to be “another Vietnam”. Iraq was going to be “another Vietnam.”

Because this symbol is so powerful, we have to ask why not just why the Anti-War Left got it so badly wrong back then, but much more importantly why they continue to get it wrong to this very day.

My short answer is that Leftists have failed to produce a clear version of Goodness, and suffers correspondingly with respect to the questions of what is right and what is wrong. They differ in this problem from old fashioned philosophical liberals, to whom they may productively be compared and contrasted.

To clarify this difference, we must step back in time, to the French Revolution.

II

According to most scholars, this revolution, which ultimately convulsed all of Europe in war in the Napoleonic Era, killing millions, was in large measure the brainchild of Emile Rousseau. Since most of my readers likely did not study that period in their history classes—certainly I didn’t—I will cover it quickly in a moment.

First, though, I would like to discuss its philosophical underpinnings.

The following passage says a great deal. It is from **The Social Contract:**

Whoever ventures on the enterprise of setting up a people must be ready, shall we say, to change human nature, to transform each individual, who by himself is entirely complete and solitary, into a part of a much greater whole, from which that same individual will then receive, in a sense, his life and his being. The founder of nations must weaken the structure of man in order to fortify it, to replace the physical and independent existence we have all received from nature with a moral and communal existence. In a word each man must be stripped of his own powers, and given powers which are external to him, and which he cannot use without the help of others. The nearer men’s natural powers

are to extinction or annihilation, and the stronger and more lasting their acquired powers, the stronger and more perfect is the social institution.

Rousseau draws from Hobbes a distinction of “within the social fold”/“external to the social fold” [my quotes]. If you are within the social fold, you have to obey. He considers this being “forced to be free”. As his editor notes:

“The general will is something inside each man as well as in society as a whole, so that the man who is coerced by the community for a breach of the law is, in Rousseau’s view of things, being brought back to an awareness of his own true will.

*. . .by the deed of the social contract itself, to which **everyone** [emphasis in original] subscribes and pledges (there is no question of a majority here; you either subscribe or you are not in civil society), everyone agrees to accept the decision of the majority in the formulation of the law.”*

In other words, conformity is a principle social virtue, and a lack of conformity should be punished. That punishment is not just for the good of the social order, but for that individual. This should sound familiar.

The General Will, as Rousseau uses the term, is effectively being immersed within a social body to the extent that your own personal, parochial interests are submerged and only the good of the polity as a whole is in your mind.

His specific model was his understanding of the Greek polis Sparta, which as a militaristic society was highly communitarian. As in any military, any infractions of the law were dealt with severely. Rousseau at one point goes so far as to recommend the death penalty for religious hypocrites.

What the General Will desires, then, is good, and Good is defined as the desires of the General Will. As his editor notes, “once men have entered into society, freedom comes to be inseparable from virtue”. Virtue, of course, consists in full participation in the General Will.

Rousseau does offer two version of freedom. The first will be unobjectionable to American style liberals:

. . .to be free it not to be left to what you want to do, but to be enabled to do what you ought to do. [quote from editor]

However, he offers a second definition, which brings us to the crux of Leftism:

. . .freedom is not being subject to any other MAN. Here one may suspect Rousseau retained from his experience of life the simple notion—which might well be the occupational notion of domestic servants—that being dependent on another man is slavery, and that freedom is simply having no master. To be dependent on things or

institutions is quite different and wholly unobjectionable. Throughout the Social Contract it is clear that Rousseau never sees institutions as a threat to freedom. The image of a King or Prince in Rousseau's eyes is the image of the master, and he sees such monarchs as enemies of liberty. But the image of the state touches him quite differently. (41)

Kings are bad, but the State is good. For this reason, personal liberty is being beholden only to the State, and not to any master or king.

In our modern terms, it is drawing sustenance from the government without the need to work within a capitalistic system of government, which intrinsically has winners and losers, bosses and workers. Freedom is not the ability to define virtue for yourself, but the willingness to subordinate your own will to that of the collective, for your own good.

Let us see how these ideas played out in the French Revolution.

When I was in school, I remember the vague impression that the French Revolution was something like the American Revolution and that they copied us, under the influence of Thomas Jefferson. This is wildly inaccurate. It was nothing like our revolution.

In reality, the Revolution was one of mobs in the street, constant hysterical shouting, mass murder, and eventual collapse into the first modern Totalitarian state under Napoleon.

It began with a King, Louis XVI, who was by all accounts kind-hearted, a little thick in both the head and body, and conspicuously clumsy. He spent more money than he could afford, and in particular had run up considerable debts to finance the American Revolution, which were having an economic effect. In addition, poor harvests were affecting bread prices, with the result that hunger was widespread.

More importantly, agitators—philosophes in French—were reading Rousseau and others, and demanding an end to the rule of one man by another, and in particular the privileges of the King and the aristocracy (the First Estate), and the Church (the Second Estate).

They demanded “liberte, egalite, and fraternite”, or “liberty, equality and brotherhood”. They were declaiming everywhere to anyone who would listen: in cafes, in the streets, in pamphlets, and in posters.

At a certain point, the King lost control. Where there were traditionally Three Estates—the People being the Third—agitation had caused the Third Estate to in effect declare itself independent. They created what amounted to a large parliament, and began enacting their own laws, and enforcing them with what amounted at first to vigilante forces—usually outright mobs—which were eventually supplemented by defecting regular troops and police.

The famous Bastille Prison was stormed, and something on the order of seven prisoners rescued, one of whom—the Comte de Solages--was apparently a child molester put there by his family.

The King and his wife and child were arrested, and eventually both Louis and Marie Antoinette were tried and executed.

War broke out, and a Committee of Public Safety was formed. This Committee was intended to safeguard the Revolution, and to purify the “virtue” of the people. Towards this end, it was given nearly unlimited power. This is where Rousseau’s true color—Red—appears most prominently. Under the threat of war many atrocities are committed, but in this case what was revealed was the fundamentally sanguinary nature of Rousseau’s Virtue.

Guillotines were used relentlessly to behead—to the approving cheers of the People—tens of thousands of victims, most of whom were neither aristocrats nor counter-revolutionaries. Most of them, in fact, were guilty only of disapproving of being subjected to such tyranny in the name of freedom and liberty. Some were victims of a personal or political feud.

“Countless people lived in constant fear of death and went to bed dreading the sound of a knock on the door in the middle of the night when most arrests took place”, (225) says Christopher Hibbert, describing a phenomenon all too familiar to students of 20th Century totalitarianism.

I will quote one story:

“On November 8 Madame Roland [who had been a supporter of the Revolution, but who proved insufficiently radical] was sentenced to death. . .At her trial she responded bravely to the inquisitors who bullied her unmercifully, who insisted that she reply yes or no to their questions, accused her of loquacity when she attempted a more detailed answer, and told her that she was ‘not there to be clever.’ She sometimes wept when questions were asked about her private life and her relations with Girondins [a political sect then in disfavor] other than her husband, but she never broke down and refused to admit any guilt or to compromise her friends, declaring defiantly when sentence was passed upon her, ‘you judge me worthy to share the fate of the great men whom you have assassinated. I shall endeavor to carry to the scaffold the courage they displayed.’

She succeeded in doing so. While the mob surrounded the cart, shouting ‘a la guillotine! A la guillotine!’, she tried to comfort a frightened forger who sat beside her. And on arrival at the scaffold she asked the executioner to behead him first so that he would be spared the spectacle of her death. . .When it was time for her to be bound to the plank, she looked up at the statue of Liberty, which had been erected in the Place de la Revolution in commemoration of the events of 10 August, and uttered her famous apostrophe, ‘Oh Liberty, what crimes are committed in your name’”. (223-224)

What crimes, indeed.

But these horrors were not seen as crimes, according to the architects of the Terror. St. Just in fact argued that “A man is guilty of a crime against the Republic, when he takes pity on prisoners. He is guilty because he has no desire for virtue. He is guilty because he is opposed to the Terror.”

He is guilty, in other words, in opposing the General Will, which is always right, and in opposing his own reconstruction as a social man, versus a private man, through the “liberty” of participation in the Revolution, and misnamed “Republic”.

Ultimately, the frenzy could not be brought under rational control. The supposed General Will was too volatile, as expressed by hordes of parliamentarians (the more radical of whom sat to the left of the central podium, from which we get the term “leftist”) who could not agree on anything. The economy was in shambles, lawlessness was rampant, the loot of the rich had been reappropriated by nouveau riche, and every shred of order had been dissipated in their effort at collectivism.

The Terror was ultimately ended, but not prior to most of its advocates—most notably Maximillian Robespierre—being put to death.

Moving to the next obvious step, we should note that within Rousseau’s formulation, the General Will was nothing without a Lawgiver:

The lawgiver is, in every respect, an extraordinary man in the state. Extraordinary not only because of his genius, but equally because of his office, which is neither that of the government, nor that of the sovereign. This office which gives the republic its constitution has no place in that constitution.

That lawgiver in France was Napoleon. According to Rousseau, the lawgiver was not supposed to also rule, but since the “General Will” does not actually exist—it is a linguistic façade behind which can be hidden the abuse of individual rights—there was in fact a pronounced need for what amounted to adult supervision.

As lawgiver, Napoleon did in fact forge a set of laws which in my understanding are to this day in effect in France and many former French colonies, including, if I’m not mistaken, New Orleans.

Chaos must resolve itself, and the French Revolution, founded on the “liberty” of submission, the equality of shared submission, and the brotherhood of participation in the General Will, turned to a leader, a lawgiver, to show the way forward.

Prior to Napoleon, the power of the King had always been checked by the French aristocracy, and the Church. Since all of them wanted some share of the spoils, no one of them could claim them all. This changed with Napoleon, who can with justification be viewed as the first incarnation of a totalitarian dictator.

And like such dictators—like Fascist dictators to be precise—he held war to be noble, and the cause of French nationalism and his system of law to be just. For these reasons, and from the simple financial need to plunder neighboring countries to refill the Treasury, he waged offensive war throughout the Continent for the better part of 10 years. Millions died, and he was ultimately replaced by a King, completing the circle.

So what was accomplished? Nothing less than the creation of a blueprint for Communism in particular, and for totalitarianism in general.

But what was the point? If you have to break a few eggs to make an omelet, as the modern version goes, where was the omelet? (as Paul Johnson famously asked).

The point was the rejection of virtue.

You read me right. Let us posit the following: **the amount of decentralization of authority possible in a civil society is a function of the virtue of the people.** Where Rousseau draws false dichotomies, let us instead draw a continuum.

On the one hand, we have rational anarchy, which was in many respects what was experienced in the American West prior to full settlement. Men and women governed themselves—typically under the guidance of the Bible—and asked for little else.

On the other extreme, you have the compulsion of totalitarianism, which demands that ALL right to self determination be ceded to the State. Rousseau calls this liberty. Americans, of course, would call this tyranny, quite justly. In between are many shades of gray.

A people which is moral and capable of mastering their passions needs a central government only for collective defense, and perhaps a few amenities like roads that cannot be completed by any one segment of the nation.

A people incapable of mastering its passions does, perhaps, need a government which compels them to do what they know they ought to do, but do not in fact do. This was what Rousseau had in mind.

And he lived in an era almost entirely devoid of morals. The aristocrats spent most of their time in debauchery, and abused the peasants whenever they wanted to. Financial restraint was not a virtue, and pleasure was.

Rousseau himself, like Blanche Dubois, always “depended on the kindness of strangers”. He never held real work, and never allowed himself to suffer adult responsibilities. He gave all of his children to orphanages and never looked back.

In short, he was lacking in virtues like personal responsibility, courage, and thrift. His only conspicuous virtue, as he saw it, was Compassion.

Compassion, he felt, was the glue that held society together. It was also the virtue, in others, that enabled him to sponge off them for his entire life, and make a living in effect as a conversational entertainer. (Samuel Johnson called him “an interesting madman”.)

What did he mean by compassion? For him, compassion was the social glue by which the General Will comes into being. It is a sentiment by which one person is bound to another, and the absence of that feeling is ample cause for viewing that person as outside the social fold.

As we have seen, anyone not possessing such sentiments needs to be “forced to be free”, and reeducated. He needs to be broken, so he can be freed to participate in full liberty in the relationship between the State, and himself. For this reason, opposition to the “liberty” of submission to the State is what would later be called “false consciousness”.

But let us fully understand what is going on here. Because ROUSSEAU was unable to master his passions, he created a system by which an external authority would do it. In his system, he created a dialectic opposition between a state of nature, and a state of socialization, and allowed for no intermediate positions. The state of nature is what I termed above rational anarchy, which he seems to view as an unrealizable paradise of sorts.

Yet once we shift to what we might term “social society” (the stupidity in the idea is here being merely highlighted), it is an all or nothing proposition. You are either with the group, or you are a dangerous traitor in need of reeducation through punishment.

Like Doan Van Toai was.

Here is my thesis with respect to this issue: **the entire project is an extended rationalization of Rousseau’s personal failings and resentments. Moreover, that confusion over words he abused--like liberty, compassion, and virtue—haunt us to this day. They engender moral confusion where none need exist.**

Rousseau’s project is nothing more or less than a flight from responsibility. Through vagueness, and deft intellectual sleight of hand, he engenders an illusion that his ideas offer the capacity for social progress. He keeps in play a more or less American style definition of liberty, but really intends the version that was implemented not just in Communist nations, but Nazi Germany as well, which found in the idea of Race a conception fully congruent with Rousseau’s General Will. Hitler’s opponents were traitors because they were his opponents, and he was the embodiment of the “Leader Principle”, and hence of the will of the People—the German People—as a whole.

Once this set of ideas is internalized—and only then—can one claim that inequality is the same as injustice. Yet one must choose a definition of justice. If the aim is the impartiality of those judging you for an alleged crime, it can clearly be seen that if crime is defined as not being equal to others, then conformity can be the only virtue, and virtue

loses its meaning. The SS soldiers who put the Jews to death were by this definition virtuous, as were the horrifically cruel tormentors of the French people during the Terror.

Inequality cannot equal injustice in a people with an external definition of virtue, and likewise only when conformity is the only virtue can this statement be made true.

Logically, therefore, if one wants to accept Rousseau's formulations, in either their original form, or in their modern Communistic iterations, you have to reject virtue as something present outside of conformity.

This is the reason that Leftists hate the Middle Class, or "bourgeoisie", as they tend to call it, and what they incessantly refer to as "bourgeois morality". This is the morality of people who do not need to be "led", and who consequently reject the Leftist rejection of conventional virtue.

Pride, dignity, honor, self respect, personal responsibility, honesty, courage, self sacrifice, personal kindness: all of these are bourgeois values. They are the foundational virtues of our American nation, and for that reason subject to unrelenting attack by those who want to pursue "social justice", which of course is a code word for the eradication of difference. Since the goal is the eradication of difference, one can easily see that genuine tolerance of intellectual and other diversity is not part of the program. The program is oriented around full and complete conformity and submission to the State.

We can derive two principle forms of liberty, then: **American freedom is that of pursuing your own conception of virtue, free from external compulsion.** This includes freedom of thought, expression and practice of religion. It includes freedom from any and all external coercion that does not increase your ability to live your life as you see fit. This basic program is enshrined in our Bill of Rights. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, EVERY ONE of the rights given to Americans was violated constantly in the French Revolution, and every one is violated currently by Communistic regimes, like China.

Versions of freedom based on Rousseau—which would include both that of Nazi Germany, and all modern Communistic regimes—claim that the individual is free to be subject only to the State, and not to any other person. This means that no one individual possesses power over another without direct recourse to the state. No one is an employee of another. No one is more successful economically than another. People are to be judged based on their conformity to the General Will, as expressed in the dictates of the State. Family loyalties are secondary to loyalty to the State. Private property is a crime against "liberty" because some have more than others.

When North Vietnam conquered the South, they took people homes, and moved them—without regard for family cohesion—into new areas to in effect punish them for not already being members of the Collective, and to enable them to be recreated anew in the image of the State, as obedient—and therefore virtuous—members of a "just" society.

Contrast this with the following:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. --That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

We may, with justice, then, see the rights of life and liberty (along with “ownership of property” in Locke’s original formulation) as oriented around the generation of the possibility of happiness, which I view as the ultimate goal of rational human activity.

To this can be contrasted the rejection of the freedom occasioned by the capacity to govern oneself through principle-oriented behavior.

I call this Cultural Sadeism.

III

The Marquis de Sade, in my view, is the Patron Saint of Leftism. He is the embodiment of the rejection of traditional virtue which we have seen necessarily attends efforts to rebuild society along the lines envisioned by Rousseau and his intellectual descendants, including Marx (himself greatly influenced by the Paris Commune of 1871, which was an emanation of the original Revolution).

Jean-Paul Sartre, the emblematic French Existentialist, dedicated his life to the “destruction of bourgeois civilization” (162). A dedicated Communist defined by a profound hatred of the bourgeoisie, a man for whom the word “engineer” was the greatest possible insult, he did his level best to destroy traditional virtue.

His statement that “everything that exists is born for no reason, carries on living through weakness, and dies by accident” was an excellent contribution in this regard.

Absent in his life and work are traditional loyalties and virtues, most notably self sacrificing love of others. “Hell is others”, he famously said.

Coming closer to the issue at hand, his lifelong companion—that he frequently cheated on and psychologically abused-- Simone de Bouvoir, found in Sade an exceedingly original “moralist”, and writer of “incomparable value”.

In what amounts to her defense of Sade--her essay “Must we burn Sade?”--we find quite literally every ideological theme that has defined the Left in this and the last century. She

does, in fact, follow a long line of admirers of Sade, including the prominent French intellectual and artist of the early 20th Century—Guillaume Apollinaire—who said of Sade that he was the “freest spirit who ever lived.”

The content of his work we will discuss shortly. Prior to that, let us examine some of the ideas that de Beauvoir gleans from his philosophy, such that it is.

First and foremost, we see a repetition of the argument against a liberty defined in terms of law and codified systems of justice. We see instead a relentless attack on what most Marxists would term “bourgeois morality”, and which Sade simply calls virtue. He glorified crime, and rejects Goodness, root, leaf, trunk and branch, because it is intrinsically hypocritical. As she puts it:

“. . .there is no reality other than that of the self enclosed subject hostile to any other subject which disputes its sovereignty. The thing that prevents individual freedom from choosing Good is that the latter does not exist in the empty heaven or on the unjust earth, or even at some ideal horizon: it is nowhere to be found. Evil is an absolute resisted only by fanciful notions, and there is only one way of asserting oneself in the face of it: to assent to it.

For there is one idea that Sade, throughout his pessimism., savagely rejects: the idea of submission. And that is why he detests the hypocritical resignation which is adorned with the name of virtue. It is a stupid submission to the rule of evil, as re-created by society.

Let us ponder this for a moment.

De Beauvoir clearly is sympathetic to Sade’s position in this argument. She, too, believes that middle class moral values—such as obedience to one’s nation, patriotism, honesty, loyalty, etc.—are intrinsically suspect, because they support inequalities in the universe. They are invoked, in her view, by the powerful to support their positions of power, and to disenfranchise the weak. One can easily build moral relativism / “multiculturalism” out of this. Let’s look at a few quotes::

Sade passionately exposes the bourgeois hoax which consists in erecting class interests into universal principles. Since the concrete conditions under which individuals live are not homogeneous, no universal morality is possible. (48)

And:

He was sure . . .that a man who was content with whipping a prostitute every now and then was less harmful to society than a farmer-general.

The real plagues are established injustice, official abuses, and constitutional crimes, and these are the inevitable accompaniments of abstract laws which try to impose themselves uniformly upon a plurality of radically separate objects. . .

What Sade understood remarkably well was that the ideology of his time was merely the expression of an economic system and that a concrete transformation of the system would put an end to the humbug of bourgeois morality” (49)

In short, if the task is to refute conventional morality—and he considered the words “conventional” and “imaginary” to be synonyms—then Sade is the man to do it. Moral relativism is greatly simplified as well: there is bourgeois/conventional/traditional morality, and there is everything else. There is to be no constructive engagement between varying, stable systems of morality. Rather, there is to be a line drawn with regard to varying recognitions of the “truth” that Goodness is an illusion.

Communists, to get ahead of myself, are through this philosophical stepping stone able to use the Sade/Rousseau notions of virtue, instead of those found among the founders of the United States.

We may ask, just who was this man who contributed towards a rebirth of “freedom” from convention?

He was a sexual psychopath and predator who spent most of his life in jail both for actual crimes, and for imaginary crimes he committed in books he knew would be tracked back to him. His notion of “freedom” was an exceedingly literal one. He literally wanted to be able to do to other people absolutely anything his mind could conjure up, and to be accepted and even lauded for his “courage” and individuality.

From the perspective of a non-French intellectual, his self justifications are not any different from the sorts of things cops hear in the streets, and judges hear in the court. In effect, Sade claims that the hypocrisy of society, in countenancing the abuse of the weak by the strong, forced him to develop a philosophy—which he acted on—by which the powerful abuse the weak. He makes of this a virtue by claiming sincerity in his evil where everyone else is insincere in their Good. By what criterion—other than conventional morality—hypocrisy is considered wrong, he is not able to clarify. This is of course because he is concocting an alibi, not a coherent philosophy.

Ultimately, his aim is to reduce the world of human society to that of objects, including himself, and to proceed from there into a systematic catalogue of the material configurations in which human beings can enter. Implicit is an ethical determinism, in which evil is foreordained by Nature—which one can plainly see is evil since it countenances evil—and the only freedom is that of accepting this fact completely and radically.

In researching this part of the book, it quickly became plain to me that it would be desirable to read as little Sade as possible. Therefore I determined to ascertain what one work best defined him. By common consensus, in every text or resource I consulted, this book is 120 Days of Sodom. It is, I read in numerous places, his “masterpiece”, and the

fact that it is was nearly lost in the Bastille prison where he spent some years an apparent source of latent anxiety to more than one commentator.

Yet, this book is evil. It is Satanic, in every possible way, and this obvious fact is immediately clear to anyone who so much as peruses it. The following is a bit disturbing (which was Sade's intent, since he never liked to miss an opportunity to inflict pain) but necessary, I think, to understand much of our modern world, and in particular the singular evils of ideologically based totalitarianism. It starts here, in my view. I will explain why shortly.

Reading de Beauvoir, one is tempted to view him as some misunderstood profligate who liked to spank or be spanked and flog or be flogged on occasion. He was ambiguously gay or bisexual, but basically within the fold. Certainly this is the impression conveyed by Oscar Winner Geoffrey Rush in his recent sympathetic portrayal of him in the critically acclaimed "Quills".

The book, however, is a listing of every crime he could conceive, many of which are literally inconceivable to a non-Sadeistic pervert. Does that sound strong? Well, let's examine the text a bit more carefully.

The gist of the story is that four men, four libertines, decide one day to form a pact to pursue their "diversions" jointly. All four are molesting their daughters, but agree to marry the daughters amongst one another—for the sake of appearances—while foregoing none of their sexual transgressions. This is an exceedingly mild crime, for Sade, but he wants to set the proper mood.

All four are horrible, evil men. One poisons his mother, sister, and 3 wives, one at a time, because they annoy him in one way or another. He decides to stop a stagecoach, rape all the men and women in it, steal their money—which he doesn't need, making the sheer gratuitousness of the crime all the more thrilling--and kill them. So he does.

Another wants to molest a young girl whose parents will not take money to give her to him, so in his position as a local official he has charges trumped up against the father, has him put to the rack, and tells the mother the only way to save him is to offer the little girl. Finally, hysterically, she does. He had promised her the husband would be freed, but drew pleasure from violating his word, so instead of releasing him, he arranged for him to be executed outside of his window at the same moment he violated the daughter while her hysterical mother was holding her down. Thereupon, he opens the windows, says "see how I keep my word?", and they swoon. This was what he expected though, not just due to shock. He had poisoned them.

Eventually, they find themselves a remote castle where they can practice crime in earnest, in solitude, and systematically. Much of the book consists of crimes they perform for no reason other than their pleasure. These crimes are numbered. Please forgive my inclusion of the following examples, taken substantially at random. I want it to be crystal clear what exactly de Beauvoir is excusing.

The 27th. 130. He likes to whip none but little girls between the ages of five and seven, and always finds a pretext so as to make it appear as if he were punishing them. . .

The 22nd. 105. He wraps a girl and a cat in a large blanket, has her stand and dance about; the cat bites, scratches her as she falls to the floor; but, come what may, she must leap and skip, and continue her antics until the man discharges. . .

146. Whips with cat-o'-nine-tails, from the nape of the neck to the calves of the legs; the girl is bound, he excoriates her entire back.

As their winter is winding down, they have fifteen girls, aged 15 to 17, procured, and send each of them into a separate dungeon, where torturers with “demon masks” are awaiting them:

The first torture engine is a wheel upon which a girl is strapped and which, rotating uninterruptedly, bears against an outer circle studded with razors which everywhere scratch and tear and slice the unfortunate victim, but as the blades do not bite deep, only superficially, she turns for at least two hours before dying.

The second: the girl lies two inches above a red-hot iron plate which slowly melts her.

The third: she is attached by the waist to a piece of burning iron, and all her limbs are twisted and frightfully dislocated.

And so it goes. There were many more disgusting things in there, which I choose not to repeat. This book has 3 ½ stars, of five, from Amazon.com, and 4 ½ from Barnes and Noble’s website. (These facts will of course be discussed at an appropriate point later in the book.)

This is, as I have said, by all accounts his “masterpiece”. This is the man who de Beauvoir called a “moralist”, and of “incomparable value”.

What is going on that this horrific filth is not justly excoriated and burned (as de Beauvoir herself implicitly admits is the impulse of most readers)? How is it that Sade is praised for countless descriptions of sexual violence that would get him put in jail for life in any rational polity?

How is it that Stalin’s murder of millions was justified? Is this not the same question? Pol Pot? The Cultural Revolution?

Are we not confronting in Sade the same “you have to break a few eggs. . .” of the Communists? Did they not have to somehow justify to themselves crimes which served no immediate purpose?

Here is my view: **cruelty is the connection between the abstractions of Rousseau's General Will—or those of Marxist History—and action.** Between book and street lies Sade. He is the protector of all those who violate traditional standards. He is the Patron Saint of all those who want to “reform nature” so as to eliminate inequality.

If he is disgusting, then so are the crimes of the Communists.

In this formulation, the only way to reject hypocrisy is to reject traditional virtue. Since hypocrisy is, in Leftist formulations, synonymous with protection of existing “class” structures, traditional virtue must be rejected. The goal is not, I want to emphasize, to IMPROVE virtue, but reject it. The Revolution will not draw from what is, but create everything anew. Somehow.

Moreover, all notions of Quality whatever must be ended. Ideas like nobility, love, truth, generosity—all of these partake of weakness—a lack of Sadeian morality—and must be rejected. All humans are reduced to equal objects—Sade himself wanted to be considered qualitatively on par with a “plant, or a stone”—and the notion of any means of contemplating virtue outside of raw power abandoned.

In short, Communist nations are incapable of hypocrisy since they are fundamentally evil, having rejected traditional virtues. Because of this, they are Good. The invasion of South Vietnam by the North was good. Once the Communists took over, Western imperialistic hypocrisy ended, and good old fashioned torture and murder—which were not hypocritical—commenced.

If this sounds like nonsense, it is, but this is the way this thing actually plays out, in my view.

Consider carefully the following passage from de Beauvoir:

To sympathize too readily with Sade is to betray him. For it is our misery, subjection, and death that he desires; and every time we side with a child whose throat has been slit by a sex maniac, we take a stand against him. Nor does he forbid us to defend ourselves. He allows that a father may revenge or prevent, even by murder, the rape of his child. What he demands is that, in the struggle between irreconcilable existences, each one engage himself concretely in the name of his own existence. He approves of the vendetta, but not of the courts. We may kill, but we may not judge. The pretensions of the judge are more arrogant than those of the tyrant; for the tyrant confines himself to being himself, whereas the judge tries to erect his opinions into universal laws. . . . Sade's immense merit lies in his taking a stand against these abstractions and alienations which are merely flights from the truth about man. (61)

What she is saying is quite remarkable. One, she is highly tempted to side outright with Sade against the child whose throat has been slit, but sees this as potentially problematic, as it risks being “inauthentic” by merging one's own “freedom” with the preferences of Sade. It risks conformity, where “freedom” is the goal.

Likewise, if we do side with the child—or the father—it can only be a moral act in her view if we do it as an act of power, and not as a matter of principle. Power alone is real, since principle is empty: it is nothing but a hypocritical cover for systemic, class-based power differences. To be perfectly clear: evil—as it is defined by the bourgeoisie, which she hated her entire life—alone is “virtue”, and to pretend otherwise is to abandon the “morality” of seeing the world as it “is”.

In practice, Sade’s oeuvre defines nicely the sum total of what the limits of tolerance are for moral relativists. The inescapable conclusion is that everything—EVERYTHING—is allowed. We have seen what de Beauvoir defends. She is not alone in this. As mentioned, **Quills** is nothing other than an effort to reimagine Sade as a member of the community, by pushing the limits of the tolerable. They were not ready to present him accurately, but one senses that time may yet come, on the path we are treading.

I am not saying that all Communists and Leftist read Sade—although many clearly did. I am saying that his philosophical conceptions—and their sundry derivations—are integral to the project of rejecting bourgeois virtue, and of connecting abstraction to action through cruelty.

Infamous serial killer Ted Bundy commented that his goal in torturing and murdering women was

Possessing them physically as one would possess a potted plant, a painting, or a Porsche. Owning, as it were, this individual.

The goal, we can now clearly see, of the leftists in eliminating property is not to elevate human life to the spiritual realm, but rather to reduce human beings themselves to property, which like land itself, can be parsed up and managed in whatever fashion best suits those controlling them.

This is the essence of a Communist state.

In later chapters I will deal with the very real political significance of pornography, and horror films, which constitute in part the Secular Sacred of our modern cult of the media, the church we attend nightly for ongoing indoctrination and socialization.

For now, let me make a general comment, and then return to Vietnam.

Ultimately, as I will argue throughout this text, the two possible freedoms are physical and moral. The only difference between humans and objects is freedom, specifically the freedom to choose the form one takes emotionally and spiritually. This is in my terminology the essence of Quality. As Victor Frankl famously argued, we can, even in confinement, choose our attitudes.

Sade is the limit case in physical freedom, in that he carefully defines every possible manner of crime. His interest to the Left is that he refutes Virtue as a fiction by indicating what can be done with freedom. He does so by eliminating Quality—nobility and any possibility of real connection or love—and pursuing quantity alone:

What an enigma is man!—Yes, my friend, and that's what made a very witty man say that it's better to f--- him than to understand him. [quote is Sade's directly]

Freud's immense political significance will be dealt with shortly. For now, let's continue on a line.

Leftist politics have their origin not in a rational desire to improve the human condition, but rather a moralistic desire to punish those they consider evil, those who hew to bourgeois ethical systems they consider hypocritical because they themselves cannot follow them. Echoes of this are clearly seen in the resentments felt toward Corporate America, and capitalism generally.

Their liberty is liberty of the STATE, and the entire movement of their project is towards increasing quantification of human life, and the eradication of universal moral sentiments and associated generalized notions of quality and goodness. Goodness is full, material equality, nothing more.

Leftism is based on evil, and the principle confusion it has introduced into our political discussion is the insistence that political freedom of the sort defined by the Bill of Rights can exist in anything other than a society which begins its self government with personal morality and decency. No evil people can survive as a democracy, and it is clearly a result of our fundamental Goodness—our desire to serve common sense notions of justice—that America has enjoyed the success it has.

IV

Doan Van Toai was tortured. First he was bound for a long period of time in a physically uncomfortable position (many variations of which, of course, were suggested by Sade). Then he was fed rice with sand in it, to remind him he was “a criminal”.

Why was he a criminal? Very simple: because he was accused of being a criminal. If there is no appeal to abstraction, no universal notions of justice, there is no criterion by which to determine a man's innocence other than his access to, or estrangement from, centers of power. He was a nobody, so he was sentenced for his “crime”. This of course is perfectly logical, given the presuppositions.

In the outside world around him, families were broken apart at gunpoint, and led to forced labor camps, to reeducate them in the collectivist ethos, as Rousseau had insisted would lead to the perfection of both liberty and the triumph of the General Will (Riefenstahl allusion intentional).

Can anyone doubt that mothers screaming as their children were led away from them, and their homes burned, cried any louder or more poignantly than any American slaves did? They lost everything. Everything they owned, and everyone they loved. Their entire lives were made to vanish in a large scale act of government sponsored sadism.

Were the children of the 65,000 South Vietnamese soldiers summarily executed by the North Vietnamese any less horrified than those of the children of North Vietnamese soldiers killed in their efforts to conquer the South? Does it not matter that more men were needlessly murdered AFTER our ignominious and unnecessary retreat than we lost in the ENTIRE conflict?

Can anyone seriously doubt the fundamental homology of Communist “reeducation” and slavery itself? The only difference is that traditional slavery led to prosperity for someone somewhere, and in Vietnam it led directly to general ruin for everyone.

This truth is appalling, but some important lessons can be gleaned from it. First off, that the principle tool used by Cultural Sadeists is deception and misdirection. Sade himself was a physical coward, and extolled cowardice in his “heroes”, who performed badly in combat, and were unable to stand up to direct, determined resistance. Self evidently, the man who rejected all virtue lacked every shred of what would be termed character in any common sense understanding of the term.

Secondly, the argument that “imperialism” is inherently bad, and any and all alternatives intrinsically good, rests on the rejection of traditional moral standards. Moral relativism countenances Sade, and therefore everything in the continuum leading up to him. They may claim otherwise, but they run into philosophical difficulties nearly immediately. It is necessary to reference universal codes to condemn him, and if they do that they are no longer relativists.

For this reason, no objective assessment of the outcome of the conquest of South Vietnam by the North—or the immersion of Cambodia in mass slaughter under the Khmer Rouge—is possible within the leftist mindset. Therefore, they ignore what happened.

To the extent, though, that they do speak of it, it is to condemn America. From their implicit perspective, the use of our military to stop the killing would have been to invoke universal standards, and therefore wrong. We would have been judges, and no judging is possible. Since the Communists sought power, and power alone, without recourse to “classist” moral conceptions, they were right in what they did. That, or as in the case of Sade, it was “societies” fault. We, of course, are the “society”.

This is why, all these years later, we have seen very, very few cinematic portrayals of the reality of the decision of our elites to fail in Southeast Asia. The only one that comes to mind is “The Killing Fields”. Despite the fact that the war cost 100’s of thousands of lives, billions if not trillions of dollars, and preoccupied a generation, no one has told the story of what happened afterwards.

My view is that were Hollywood—or independent film-makers outside of Hollywood—to choose to treat the effects of Communism with the same revulsion with which the Holocaust has been treated, much good would result.

Doan Van Toai ended his piece thus:

I am confident that the truth about Vietnam will eventually emerge. It is already available to those who wish to know it. As Solzhenitsyn has said, "Truth weighs as heavy as the world." And Vietnam is a lesson in truth.

He wrote that in 1981. Perhaps we have not been ready to hear the truth in the last 25 years, but as I have indicated, perseverance is one of the principle values necessary to the pursuit of Goodness. Let us continue, then.

I will turn now, in the next chapter, to what might be termed an “archeology” of evil.