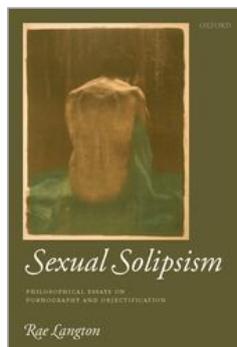


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## Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification

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## Sexual Solipsism

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### Abstract and Keywords

If solipsism is false but believed, the agent treats people as things (objectification). If solipsism is true but not believed, the agent treats things as people (projective animation). These two global solipsisms have two local, sexual counterparts. In pornography 'the human becomes thing' (MacKinnon's ambiguous phrase): women are treated as things, and things are treated as women. This chapter discusses objectification, objective attitudes, and sadism (Kant, Herman, Strawson, Scruton, Sartre); then asks how the two solipsisms connect. Is it chance that in pornography, things are treated as women, and women as things? Is there a causal connection? Or a constitutive one (Vadas)?

*Keywords:* solipsism, objectification, projective animation, causal connection, objective attitudes, sadism, Kant, Herman, Strawson, Scruton

### 1. Introduction

Solipsism finds its best known philosophical expression in the predicament of Descartes's meditator, which is where we are going to begin. But a variety of solipsisms are going to occupy us here—more local, and sexual, counterparts of the lonely meditator. We shall be thinking about escape from solipsism,

and what Kant had to say about it (Section 2). We shall be taking a closer look at the solipsism that bothered Kant, which involves treating people as things, and which might be taken to include objective attitudes, objectifying attitudes, and sadism (Section 3). And finally, we shall look more closely at a claim that, in pornography, two sexual solipsisms are united: things are treated as people, and people are treated as things (Section 4).<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1. Two Solipsisms

Suppose I were the meditator, and the Cartesian nightmare were the truth. The beings beneath my window, in their hats and coats, would be mere machines. Would I treat them as mere machines? No. I would call to them, laugh with them, talk with them, just the same. I would treat these things as people. But my world would be, in one way, solipsistic. Suppose now the reverse. Suppose the Cartesian nightmare were false, but I believed it true. The beings beneath my window would be people, but I would treat them as machines. Solipsism would be false, but I would act as though **(p.312)** it were true. And my world would be, in a different way, solipsistic. If both worlds are solipsistic, then one aspect of solipsism concerns the world itself, and another concerns an attitude to the world. One aspect concerns the nature of the beings beneath the window: are they people? Another aspect concerns my attitude: do I treat them as people? If one is to avoid the solipsistic worlds, some of the beings with whom one interacts must *be* people (not things); and one must *treat* them as people (not as things).

### 1.2. Two Local Solipsisms

The two global solipsisms just described may have local counterparts. Someone may *treat some things as people*. Someone might treat a doll as if it is hungry. Someone might treat a river as if it is angry, and can be appeased with gifts. Someone might beg help from a statue. Someone might take an axe to a recalcitrant motor car (there, smash, that'll teach you, smash). Someone might treat a piece of paper as if it were a sexually desirable, and desiring, human being. It is a familiar, if mysterious, fact of human experience that we project human qualities onto the inanimate, whether in games, or fantasy, or outright mistake.

What can be said about this treating of things as people? When it involves outright mistake, it may perhaps be faulted on grounds of rationality; but if we owe moral duties only to people, not to things, then, at first sight, no case is obviously to be faulted on moral grounds. I cannot really hurt a thing that I treat as a human being, no matter how I treat it. I cannot help or harm a statue that I treat as a friend. I cannot help or harm the car upon which I vent my rage, though I may damage it. Perhaps that is why the elevation of things to persons attracts little philosophical attention, with some exceptions.<sup>2</sup> It is not obvious that this local solipsism is to be condemned in the way that its global counterpart deserves, and it may be that human life would be the poorer if no one ever treated some things as people. Besides, the treating of things as people is usually a rather piecemeal affair, involving the attribution (serious or otherwise) of only *some* human qualities. I might treat a statue as an especially kind and powerful friend, but am unlikely to wonder what it had for lunch. I might treat my car as an **(p.313)** appropriate target for reactive attitudes of blame and rage, but am unlikely to apologize to it later. I might treat things as people in some respects, and not in others. I shall speak of this treating of things as people, this animation of things, as a solipsism nonetheless. In the small world of my reactive relationship with a statue, or a car, there is only one real person. So I see this local solipsism as a microcosm of the first global solipsism I described: the solipsism of one who attributes (seriously or otherwise) human qualities to an inanimate thing.

There is a second local solipsism. Someone may *treat some people as things*. This reduction of people to things attracts attention from philosophers. They say it is wrong to treat a person as a thing, because such an attitude fails to treat the other person as an end in herself, or because it violates the autonomy of the other person, or because it objectifies the other person, or because it makes an Other of the other. They say that it fails to do justice, both morally and epistemically, to the humanity of the person who is treated as a thing. The treating of people as things is likewise a rather piecemeal affair, involving only *some* non-human qualities. I might treat people as things in some respects, and not in others. I shall speak of this treating of people as things, this objectifying of people, as a form of solipsism nonetheless. In the small world of an objectifying relationship, there is more than one real

person: but it is, for one, as if he were the only person. So I see this local solipsism as a microcosm of the second global solipsism described above: the solipsism of one who ignores—and perhaps diminishes, or destroys—some human qualities of the person whom he treats as a thing.

Feminists too are concerned about a local solipsism. Many say that women, in particular, are treated as things, objectified, made Other. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote that the oppression of women produces creatures who are ‘alluring objects’ and ‘slaves’, and that relations between men and women can be solipsistic as a result. She wrote of ‘the man who can be contented to live with a pretty, useful companion, without a mind’, and said that ‘in the society of his wife he is still alone’.<sup>3</sup> The theme is famously developed by Simone de Beauvoir, who says that oppression is the degradation of a free human being into an object. **(p.314)**

What peculiarly signalizes the situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all human creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other. They propose to stabilize her as an object . . .

In the company of a living enigma *man remains alone*. [This] is for many a more attractive experience than an authentic relationship with a human being.<sup>4</sup>

If a failure to recognize the humanity of others amounts to a solipsism, then one message of feminist writers is that solipsism is not a mere problem in epistemology, but a moral and political problem, and one we have yet to fully escape.

### 1.3. Two Sexual Solipsisms

Among these local versions of the global solipsisms with which I began are two that have a sexual aspect. In the first, someone treats a thing as a human being, in a context that is sexual; in the second, someone treats a human being as a thing, in a context that is sexual. Feminists have been concerned with both sexual solipsisms, and so has Kant.

First there is a solipsism of animating things. When someone treats a thing as a human being, in a sexual context, he does not believe outright it is a human being, but he may act as if it were. He may talk with it, he may praise it, or blame it; he may attribute to the thing beliefs about himself, and desires. He may direct a range of reactive attitudes towards it. And he has sex with it. The talk, praise, blame, belief/desire attribution, is in some sense make-believe. The sexual experience is not. Perhaps the thing is a piece of paper, a doll, or, more elaborately, the electronically created virtual being imagined in Jeanette Winterson's novel:

If you like, you may live in a computer-created world all day and all night. You will be able to try out a Virtual life with a Virtual lover. You can go into your Virtual house and do Virtual housework, add a baby or two, even find out if you'd rather be gay. Or single. Or straight. Why hesitate when you could simulate?

**(p.315)**

And sex? Certainly. Teledildonics is the word. You will be able to plug in your telepresence to the billion-bundle network of fibre optics criss-crossing the world and join your partner in Virtuality. Your real selves will be wearing body suits made up of thousands of tiny tactile detectors per square inch. Courtesy of the fibre optic network these will receive and transmit touch. The Virtual epidermis will be as sensitive as your own outer layer of skin.

For myself, unreconstructed as I am, I'd rather hold you in my arms . . . Luddite? No, I don't want to smash the machines but neither do I want the machines to smash me.<sup>5</sup>

Technology may be catching up with the thought experiments that philosophers, since Descartes, have half-seriously entertained—brains in vats, experience machines, the rest. And Winterson's description nicely captures the liberal dream. A thousand possible experiments in living, and cost free. The Cartesian nightmare becomes utopia. Why not plug in from the start? Why hesitate, when you could simulate?

In short, one sexual solipsism might involve the treating of things as if they are human, when pornography is used as a sexual partner. This idea is clearly present in certain feminist discussions, and in Kant's writing, though I postpone discussion of Kant's version until later. Catharine MacKinnon says that the use of pornography is 'sex between people and things, human beings and pieces of paper, real men and unreal women'.<sup>6</sup> Melinda Vadas defines pornography to be 'any object that has been manufactured to satisfy sexual desire through its sexual consumption or other sexual use as a woman' where 'as' means 'in the role, function, or capacity of' a woman.<sup>7</sup> She says that the use of pornography is the sexual consumption of a manufactured artifact, a thing, a piece of paper, that is treated as a human being, and in particular, as woman. There may well be something piecemeal about this treating of things as if they are human that is involved in pornography: there may be some reactive attitudes and not others, there may be a projection of some human qualities and not others, so that although this sexual solipsism may involve the treating of a thing as a woman, it falls short of treating a thing as a person. That, indeed, is a point that Vadas wants to emphasize, and we will return to it later.

**(p.316)** To describe the feminist argument in this way is to risk missing the main point, which is not that pornography *animates things*, but that it *objectifies women*, not that pornography elevates things to human beings, but that it reduces human beings to things—in other words, that pornography instantiates the second sexual solipsism. Let us think briefly (for the moment) about what this latter solipsism might involve.

In addition to the solipsism of animating things, there is a solipsism of objectifying people, and this, like the first, can have a sexual aspect. Feminists see a sexual aspect to the treating of women as things, as the remarks from Wollstonecraft and de Beauvoir show. Women are treated as things, when they are treated as sex objects. What this

amounts to is a matter of debate, but let us say provisionally that in sexual contexts, women are treated as things to the extent that women are treated as merely bodies, as merely sensory appearances, as not free, as items that can be possessed, as items whose value is merely instrumental.

Feminists say that women are often treated as things, in sexual contexts, and ought not to be: the claim has a descriptive and a normative role. Kant says that people are often treated as things, in sexual contexts, and ought not to be: the claim has a descriptive and normative role for him as well. In pessimistic moments Kant suggests that sexual desire carries, in itself, a tendency to this kind of solipsism. He says that when a human being becomes an object of someone's sexual desire, the 'person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such'. He says, notoriously, that 'sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon that has been sucked dry'.<sup>8</sup> The bleakness of Kant's descriptive claim echoes the bleakness of some feminist claims, as Barbara Herman has noted.<sup>9</sup>

It is in the context of a general view about objectification that the main feminist claims about pornography have their place. The claim is that pornography, in particular, makes women objects, helps to bring it about that women are treated as merely bodies, merely sensory appearances, not free, as items that can be possessed, as items whose value is merely instrumental.

**(p.317)** Now MacKinnon herself says that pornography instantiates both solipsisms, though not in quite those words. She says that in pornography use, things are treated as women, and women are treated as things—in pornography use, things are animated, *and* women are objectified. The use of pornography involves 'sex between people and things, human beings and pieces of paper, real men and unreal women';<sup>10</sup> and when sex is solipsistic in one way, it becomes solipsistic in the other:

What was words and pictures becomes, through masturbation, sex itself. As the industry expands, this becomes more and more the generic experience of sex. . . . In other words, *as the human becomes thing* and the mutual becomes one-sided and the given becomes

stolen and sold, objectification comes to define femininity, and one-sidedness comes to define mutuality, and force comes to define consent as pictures and words become the forms of possession and use through which women are actually possessed and used.<sup>11</sup>

When sex is something you do with a thing, 'the human becomes thing'. Notice that this phrase is exactly ambiguous between the two sexual solipsisms I have described. When MacKinnon says that 'the human becomes thing', she means both (a) that a pornographic artifact is used in place of a human sexual partner, and (b) that a human sexual partner is used as if she were a pornographic artifact, a thing. It may be tempting to think that there is a pun here, or an equivocation, or that MacKinnon has somehow mistaken the one solipsism for the other. A better alternative is that we have here a substantive claim: that there is a connection between these two solipsisms; and that the solipsism of treating things as people, in pornography, in some way leads to the solipsism of treating people as things.

In these preliminary thoughts I have described two sexual solipsisms: one of treating things as human beings, in sexual contexts; and one of treating human beings as things, in sexual contexts. What is involved in each of these? And might the two be connected, generally, or in pornography? A wholly adequate response to these questions would analyze each of the two solipsisms in detail, firmly distinguish their moral and epistemological dimensions, make plain their implications for philosophy and feminism, and discover whether and exactly how they are related. But my response, **(p.318)** in what follows, is more modest. I consider in Section 3 the solipsism of treating people as things, drawing on Kant and other writers, and I distinguish, in a far from exhaustive taxonomy, four kinds of object-making attitude: objective attitudes, objectifying attitudes, self-objectifying attitudes, and the attitudes of sadism. The discussion of that section is partly interpretive (in its exploration of Kant), partly analytical (in its distinctions between attitudes), and partly critical (in its attack on a recent account of sadism). As for the solipsism of treating things as people, I consider in Section 4 MacKinnon's suggestion that there is a connection between solipsism of the one kind and solipsism of the other, and that through pornography 'the human becomes thing' in more ways than one.

First, though, let us turn our thoughts to escape.

## 2. Escape From Solipsism

Descartes said that the path to solipsism, and hopefully beyond, required the temporary abandoning of practical life. The meditator should leave his normal activities, since the task before him 'does not involve action'.<sup>12</sup> He should leave, for the moment, his friends. Imagine how disquieting it would otherwise be for the friend. Imagine what it would be like to meet the solipsist. Imagine how it would feel to converse with someone, hitherto my friend, who seriously entertains the hypothesis that I, in my hat and coat, am a mere machine. Imagine how it would feel to converse with someone who seriously entertains the hypothesis that thoughts are being constantly inserted into his mind by a malevolent spirit—that the thoughts which *I myself* put in his mind (using a traditional technique known as 'speech') have their source in the actions of the same malevolent spirit. It would be disquieting, to say the least. Better leave behind ones friends, or one is unlikely to be left with many.

### 2.1. Kant on Friendship and Sexual Love

If an effective remedy for (and proof against?) solipsism can be found, it is in practice, and one remedy is in friendship itself. Kant suggests that friendship provides escape from solipsism. He describes the man without a **(p.319)** friend as if he were the Cartesian meditator. The man without a friend is the man who is all alone, who 'must shut himself up in himself', who must remain 'completely alone with his thoughts as in a prison'.<sup>13</sup> Kant says that friendship provides 'release' from the 'prison' of the self, and that we have a duty 'not to isolate ourselves', but to seek release from the prison of self by seeking out friendship. Kant says, in short, that we have a moral duty to escape solipsism.

In friendship the reciprocity characteristic of moral relations in general is present in a distinctive way: friendship is 'the maximum reciprocity of love', an 'intimate union of love and respect', an ideal of 'emotional and practical concern' for another's welfare.<sup>14</sup> In her illuminating discussion of Kant's views on friendship, Christine Korsgaard notes the metaphors of self-surrender and retrieval in Kant's description of reciprocity.<sup>15</sup> Kant says, of an ideal friendship,

Suppose that I choose only friendship, and that I care only for my friend's happiness in the hope that he cares for mine. Our love is mutual; there is complete restoration. I, from generosity, look after his happiness and he similarly looks after mine; I do not throw away my happiness, but surrender it to his keeping, and he in turn surrenders his into my hands.<sup>16</sup>

The escape from the prison of the self is bought, in part, by a surrender of the self—a surrender that is no one-sided abdication, but a generous gift offered and reciprocated. The friendships of practical life do not achieve this ideal of reciprocity, but friendships aim for that ideal, in Kant's opinion, and can sometimes approach it.

Since friendship is an escape from solipsism, it has aspects that are both practical and epistemic. If I am to respect the beliefs and intentions of my friend, I must learn what those beliefs and intentions are. If I am to share his goals, I must learn what they are. If I am to bring him happiness, I must learn what his desires are. And if our love and respect is reciprocal, he must know the same about me. That is why Kant says that one needs epistemic **(p.320)** virtues to pursue the moral life: one must exercise an 'active power' of sympathy, a practically oriented capacity that provides one with knowledge of the beliefs and desires and feelings of others as a means of 'participating actively' in their fate.<sup>17</sup> In friendship this capacity is especially necessary, since the duty of friendship is in part a duty to know and to make oneself known. The best kind of friendship involves 'the complete confidence of two persons in revealing their secret thoughts and feelings to each other'<sup>18</sup> Kant says that because of the basic human need to 'unburden our heart',

. . . each of us needs a friend, one in whom we can confide unreservedly, and to whom we can disclose completely all our dispositions and judgments, from whom we can and need hide nothing, to whom we can communicate our whole self.<sup>19</sup>

If friendship provides an escape from solipsism, and there can be sexual solipsisms, we can conclude that not all sexual relations are friendly—but we are left wondering about the relation between sex and friendship.

Kant, in optimistic mood, writes that friendship and sexual love can provide the same escape from solipsism, and that

sexual love can be as potent as friendship in its capacity to unlock the 'prison' of the self.

Love, whether it is for a spouse or for a friend . . . wants to communicate itself completely, and it expects of its respondent a similar sharing of heart, unweakened by distrustful reticence.

Whether it is for a spouse, or for a friend, love presupposes the same mutual esteem for the other's character.<sup>20</sup>

This is from Kant's letter to Maria von Herbert, a young woman who believes she has been abandoned by someone, but whether friend or lover is unclear. 'It makes no difference' anyway, says Kant, since these relationships share the same moral core of communication, respect, and 'sharing of heart'.<sup>21</sup> In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant's description of the reciprocity of sexual love has the very same features as his description of friendship, as Christine Korsgaard points out—the same talk of surrender and retrieval. Of friendship, Kant writes that if I love my friend 'as I love myself', and he loves me 'as he loves himself', 'he restores to me that with **(p.321)** which I part and I come back to myself again'. Of sexual love, Kant writes 'if I yield myself completely to another and obtain the person of the other in return, I win myself back'.<sup>22</sup> If sexual love and friendship are similar, as Kant suggests, then a lover can be a

friend . . . in whom we can confide unreservedly, and to whom we can disclose completely all our dispositions and judgments, from whom we can and need hide nothing, to whom we can communicate our whole self.<sup>23</sup>

There is reason for thinking that Kant is an optimist, who believes that sexual love and friendship are alike in their power to provide an escape from solipsism, through mutual knowledge, affection, respect, and the trust which makes knowledge possible.

### 2.2. Interlude

The sense of discovery in love and friendship can be brought to life by novelists in ways that no philosopher can hope to do, and this section tells a story from *The Innocent*, by Ian McEwan.

She sat across from him and they warmed their hands round the big mugs. He knew from experience that unless he made a formidable effort, a pattern was waiting to impose itself: a polite enquiry would elicit a polite response and another question. Have you lived

here long? Do you travel far to work? . . . Only silences would interrupt the relentless tread of question and answer. They would be calling to each other over immense distances, from adjacent mountain peaks . . . Rather than tolerate more silence, he settled after all for more small talk and began to ask, 'Have you lived here long?'

But all in a rush she spoke over him, saying, 'How do you look without your glasses? Show me please.' This last word she elongated beyond what any native speaker would have considered reasonable, unfurling a delicate papery thrill through Leonard's stomach. He snatched the glasses from his face and blinked at her. He could see quite well up to three feet, and her features had only partially dissolved. 'And so,' she said quietly. 'It is how I thought. Your eyes are beautiful and all the time they are hidden. Has no one told you how they are beautiful?' . . .

His voice sounded strangled in his ears. 'No, no one has said that' . . .

'Then I am the first to discover you?' There was humour, but no mockery, in her look. She interlocked her fingers with his . . . Their hands fitted well, the grip was intricate, unbreakable, there were so many points of contact. In this poor **(p.322)** light, and without his glasses, he could not see which fingers were his own. Sitting in the darkening, chilly room in his raincoat, holding on to her hand, he felt he was throwing away his life. The abandonment was delicious. . . . Something was pouring out of him, through his palm and into hers, something was spreading back up his arm, across his chest, constricting his throat. His only thought was a repetition: So this is it, it's like this, so this is it . . .<sup>24</sup>

Leonard knows from experience how the encounter will proceed. They will be remote as adjacent mountain peaks, a vast space of awkward good manners and English reserve floating between them, despite his best hopes. He doesn't know at all, of course. He hadn't begun to factor into the equation what Maria herself might think, or want, or do.

He began to explain himself . . . 'Actually, I didn't know whether you'd want to see me, or if you'd even recognise me'.

'Do you have another friend in Berlin?'

'Oh no, nothing like that' . . .

'And did you have any girlfriends in England?'

'Not many, no.'

'How many?'

He hesitated before making a lunge at the truth. 'Well, actually, none.'

'You've never had one?'

'No.' Maria leaned forwards. 'You mean, you've never . . .',

He could not bear to hear whatever term she was about to use. 'No, I never have.'

She put her hand to her mouth to stifle a yelp of laughter. It was not so extraordinary a thing in nineteen fifty five for a man of Leonard's background and temperament to have had no sexual experience by the end of his twenty-fifth year. But it was a remarkable thing for a man to confess. He regretted it immediately. She had the laughter under control, but now she was blushing. It was the interlocking fingers that had made him think he could get away with speaking without pretence. In this bare little room with its pile of assorted shoes belonging to a woman who lived alone and did not fuss with milk jugs or doilies on tea trays, it should have been possible to deal in unadorned truths.

Maria's directness, her evident delight in him, her indifference to feminine niceties, her physical closeness, make him trust her. Leonard has a feeling **(p.323)** of throwing away his life in a 'delicious abandonment', the surrender Kant described which is perhaps more typical of lovers than friends. He has the impulse of which Kant wrote, the desire love has to 'communicate itself completely', that 'expects of its respondent a similar sharing of heart, unweakened by distrustful reticence.' But the relations of lovers are at once more intimate and more convention-governed than the relations of friends. And it is not at all obvious that a lover can always be a 'friend . . . in whom we can confide unreservedly, and . . . from whom we can and need hide nothing', especially at first. Margaret Atwood once asked a group of men, what is it that you fear most from women? The reply was, we're afraid that they'll laugh at us.<sup>25</sup> There was no mockery at first, but Maria is surely laughing at him now.

The story continues:

. . . it should have been possible to deal in unadorned truths.

And in fact, it was. Maria's blushes were brought on by shame at the laughter she knew Leonard would misunderstand. For hers was the laughter of nervous relief. She had been suddenly absolved from the pressures and rituals of seduction. She would not have to adopt a conventional role and be judged in it, and she would not be measured against other women. Her fear of being physically abused had receded. She would not be obliged to do anything she did not want. She was free, they both were free, to invent their own terms. They could be partners in invention. And she really had discovered for herself this shy Englishman with the steady gaze and the long lashes, she had him first, she would have him all to herself. These thoughts she formulated later in solitude. At the time they erupted in the single hoot of relief and hilarity which she had suppressed to a yelp.

Leonard took a long pull of his tea, set down the mug and said 'Ah' in a hearty, unconvincing way. He put his glasses on and stood up.

Maria's laughter, if only he could read it, spells joyful relief: a relief at a release from convention, and something else—a relief that accompanies the vanishing of fear. The story about Margaret Atwood had another chapter. She asked the women, what is it that you most fear from men? The reply was, we're afraid that they'll kill us. Maria has known violent soldiers and **(p.324)** an abusive husband, after which the innocence of Leonard is a treasure. But innocence is partly ignorance, and Leonard takes the laughter to be his worst fear fulfilled. Convinced of his 'humiliating tactical blunder', Leonard invents an excuse and turns to leave.

He was fumbling with the unfamiliar lock and Maria was right at his back. . . . The man scrabbling to leave by her front door was less like the men she had known and more like herself. She knew just how it felt. When you felt sorry for yourself, you wanted to make things worse . . . .

He opened the door at last and turned to say his goodbyes. Did he really believe that she was fooled by his politeness and the invented appointment, or that his desperation was invisible? He was telling her he was sorry he had to dash off, and expressing gratitude for the tea again, and offering his hand—a handshake!—when she reached up and lifted his glasses clear of his face and strode back into her sitting room with them . . . .

'Look here,' he said, and, letting the door close behind him, took one step then another into the apartment. And that was it, he was back in. He had wanted to stay, now he had to. 'I really do have to be going.' He stood in the centre of the tiny room, irresolute, still attempting to fake his hesitant English form of outrage.

She stood close so he could see her clearly. How wonderful it was, not to be frightened of a man. It gave her a chance to like him, to have desires which were not simply reactions to his. She took his hands in hers. 'But I haven't finished looking at your eyes.' Then, with the Berlin girl's forthrightness . . . she added, 'Du Dummer! Wenn es für dich das erste Mal ist, bin ich sehr glücklich. When this is your first time, then I am a very lucky girl.'

It was her 'this' which held Leonard. He was back with 'this'. What they were doing here was all part of 'this', his first time.

Leonard's revelation is not after all a tactical error. His innocence, his ignorance about tactics and conventions, his awkwardness—all are utterly endearing to Maria. Without the trammels of convention and fear, there is room for discovery. She can know how he feels, she knows herself how stubborn self-pity can be, that when you feel sorry for yourself, you want to make things worse. There is room for ordinary friendship: she has a chance to like him. There is room for desire: a chance for her to have desires which are not simply reactions to his. The two of them are free to be lovers who are partners in invention, which is what they indeed become.

**(p.325)** 3. The Solipsism of Treating People as Things  
The optimism about friendship and sexual love occasionally to be found in some of Kant's writings must be placed against a pessimism which is his more common attitude.

### 3.1. Kant on Sexual Objectification

Kant more often writes as though sexual love does not provide an escape from solipsism at all. Sexual desire, he says in the passage partly quoted above,

*. . . is an appetite for another human being . . . Human love is good will, affection, promoting the happiness of others and finding joy in their happiness. But it is clear that when a person loves another purely from sexual desire, none of these factors enter into love. Far from there being any concern for the happiness of the loved one, the lover, in order to satisfy his desire, may even plunge the loved one into the depths of misery. Sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite; as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon that has been sucked dry.<sup>26</sup>*

Sexual love is not a species of 'human love' but is opposed to it: or so Kant seems to say here. Sexual love is not the cure for solipsism, but the disease. Sexual desire makes of the loved person an 'object of appetite'. What does he mean?

Clearly there is one, innocuous, sense in which sexual desire makes of the loved person 'an object'. Any intentional attitude directed towards a person makes of that person an 'object' of that attitude: an intentional object. A person can be an object of someone's thought, or love, or loathing, or respect, or desire. This sense of 'object' yields no grounds for moral alarm. On the contrary, we have duties to make persons into objects, in some of these ways. We have duties to make persons into objects of knowledge, and love, and **(p.326)**

respect. These ways of making persons into objects are implied by the duty we have to escape solipsism. So while it may well be that sexual desire makes a person into an object in this intentional sense, since the same can be said of the intentional attitudes of knowledge, and love, and respect, we have no explanation yet for Kant's moral dismay. Kant must mean something more by the claim that sexual love makes of a person 'an object of appetite', and two different suggestions have made, by Korsgaard, and by Herman.

According to Korsgaard, Kant believes that sexual desire takes as its intentional object not a mere body, but a person in his or her entirety. Kant says,

Amongst our inclinations there is one which is directed towards other human beings. They themselves, and not their work and services, are its objects of enjoyment. . . . There is an inclination which we may call an appetite for enjoying another human being. We refer to sexual impulse. Man can, of course, use another human being as an instrument for his service; he can use his hands, his feet, and even all his powers; he can use him for his own purposes with the other's consent. But there is no way in which a human being can be made an object of indulgence for another except through sexual impulse . . . it is an appetite for another human being.<sup>27</sup>

Kant says here that the sexual inclination is 'directed towards other human beings': that 'they themselves', and not their services, or their bodies, are its objects of enjoyment. Korsgaard says that what troubles Kant is the idea that sexual love demands that the beloved put not simply her body but her *entire self* at the lover's disposal. 'Viewed through the eyes of sexual desire another person is seen as something wantable, desirable, and therefore inevitably possessable. To yield to that desire, to the extent it is really that desire you yield to, is to allow yourself to be possessed'.

Herman suggests an alternative interpretation. She draws attention to the evident common ground between Kant and the feminist writers who say that sexual relations can make women into objects: that sexual relations can objectify women. On this interpretation, Kant thinks that there is something about sexual desire that can cast the desired person in the role of a thing, a mere body, something whose value is merely instrumental. Kant says,

Because sexuality is not an inclination which one human being has for another as such, but is an inclination for the sex of the other, it is a principle of the degradation of human nature . . . That [the woman] is a human being is of no **(p.327)** concern to the man; only her sex is the object of his desires. Human nature is thus subordinated. Hence it comes that all men and women do their best to make not their human nature but their sex more alluring and direct their activities and lusts entirely towards sex. Human nature is thereby sacrificed to sex.<sup>28</sup>

Kant's claim that in sexual love a person is somehow made thing-like finds an echo in claims of MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, and Herman offers the reader some samples from the latter, for comparison:

It is especially in the acceptance of the object status that her humanity is hurt; it is a metaphysical acceptance of lower status in sex and in society; an implicit acceptance of less freedom, less privacy, less integrity . . . a political collaboration with his dominance . . . [In intercourse] he confirms for himself and for her what she is; that she is something, not someone; certainly not someone equal.<sup>29</sup>

Sexual desire makes a woman 'something, not someone'. On Herman's interpretation of Kant, sexual desire takes as its intentional object a body, rather than a person. It may view the body as an object of beauty, or it may view the body as an anonymous instrument, but in either case, it ignores the person who is partly constituted by her body.

On Herman's interpretation, sexual love can be reductive: it can make of the loved person an object by making her something, not someone. On Korsgaard's interpretation, sexual desire can be invasive: it can make of the loved person an object by viewing her as someone (not something), a person in her entirety (not merely a body)—but a person to be invaded and possessed.

Neither description is plausible, as a description of the essential and inevitable character of sexual relationships, even according to Kant: for Kant says that sexual love can be like friendship in its power to unlock the prison of the self, nourish the epistemic and moral virtues, provide escape from the hell of solipsism. However, both interpretations are evidently plausible as descriptions of different pathologies of sexual love. Perhaps sexual desire can indeed be invasive, in the way that Korsgaard describes. That possibility is addressed in this

essay's companion piece.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps sexual desire can indeed be reductive, in the way that Herman describes. To consider this possibility is to consider in closer detail the **(p.328)** solipsism of treating people as things, the solipsism of making someone an object.

### 3.2. Making Someone an 'object'

The notion of an object draws its weight from a particular picture of the world and the place of human beings in it, a picture which has been in the background of the discussion so far, and which, as I have painted it, is broadly Kantian. There is the world of natural phenomena—things bright and beautiful, creatures great and small, purple mountains, rivers running by, sunset, morning, bright sky. Things dance inexorably to a score laid down by the laws of nature. Their movements are explained and predicted by scientists and engineers, cooks and gardeners. Things appear to our senses, they dazzle and bewitch with color and noise and smell. Things provide us with tools. We take them, fix them up, make them more amenable to our purposes, and use them for whatever we want without so much as a by your leave. Things don't talk back, argue, communicate. Things may be noisy, but when it comes to speech, things are silent. Things are bought and sold in the marketplace. They have a price fixed by their usefulness to a buyer. When things are worn out, you throw them away. If you lose a thing, you can always replace it with another thing that will do the job just as well.

Despite the fact that people are to be counted amongst the creatures great and small, our attitude to people is not the same. And although people are undubitably part of the great dance whose score is laid down by laws of nature, people—somehow—get to make up their own steps. People are viewed as responsible for what they do. We feel resentful when they hurt us deliberately, grateful when they help us deliberately, and in general have a range of reactive attitudes that show that we are, as Strawson says, involved.<sup>31</sup> The movements of human beings are to be explained, not by a physicist, but by someone who understands the pattern of beliefs, desires, reasons, and decisions, that motivate the human beings. People talk back, argue, communicate. People appear to our senses, just as other sensory phenomena do, and a person can be more dazzling and bewitching than any rainbow. But there is always more to a person than meets the eye or **(p.329)** ear, there is an inner life, a garden enclosed, which may be very different to the appearance presented at the gate. With a person there is a potential gap between appearance and reality that makes room for shyness, reticence, hypocrisy, and deception, one reason why the problem of other minds is not simply the problem of the external world. A person who is an

object of appearance for me is someone for whom I in turn am an object of appearance. And on the Kantian vision, what most sets human beings apart from the world of natural phenomena is their capacity for choice, a capacity which endows each person with 'an inalienable dignity', and prohibits the treating of persons as things.

To be an object, on this picture, is to be a natural phenomenon: something which is not free, something whose movements could be explained and predicted by science, something whose movements are not determined by reason and choice. It is to be something incapable of the activities of knowledge, communication, love, respect. It is to be something that is merely a sensory appearance, something whose qualities are exhausted by how it can look, feel, sound, and taste to a perceiver. It is to be merely a body, something solid and extended in space. It is to be a tool, something whose value is merely instrumental, something which is a potential possession. These different aspects of the notion of an object are related: it is no coincidence that the realm of determined things, the realm of sensory appearances, the realm of bodies, and the realm of potential tools and possessions are, for Kant at least, one and the same. But these are all conceptually, and modally, distinct. And since they are distinct, a person may be made an object in some of these ways, but not others. That is why the solipsism of treating people as things can be a piecemeal, partial affair.

### 3.3. 'Making' Someone an Object

What sense can be attached to the idea that someone whose humanity is inalienable can nonetheless be *made* an object in some or all of the above ways? This is a vast topic, but here I want to describe four overlapping ways of object-making.<sup>32</sup>

#### **(p.330) Objective Attitudes**

One might make someone an object, in one sense, when one takes an objective attitude towards her, in the manner that Strawson described in 'Freedom and Resentment'. This is to view someone as if she were a natural phenomenon in the first sense—lacking in responsibility, not (or not fully) free, autonomous, or responsible for what she does.

To adopt the objective attitude to another human being is to see him, perhaps, as an object of social policy; as a subject for what, in a wide range of sense, might be called treatment; as something . . . to be managed or handled or cured or trained.<sup>33</sup>

Strawson says that the objective stance can be contrasted with the stance of the engaged participant, and an important sign of the difference between them is the absence or presence of certain reactive attitudes. In general, the absence of such reactive attitudes as resentment indicates the presence of an objective attitude. One does not resent the (hurtful) behavior of a human being who is not held to be responsible.

It that always so? It is plausible enough for the cases Strawson considers: the benign social scientist, the teacher, the psychiatrist, who can afford the distance required by the objective attitude. But there are exceptions to Strawson's rule. Consider cases where one is in a relation of on-going dependence on, or vulnerability to, a person who is not responsible for the pain they cause, and is known not to be responsible. One views them as not responsible, and in that sense takes an objective attitude towards them: however, one may still feel resentment even though the hurtful actions are not viewed as the result of reasoned choice. One might resent a person who innocently, and deafeningly, snores. One might resent a cruel jailer, even if the cruelty were viewed as a result of Maoist indoctrination. One might resent an infant who guiltlessly, and inexplicably, screamed for months on end. The resentment here is not always dissipated by knowledge that the person is not responsible. Such knowledge can even, rightly or wrongly, exacerbate the resentment. Where the vulnerability is towards a loved person who was once responsible, but is no longer, resentment can come from a feeling that one has been robbed, a feeling that something precious has been torn away. What can provoke resentment is the very fact that the loved one *is no longer a participant*. One can feel not only grief but anger towards a loved person who has become senile, or insane, or **(p.331)** alcoholic. And the death of a loved person can provoke a potent mixture of grief and rage. How *dare* she die! How *dare* she leave me! Such resentment is a datum of human experience, and rational or not, it seems relevant to a Strawsonian task of a purely descriptive metaphysics.

To take an objective attitude towards someone is one way of treating a person as a thing: but the objective attitude described by Strawson is rather benevolent, notwithstanding its lack of respect. It is the attitude of the impartial social scientist, the kind teacher, the concerned psychiatrist. What has this attitude to do with the treating of women as things? Something, certainly. But it is unlikely that this is what Kant and feminist writers have in mind when they say that sexual desire can make a person an object. They do not mean that in sexual contexts one person looks upon another with an eye of benign and dispassionate concern, viewing the person as not responsible for their behavior and thus 'an object of social policy'. There is something else.

### **Objectifying Attitudes**

Someone might display, not the objective attitude which Strawson described, but what we can call an objectifying attitude. Someone might view a person as thing-like: view her not merely as lacking in responsibility, but view her as if there were nothing more to her than an appearance, nothing more to her than how she looks, and generally manifests herself to the senses. Someone might view a person as being nothing more than a body, nothing more than a conveniently packaged bundle of eyes, lips, face, breasts, buttocks, legs. Someone might view a person as if she were a mere tool, a mere instrument to serve his own purposes, or property that belonged to him. The benign social scientist imagined by Strawson would not view a person in these ways. But these latter ways come closer to the sexual solipsism described by Kant, MacKinnon, and Dworkin. An objectifying attitude may well have in common with the objective attitude a lack of respect, and a tendency to view a person as not fully responsible, but other aspects of the notion of an object may be in play: mere sensory appearance, mere body, possession, tool. One who takes an objective attitude sees a person in terms of certain well-meaning relational gerundives: he sees him as to be handled, to be managed, to be cured, to be trained. One who takes the objectifying attitude sees a person in terms of different relational gerundives: something to be looked at, to be pursued, to be consumed, to be used, to be possessed.

**(p.332)** I remarked that, contrary to Strawson, it seems possible to resent someone while at the same time ‘seeing’ them as an object, in his sense, that is, as lacking in responsibility—resentment seems compatible with the objective attitude. It is worth noting that resentment seems compatible with an objectifying attitude as well. Someone who views women reductively, as brutish creatures whose purpose is the satisfaction of men's lusts, may also manifest resentment towards women. Misogyny may sometimes present just this combination. And perhaps the connection between the resentment and the objectifying attitude is not coincidental. Perhaps it is caused by a horror that one's desires put one in the power of such contemptible creatures.

There are objective and objectifying attitudes, but this emphasis on attitudes as ways of ‘seeing’ a person may suggest mere states of mind, not in themselves harmful to the person who is ‘made an object’ in these attitudinal ways. As Strawson says, though, it matters to us very much that we are viewed as people, and not as things. Strawson says that in much of our behavior, ‘the benefit or injury resides mainly or entirely in the manifestation of attitude itself’.<sup>34</sup> If one is injured by being made the object of an objective attitude, one can also be injured by being made the object of an objectifying attitude, and a person is injured when she is viewed as if she were a thing—unfree, mere appearance, body, tool, or property. But there is more than ‘seeing’ involved.

Strawson somewhat blurs the distinctions between attitude, action, and effect in his use of the gerundives: one adopts the objective attitude when one ‘sees’ a person as ‘an object of social policy . . . as something . . . to be managed or handled or cured or trained’. Is it a matter of seeing, or doing? Clearly, both. The person who sees someone as to-be-managed, to-be-cured, to-be-trained, will translate that attitude into action, and will (assuming power and resources) actually manage, cure, or train. He will act in a certain way. And he will achieve certain effects. The objectifying attitude likewise will involve both seeing and doing. MacKinnon says, ‘Men treat women as who they see women as being’. Objectification is a stance, a way of looking at the world, and a social practice.<sup>35</sup> Someone **(p.333)** who adopts an objectifying attitude may do things to the people he views as objects. He may turn people into objects, in so far as that is possible. If human beings have an ‘inalienable’ dignity, as Kant says, then there will be limits on

how far this process can go: one cannot turn a human being into something that is entirely unfree, a mere tool, something that is exhausted by its sensory appearance, its body. But a person can be made less free, more tool-like, and a person's appearance and bodily qualities can be made to play a more exaggerated role in her own social identity.

When MacKinnon says that 'men treat women as who they see women as being', she means, in part, that men see women as beings whose purpose is the satisfaction of desire. Perhaps men see women as being submissive by nature; they want women to be that way; and they treat women accordingly. And in conditions of gender hierarchy, seeing can become doing. Men attribute certain qualities to women, see women a certain way, and that projection of qualities 'is not just an illusion or a fantasy or a mistake. It becomes embodied because it is enforced'.<sup>36</sup>

Sally Haslanger has drawn upon this theme in MacKinnon to offer one conception of what it is to objectify someone. To objectify someone is to take a (practical) attitude that has four dimensions: it is to view and treat someone as an (intentional) object for the satisfaction of one's desire; to force her to have a property that one desires her to have; to believe that she has that property; and to believe that she has that property by nature.<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that of these four conditions, the first, second and fourth would each independently appear among the objectifying attitudes described by Kant. To view someone as an object for the satisfaction of *desire* is to treat her as a thing: 'as soon as a person becomes an object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an object of appetite for another, a person becomes a thing'.<sup>38</sup> To *force* someone to have some property is to violate her autonomy, and in that sense to treat her as a thing. To believe that someone has some property *by nature* is to view her as determined, lacking in responsibility, part of the natural order, and this too would be to treat her as a thing. On Haslanger's conception (**p.334**) of objectification, the objectifying attitude requires the satisfying of all four conditions. On this conception, men objectify women if, for example, they view and treat women as objects of sexual desire, desire them to be submissive, force them to submit, believe that women are in fact submissive, and believe that they are submissive by nature. The 'seeing' involved is partly accurate, and partly inaccurate. The attribution of qualities is

'not just an illusion or a fantasy or a mistake', as MacKinnon says: women do indeed have the qualities in question, because they are forced to have them. There is an accurate descriptive belief, combined with an illusory projective belief. The illusion is to think women have the enforced qualities by nature.

Haslanger's analysis offers us one way to understand Kant's moral dismay about the character of (some) sexual desire. It may be that sexual desire can sometimes 'make a person an object' by instantiating the four-fold attitudes of objectification: viewing a woman as an object of sexual desire, desiring her to be submissive, believing that she is submissive, and believing that she is submissive by nature. This would be to make the desired person into a mere instrument to serve one's own purposes, a mere means to satisfy one's own pleasure, something less free, and more like a thing, whose behavior is dictated by the will of another.

### **Self-Objectification**

It is possible for someone to make *herself* an object, and this is a central theme of de Beauvoir's analysis of the subjection of women, and of many who speak of women's complicity in oppression. Perhaps someone could make herself an object in any of the ways that we have described. Perhaps someone could take an objective attitude to herself by viewing herself as unfree, as having no choice. Perhaps someone could take, not only the objective, but the objectifying attitude towards herself: view herself as being nothing more than how she appears to someone else, nothing more than her body, nothing more than a thing whose (relevant) properties are bodily and sensory, shape, weight, textures, and looks.<sup>39</sup> She may view herself as determined, as having the qualities she has by nature. She may take herself to have value only in so far as she can be used, or possessed, by someone else. She may view herself as a being whose purpose is to satisfy the desire of another. The self-objectifying attitude will be a **(p.335)** matter of both seeing, and doing. Someone who has it may actually turn herself into an object—so far as that is possible. She may bring it about that she is in fact less free, more tool-like, more thing-like. She may become passive, she may become submissive, she may become a slave.

To view oneself in these ways is to be in bad faith, according to existentialists, and they say that it presents a constant temptation to us all. Each of us would like 'to forgo liberty and become a thing'.<sup>40</sup> We would each prefer the role of the automaton, in the hat and coat, to the role of the free and conscious agent, the Cartesian ego, the meditator doing battle with his goliath. When Herman says that Kant and feminist writers share a common ground, she has partly this self-objectification in mind. Andrea Dworkin says that a woman's humanity is hurt by her own '*acceptance* of the object status'. She says that sexual desire is implicated in a woman's making an object *of herself*. Kant is likewise concerned about what a person does to himself or herself: he is concerned that 'men and women do their best to make not their human nature but their sex more alluring,' and that 'human nature is thereby sacrificed to sex'. Kant wastes no sympathy on the person who objectifies himself or herself. 'One who makes himself a worm', he says, 'cannot complain if others step on him'. Such a person violates a self-regarding duty, the duty of self-esteem, and is guilty of servility. Such a person fails to show respect

for the humanity in one's own person, by virtue of which 'we are not for sale at any price, and possess an inalienable dignity'.<sup>41</sup> Kant's words about servility are harsh, but they find a later echo in the fine line de Beauvoir attempts to draw between bad faith and oppression: the downfall to thing-hood 'represents a moral fault if the subject consents to it; if it is inflicted . . . it spells frustration and oppression'.<sup>42</sup>

It is oppression 'if it is inflicted'. One way to do something is to make someone else do it. One way to hurt someone is to get someone else to hurt them. One way to hurt someone is to get them to hurt themselves. (The death of Socrates was an execution and a suicide.) One way to make someone an object is to make her make herself an object. This misuse of a person would go beyond the usual vices, in Kantian terms. When you lie to someone, you fail to respect their humanity, and you prevent them from being the authors of their actions. When you steal from someone, **(p.336)** the same is true. However, while the liar and the thief do treat a person as a mere instrument, they do not desire the person in question to identify *herself* as a mere instrument. They do not desire the person to throw off her personhood with abject abandonment. But perhaps that is what sexual desire can sometimes demand. When Andrea Dworkin says that a woman's humanity is hurt by her own 'acceptance of the object status', she takes this acceptance to be demanded by a man's desire. Dworkin (famously) sees this as a feature of 'normal' sexual intercourse, but what seems clear is that sexual desire in its sadistic guise at any rate can have the character she describes.

### **Sadistic Attitudes**

I take my description of sadistic sexual desire from the work of a well-known contemporary analytic philosopher (let him be temporarily nameless) who attempts in a lengthy book to analyze the complex terrain of sexual desire. Sadistic desire, he says, is a desire to 'vanquish the other in his body, to force him to abjure himself for his body's sake'; it aims 'to show the ease with which another's perspective can be invaded and enslaved by pain, to humiliate the other by compelling the self to identify with what is not-self', to 'go under' in the stream of bodily suffering. It aims, through the infliction of pain, 'to overcome the other in the act of physical contact'. The author

approvingly quotes Sartre as an accurate reporter on the attitude of the sadist.

The spectacle which is offered to the sadist is that of a freedom which struggles against the expanding of the flesh, and which freely chooses to be submerged in the flesh. At the moment of abjuration, the result sought is attained: the body is wholly flesh, panting and obscene; it holds the position which the torturers have given to it, not that which it would have assumed by itself; the cords which bind it hold it as an inert thing, and thereby it has ceased to be the object which moves spontaneously. In the abjuration a freedom chooses to be wholly identified with this body; this distorted and heaving body is the very image of a broken and enslaved freedom.<sup>43</sup>

In Sartre's description, the 'result sought' by sadistic desire is that the person will turn herself into a thing, 'abjure' herself, become 'wholly identified' with a 'broken and enslaved freedom'. Sadistic desire aims that the desired person should make herself as thing-like as it is possible for a person to be. Sartre's 'incomparable description' in fact applies to the attitudes of (p.337) torturer and sadist alike, according to our author. The torturer and the sadist both aim to be seen by their victims in a dominating light, both aim to inflict pain. But what distinguishes the two is that the sexual sadist (unlike the mere torturer) has in addition a desire for the victim to have a certain desire: he 'wants the other [person] to want the pain inflicted, and to be aroused by it'. He wants the other person to desire the pain and domination, and to be aroused by it. He wants the other to want to submit, he wants the other to want to abjure herself. The attitude has some aspects of solipsism, and not others. In so far as it is a desire for the other person to be identified as a thing, it is solipsistic. In so far as it is a desire for the other person to have a certain desire, it demands that the other should retain some human qualities. But the desired desire is a desire to be a thing, a desire to become the 'very image of a broken and enslaved freedom'. The sadist is a solipsist who wants the other to *want* to be a machine. He is a solipsist who demands that the other choose to be a mere machine, that she choose to become a thing that cannot choose. The project, as Sartre says, is doomed. If she wants and chooses anything, she is no machine.

One hopes that the words used by our author—vanquish, force, abjure, invade, enslave, humiliate, suffer, overcome—describe some rare variety of violent rape, punishable by law. But no: the author distinguishes this 'normal' attitude from a 'perverted' sadism which cares nothing about the desires of its victim, but seeks rather to 'abolish the personal object of

desire . . . and replace him with a compliant dummy'. The 'ideas of dominance and submission' manifested in the 'normal' sadism 'form a fundamental part of the *ordinary understanding* of the sexual performance'. Sadism is, he says, a 'normal' variant of this 'ordinary understanding' of sexual performance. It is part of a 'common human condition'.

The author tries to offer a gender-neutral story about the phenomenon of 'normal' sadism, and presents a man, Count Sacher Masoch, as chief among masochists. But it is hard to credit this attempt at neutrality, given the kind of sexual encounter that the author offers as a paradigm. He takes seriously the hypothesis that sadism 'lies in the very structure of the sexual urge'. Whose 'sexual urge'? He cites expert social science testimony according to which

the paradigm example is the practice of 'marriage by capture'—in which a woman is pursued by her suitors and forced to yield by the strongest . . . The girl . . . submits (**p.338**) only to that force which she also desires. The aggression of the male, and the submission of the female, here combine to fulfil an archetype of sexual encounter.

The games of an aristocrat, and the forcible rape of a woman, are presented by the author as expressions of the same unitary sexual phenomenon. In both, a desire to dominate, and be dominated, are desires that lie 'in the very structure of the sexual urge'. The paradigm case he offers shows how this is to be understood. It is the submission of the female to force that is supposed to provide the 'archetype' of sexual encounter.

These descriptions of the 'ordinary understanding of the sexual performance' and its 'normal' variant might have been lifted from the works of MacKinnon and Dworkin. The author seems to share their bleak view about the paradigm sexual encounter: that the sexual desire of a man is a desire to dominate another person, a desire to overcome her, a desire to make her abjure her personhood; that it is, for women, a desire to submit to force. Indeed, the view of this author is bleaker than that feminist view, since he appears to see the 'ideas' of dominance and submission not as a contingent product of oppressive but changeable social relations, but as arising from the very structure of sexual desire.

The philosopher is Roger Scruton.<sup>44</sup> It is interesting to learn of such unanimity between radical feminists and a conservative philosopher. It is true that assertions of common ground between some feminists and conservatives are not unusual: there are critics who complain of an allied opposition to pornography, for example. But this particular unanimity seems new. Here there is an agreement, not about the ‘immorality’ of pornography, but about the *normality of domination*. MacKinnon, and Dworkin, and Scruton, agree that domination is ‘normal’, that it is the dynamic which underlies ordinary sexual relations. If this opinion were right, then Kant would be right to be concerned about the morality of sexual desire. Kant would be right if he thought that ‘normal’ sexual desire aims to reduce people to things.

The appearance of unanimity is interesting, and perhaps gratifying for any seeker of consensus—until, of course, one realises that ‘normal’ is here being used by Scruton not in its descriptive but its *normative* sense. Scruton (p.339) says that the ideas of dominance and submission so fundamental to our ordinary understanding of sexuality are ‘*moral ideas*’. He says that sadistic desires ‘can easily be accounted for, in terms of the conscious structure of desire, as an *interpersonal emotion*’, and that they aim at ‘an *intelligible moral relation*’.<sup>45</sup> The ‘marriage by capture’, and the games of the count, instantiate ‘an intelligible moral relation between effective equals’.<sup>46</sup> The contrast drawn between ‘normal’ sadism, and the ‘perverted’ variety which seeks a ‘compliant dummy’, is not a contrast between the common and the exotic, but a contrast between the morally appropriate, and the morally inappropriate. Well, well. The most facile ascent from fact to value is the ascent from the normal to the normatively appropriate, and Scruton would hardly be the first to infer the rightness of an activity from its ordinariness. However, our author is usually rather more fussy about this kind of normative ascent, and his standards for sexual ‘normality’ are hardly generous. A homosexual, a masturbator, a woman who (heaven forbid) touches her clitoris while having sex with her partner—none of these people are, in his view, ‘normal’—their ordinariness notwithstanding. They, unlike the sadist, are *perverts*, and their actions are cowardly and obscene.<sup>47</sup>

Scruton is right to describe the emotion of the sadist as a kind of interpersonal relation: if a woman were a mere puppet, or doll, or dummy to start with, there would be nothing to 'vanquish'. If by describing a relation as 'moral' he were to mean that it falls within the scope of morality, then it is a 'moral relation'—as indeed are all relations of objectification. That would hardly be grounds to approve them. The sadism Scruton describes begins with an acknowledgement of the humanity of the desired person. Sartre's sadist acknowledges the desired other as a person with a unique inner life, a 'freedom', a being that 'chooses', and 'moves spontaneously'. The desired person is not regarded as unfree or thing-like to begin with, as with other forms of reductive objectification, or sadism of the 'perverted' variety. The person is regarded as free and to-be-willingly-enslaved. The desire distinctive of normal sadism, the desire (p.340) that one's partner should want the pain and domination, and be aroused by it—this desire, according to Scruton, transforms the action entirely, and raises it to new moral heights. This production of a 'broken and enslaved freedom' is not obscene. This new dimension elevates the action from mere torture to a morally intelligible interpersonal relation which is 'an affirmation of mutual respect'.<sup>48</sup> The action of the sadist thereby becomes a mere 'extended version of the lovebite'.<sup>49</sup> The solipsist who wants the other to *want* to be a machine is a superior sort of fellow, on a moral plane far above the solipsist who views the other as a machine from the start.

Scruton adds that the strategy adopted by the sadist is a reasonable solution to a serious practical problem that can plague sexual relations: namely, the problem of embarrassment. The infliction of pain enables a person to do what he 'would otherwise be too embarrassed to do: to overcome the other in the act of physical contact'.<sup>50</sup> Embarrassment. One person plans to 'overcome' another in an 'act of physical contact'—and the problem is embarrassment. One person contemplates turning another into something bound, tortured, distorted, inert, heaving, broken, enslaved—and the problem is embarrassment. Here we have the Atwood story all over again: 'we're afraid that they'll laugh at us'. That was Leonard's response to Maria, in McEwan's story. It is also a response of liberals to pornography. The real victim of pornography law, according to Ronald Dworkin, is the 'shy pornographer'. Poor chap, will he, or will he not, be permitted

a brown paper bag for his magazine?<sup>51</sup> The real, and serious, problem about pornography is embarrassment, and Scruton shows the same touching sympathy for the 'normal' sadist. What a helpful advice column a philosopher could run here. Imagine.

'Dear sir, I am attracted to someone. So I really would like to overcome her in the act of physical contact. But I find the prospect embarrassing. What can I do? Signed, Embarrassed.'

'Dear Embarrassed: Yes, I understand your problem perfectly. Here's what to do. Make her suffer. Bind her with **(p.341)** cords, make her into a distorted and heaving body, make her wholly flesh, panting and obscene, the very image of a broken and enslaved freedom. And make her want it. You'll find that will relieve your embarrassment, and put a stop to unseemly mirth. With best wishes, from your friendly Agony Uncle.'

Appearances notwithstanding, Scruton is an earthling like the rest of us. That means he comes from a small planet in which sexual violence against women is rife, where many marriages are violent, many women have their first sexual experiences under conditions of force, many women are raped. He comes from a planet where the 'moral ideas' of dominance and submission are popular, even fashionable, where many adolescents apparently believe it acceptable for a man to rape a woman if he is sexually aroused by her, and where many young men find faces of women displaying distress and pain to be more sexually attractive than faces showing pleasure.<sup>52</sup> Why not, if pain and domination are thought to be what a woman wants, and human sexual relations find their paradigm in a ritual where a woman 'submits . . . to that force which she also desires'? Recall that the story about Margaret Atwood had another chapter. She asked the women: What is it that you most fear from men? The reply was, 'we're afraid that they'll kill us'. Why not, if in the 'archetype of sexual encounter' a woman is 'pursued' by a gang, captured, and 'forced to yield' to 'the strongest'—forced to yield to 'the aggression of the male'? Social scientists and pornographers, psychiatrists and judges, have often preached the gospel that men dominate and women not only submit, but like it that way. It was only a matter of time, perhaps, before a philosopher should join their illustrious ranks.

**(p.342)** I said that feminist writers Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon seem to share Scruton's opinion that there is something 'normal' about the dynamic of dominance and submission. Kant may share this opinion too, and it may be what he means when he says that sexual desire makes of a person an object: he may mean that it aims to reduce a person to a thing, because it aims to dominate. There are crucial differences. Kant and the feminist writers appear to share the descriptive part of Scruton's story, but they reject the normative part. Unlike Scruton, they both acknowledge the moral bleakness of this story, and refuse to accept it as inevitable. For Scruton the story is not bleak, but fine and morally intelligible; it is not avoidable, but 'lies in the very structure of the sexual urge'. This deterministic fantasy belongs on the dust heap with the mouldering fantasies of original sin, which Kant would have detested with equal vehemence. Despite Kant's occasional pessimism, human beings have, he thinks, a 'splendid disposition for good',<sup>53</sup> and it would be an inhuman pessimism that failed to agree. As for the normative part of Scruton's verdict, enough is enough. Domination may be 'normal' in one sense. To say it is therefore 'normal' in the other would be to make a more than philosophical mistake.

#### 3.4. Interlude, Again

One might wonder what, if anything, these abstract descriptions of object-making have to do with the sexual love which Kant regards as an escape from solipsism. One might wonder what they have to do with the ordinary lovers described so well by McEwan. Perhaps it is a foolish philosopher who would rush in where even novelists might fear to tread.

As a matter of fact McEwan paints sexual solipsism as eloquently as he paints its escape.<sup>54</sup> There is a new development in the relationship between Leonard and Maria.

It began . . . with a simple perception. He looked down at Maria, whose eyes were closed, and remembered she was a German. The word had not been entirely prised loose of its associations after all . . . German. Enemy. Mortal enemy. Defeated enemy. This last brought with it a shocking thrill. He diverted himself momentarily . . . Then: she was the defeated, she was his by right, by conquest, by right of unimaginable violence and heroism and sacrifice . . . He was powerful and magnificent . . . He was victorious and good and strong and free. In recollection **(p.343)** these formulations embarrassed him. . . . They were alien to his obliging and kindly nature, they offended his sense of what was reasonable. One only had to look at her to know there was nothing defeated about Maria. She had been liberated by the invasion of Europe, not crushed . . .

But next time round the thoughts returned. They were irresistibly exciting . . . she was his by right of conquest and then, there was nothing she could do about it. She did not want to be making love to him, but she had no choice. . . . She was struggling to escape. She was thrashing beneath him, he thought he heard her call out 'No!' She was shaking her head from side to side, she had her eyes closed against the inescapable reality . . . she was his, there was nothing she could do, she would never get away. And that was it, that was the end for him, he was gone, finished . . .

Over the following days, his embarrassment faded. He accepted the obvious truth that what happened in his head could not be sensed by Maria, even though she was only inches away. These thoughts were his alone, nothing to do with her at all.

Eventually, a more dramatic fantasy took shape. It recapitulated all the previous elements. Yes, she was defeated, conquered, his by right, could not escape, and now, he was a soldier, weary, battle-marked and bloody, but heroically rather than disablingly so. He had taken this women and was forcing her. Half terrified, half in awe, she dared not disobey.

Leonard has a kindly nature. He knows there is nothing defeated about Maria. Nevertheless he finds that a certain cluster of thoughts makes him feel good and powerful and strong and free: the thought that she is his by right; the thought that she is a defeated enemy; the thought that she is half terrified; the thought that she is obeying him from fear and awe; the thought that she wants to get away and cannot; the thought he is raping her. This cluster of thoughts could have been plagiarized from Scruton's description of the archetypical conquest, and Leonard finds it irresistably exciting.

There is something intensely solipsistic about this sexual encounter. But what? The events take place in a private theatre, the theatre of Leonard's mind: they happen 'in his head', 'his alone, nothing to do with her at all'. What makes them possible is 'the obvious truth', the Cartesian truth, that other minds are less accessible than one's own. Leonard is like the man Kant describes, who 'must shut himself up in himself', who must remain 'completely alone with his thoughts as in a prison'.<sup>55</sup> The two might as **(p.344)** well be 'on adjacent mountain peaks', as they were before they came to know each other. But it is not quite true that the events have 'nothing to do with her': the 'she' of his fantasy is, in some sense, Maria herself. Her own actual actions, her movements, her speech, are all interpreted (in make-believe) as the actions, movements, speech, of a woman being raped. If the Cartesian meditator were to encounter a friend among the automata in their hats and coats, he would hear friendly words as the words of a demon. Leonard hears loving words as the words of a woman in pain and terror. And not just any woman, but Maria herself (or Maria in so far as she is female and German—not perhaps the same at all). Is Leonard treating her as thing? It is at least *as if* he is treating her as a thing: the thoughts that are irresistably exciting are thoughts in which she features as something that is conquered, possessed, owned by right, captured against her will, violated against her will, in short (to borrow a phrase) 'the very image of a broken and enslaved freedom'. And there is surely more than 'as if': Maria is indeed being treated as a thing. Her body is being treated as a kind of tool, or instrument; so too are her actions. That is shown not just in the absence of her consent to their joint activity (under the description 'pretending that Leonard is raping Maria') but in the deliberate deception. Sex has ceased to be something he is *doing with her*, in the sense that one does something with another human being, shares an activity. It has become something he is *doing with her*, in the

sense that one does something with a thing, uses an instrument. The scene has a more than epistemological claustrophobia: it is a solipsism of treating a person as a thing.

Treated as what kind of thing? As a canvas on which to project a particular fantasy, an object that has the convenient advantage of possessing in fact some of the qualities in fantasy: warm, female, human, German, etc. Perhaps there is something reminiscent here of the solipsism involved in pornography: perhaps Leonard is treating Maria as he would treat a pornographic artifact, the locus of a projective fantasy. MacKinnon's words about pornography seem uncannily apt here: 'the human becomes thing, and the mutual becomes one-sided and the given becomes stolen'.

If Leonard is treating Maria as he would treat a pornographic artifact, then there is a sense in which the two sexual solipsisms have met. In treating her as an instrument, in treating her as if she were an artifact, he treats her as a thing. And in treating that thing as a human being who is in terror, says 'no', submits, he animates that thing again, attributes to it **(p.345)** human qualities absent in the original. Flattened to an instrument, Maria is then reanimated with a different human life, one in which she is then again, and in a different way, reduced to a thing. She is treated as a thing (a mere canvas) that is treated as a human being (a German enemy) that is treated as a thing (through rape). He really does treat her as if she were an instrument, a canvas. The rest is a kind of make-believe: but, as with pornography, the sexual experience that depends on the make-believe is real.

One could say, in Leonard's defense, that what Maria doesn't know can't hurt her. But that is a barren thought. One can be harmed by an objectifying attitude, whether one is aware of it or not. One could say, in Leonard's defense, that this is really a matter of seeing rather than doing: an attitude rather than an action. That seems dubious. Leonard is using Maria as a screen for his private theatre. And Leonard is in the end not satisfied with his private theatre.

He found himself tempted to communicate these imaginings to her . . . he wanted her to acknowledge what was on his mind, however stupid it really was. He could not believe she would not be aroused by it. . . . His private theatre had become insufficient. . . . Telling her

somehow was the next inevitable thing. . . . He wanted his power recognized and Maria to suffer from it, just a bit, in the most pleasurable way. . . . Then he was ashamed. What was this power he wanted recognized? It was no more than a disgusting story in his head. Then, later, he wondered whether she might not be excited by it too. There was, of course, nothing to discuss. There was nothing he was able, or dared, to put into words. He could hardly be asking her permission.

What does Leonard want? Notice that what he wants is precisely what the 'normal' sadist wants: he wants Maria to recognize his power, suffer from it, and be excited by it. The presence of this desire is precisely what elevates sadistic desire to a reciprocal moral relation, according to Scruton. Leonard is becoming the 'normal' sadist, who desires that the other identify herself as a thing, desires that she should find that identification arousing. If Scruton were right, readers should all at this point heave a sigh of relief. At last we have an aim for reciprocity, at last we have an intelligible moral relation, at last Leonard's ideas have become *moral* ideas. But readers do not heave a sigh of relief. We wait with dread for the (inevitable?) disaster that ensues when Leonard—already blurring fact and fiction in his demand that his actual power be recognized, and that Maria actually suffer—tries to communicate **(p.346)** his imaginings through actions, rather than words. Can readers hope for a happier ending? Well . . . yes, and no. But that is another story.

4. Two Sexual Solipsisms, and Their Possible Connection  
MacKinnon describes a sexual solipsism when she says that the use of pornography amounts to 'sex between people and things, human beings and pieces of paper'. She not only describes this solipsism, but condemns it. Sex 'between people and things' will not exist 'in a society in which equality is a fact, not merely a word'.<sup>56</sup> Vadas likewise does not merely describe this solipsism, but condemns it. She argues that the pornography which she defines as something 'that has been manufactured to satisfy sexual desire though its sexual consumption . . . as a woman' is the very same as the pornography MacKinnon defines in her ordinance: namely, 'the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women in pictures or words'. What is used as a woman, she says, also subordinates women. There is a connection between the two solipsisms in pornography.

Kant discusses a solipsism similar to the pornographic in his remarks about solitary sexual experience. Sexual desire can occur, he says, when a person 'is aroused to it, not by its real object, but by his imagination of this object, and so in a way contrary to the purpose of the desire, since he himself creates its object'.<sup>57</sup> And Kant does not merely describe this solipsism, he condemns it. He says that imaginary objects are treated as people, sexually, and ought not to be. He says that such behavior is 'unnatural', and worse. Are Kant and MacKinnon discussing the same phenomenon? Not quite. The fantasy MacKinnon describes is anchored to a particular thing: the object of the fantasizer's attention is an existing thing, a pornographic artifact, and he (perhaps) makes believe that *it* is a woman. He (perhaps) pretends of something that exists, that it is other than it is: which is to say that the fantasy is existentially conservative (like the make-believe of mud-pies).<sup>58</sup> The fantasy Kant describes is not anchored to **(p.347)** a particular thing: the object of the fantasizer's attention is not an existing thing, but a merely intentional object. He pretends that there is something which there isn't: which is to say that the fantasy is existentially creative (like the make-believe of shadow-boxing). There is little doubt, however, that Kant would have agreed with some of MacKinnon's conclusions about the use of pornographic sexual partners. Pornography is not the 'real object' of sexual desire, in Kant's sense, and the use of pornography would presumably be equally 'unnatural' in his opinion. However, Kant's hostility to this sexual solipsism seems unjustified, by his own lights, as he seems uneasily to acknowledge.<sup>59</sup> And Kant does not condemn this solipsism by saying it coincides with the other. He does not go on to say that treating imaginary objects as people is a way of treating other people as objects. The claim that there is a *connection* between the two sexual solipsisms is unique, as far as I know, to feminist discussion of pornography.

Feminist condemnation of pornography depends on the claim that through the use of pornography, women are treated as things. That is what distinguishes the feminist approach to pornography from the moralistic hostility displayed by Kant towards solitary sexual activity. There are different arguments for the feminist claim that through pornography, women are treated as things. Perhaps pornography makes women objects in virtue of its power as a kind of speech act, a kind of authoritative hate speech that ranks women as sub-human,

legitimizes violence against women, deprives women of powers and rights. Perhaps it makes women thing-like by silencing women, depriving women of the power to perform the speech acts we want to perform, including crucial speech acts of sexual refusal, and protest. Perhaps it makes women more thing-like by producing changes in the beliefs and desires and behaviour of those who consume it, with results of the kind acknowledged by Easterbrook, who rejected feminist anti-pornography legislation while affirming its premises. He said that depictions of subordination 'tend to perpetuate subordination. The subordinate status of women in turn leads to affront and lower pay at work, insult and injury at home, battery and **(p.348)** rape on the streets', all of which proved the power of pornography as speech.<sup>60</sup>

These ways of understanding the idea that pornography objectifies women do not obviously depend on thinking that in pornography things are treated as women. If what is crucial to feminist argument is only the claim that pornography objectifies, or subordinates, women, what are we to say of the *two* sexual solipsisms in pornography? Is it a mere coincidence that pornography instantiates them both? According to MacKinnon, it is no coincidence that pornography instantiates both. She says that in pornography 'the human becomes thing', meaning both that a pornographic artifact is used in place of a human sexual partner, and that a human sexual partner is used as if she were a pornographic artifact, a thing—and I said that this is not an equivocation, but a substantive thesis. When sex is something you do with a thing, she says, it becomes something you do with a thing, even when you do it with a person. When you treat things as human beings, you end up treating human beings as things. The solipsism of animating things *leads to* the solipsism of objectifying people. But why should pornography, as defined by Vadas, be pornography, as defined by MacKinnon: what reason is there for thinking that what is sexually consumed 'as a woman' also subordinates women? *Is there a connection between the two solipsisms in pornography?*

One possible answer is negative. There is no connection of any kind between the two claims: contrary to MacKinnon, it is after all a mere coincidence that pornography happens to

instantiate them both. Other possible answers are affirmative, and various, but I will divide them into two broad types.

**(p.349)** 4.1. There is a Causal Connection

As a matter of human psychology, when men sexually use objects, pornographic artifacts, as women, they tend to use real women as objects. Because of this causal fact, pornography that is used *as a woman* also *subordinates* women: pornography as defined by Vadas is pornography as defined by MacKinnon. One weaker variant of this causal claim might be restricted to a subset of the pornography defined by Vadas. As a matter of human psychology, when men sexually use objects as women, and those objects are pornographic artifacts *whose content is violent or misogynistic*, then they will tend to use real women as objects. Other variants may give stronger or weaker interpretations to the talk of a *tendency*: perhaps the causal connection is a matter of psychological law; perhaps it is a matter of mere raising of probabilities. What all of these have in common is that the sense in which one solipsism 'leads to' the other is a *causal* sense.

4.2. There is a Constitutive Connection

When pornographic artifacts are treated as women, *ipso facto* women are treated as objects. Because of this constitutive fact, pornography that is used *as a woman* also *subordinates* women: pornography as defined by Vadas is pornography as defined by MacKinnon. Although the two solipsisms look different, the one implies the other. One weaker variant of this constitutive claim might be restricted to a subset of the pornography defined by Vadas. When objects are used as women, and those objects are pornographic artifacts *whose content is violent or misogynistic*, then *ipso facto* women are treated as objects. Another weaker variant of the constitutive claim might be restricted not only to a subset of the pornography defined by Vadas, but also to certain background conditions. When objects are used as women, and those objects are pornographic artifacts whose content is violent or misogynistic, and whose status as speech is *authoritative*, then *ipso facto* women are treated as objects. What all of these have in common is that the sense in which one solipsism 'leads to' the other is a *constitutive* sense.

Let me consider first the constitutive variants of the claim that in pornography 'the human becomes thing' in two ways. I have some sympathy for a constitutive version of the claim that one solipsism 'leads (p.350) to' the other, that what is used as a woman also subordinates women. If an argument I develop elsewhere is correct, then pornography may be an illocutionary act of subordination: in certain conditions pornography (of a certain kind) constitutes an act of subordination—in conditions, for example, when its speakers have authority.<sup>61</sup> This amounts to the weakest of the constitutive claims described above. On this view, there is a connection between the two solipsisms: when objects are treated as women, women are indeed treated as objects, since pornography ranks women as inferior, legitimates discriminatory behaviour and violence, deprives women of powers and rights. On this view, one solipsism 'leads to' the other only in certain conditions: if pornography were to lack authority, for example, then pornography would not subordinate.

A stronger constitutive variant is that one solipsism *ipso facto* leads to the other: that the treating of pornographic objects as women is, in and of itself, the treating of women as objects, whether or not the content of the pornography is violent or misogynistic, whether or not the pornographic speech is authoritative. If this claim could be defended, then pornography would threaten women's equality not in virtue of its content ('depictions of subordination', etc.), nor in virtue of its force as authoritative hate speech, but in virtue of its basic and essential role as an inanimate sexual partner.

This strong constitutive interpretation of the claim would contradict the views of conservatives, liberals, and also many feminists. It would contradict the views of pro-pornography feminists who say that an egalitarian pornography might liberate women. It would contradict the views of feminists opposed to pornography who think there may be conditions in which objects sexually used as women would not subordinate women. It would (apparently) contradict the opinion of MacKinnon herself, in so far as a distinction between pornography and erotica was allowed in the ordinance she drafted—where erotica was defined to be sexually explicit material that does not subordinate women. (If the use of erotica were to involve sex 'between people and things', then on MacKinnon's premise that the one solipsism implies the

other, there could be no erotica that does not subordinate, hence there could be no erotica.) On all these views, there could be graphic, sexually explicit pictures and words, designed for sexual consumption, that are liberating for women, or at any rate neutral. **(p.351)** If pornography's power to subordinate depends in part on its content, then material with a different, egalitarian, content would not subordinate. Or if pornography's power to subordinate depends on its authority, then in the absence of that authority pornography would not subordinate. If the strong constitutive claim could be defended, then that would be interesting both philosophically and dialectically. It is uncontroversial that pornography is used as a sexual partner; it is controversial that pornography subordinates women. If the former can be shown to imply the latter, then there would be a path from the uncontroversial to the controversial.

### 4.3. Vadas on a Constitutive Connection

The strong constitutive claim has been vigorously defended by Melinda Vadas, and although no brief summary can do her argument justice, what follows may convey something of her strategy. The definition with which she begins is by now familiar: pornography is 'any object that has been manufactured to satisfy sexual desire through its sexual consumption or other sexual use as a woman.'<sup>62</sup> The definition makes it clear that pornography is an inanimate, non-sentient artefact, that is sexually used in the role, function, or capacity of a human being. The definition has advantages of neutrality and realism. It is fairly neutral, since it does not stack the deck in favor of a particular feminist conclusion. It is realistic, since it focuses on the (often ignored) purpose and function of pornography. Vadas wants to say that pornography, on this definition, is the same as pornography on MacKinnon's definition: that what is used as a woman subordinates women. She considers a question left open by her definition, about whether pornography is representational (and hence speech). One way, the usual way, for us to distinguish between things that are representational and things that are not is by considering their uses in human life:

What is typically used or usable as a gun is a gun and not a representation of a gun. . . . A gun, by definition, is

able to fire projectiles of some sort, typically lethal, while a representation of a gun can, as such, fire nothing.<sup>63</sup>

**(p.352)** There can be ambiguous cases. There can be an object that is a gun *and* a representation of a gun. A toy gun may be able to fire projectiles, and might also be used to represent a real gun in a court re-enactment. Whether the toy gun is a representation or not depends on its use, in a particular context. In general, 'an object's use dictates whether it is an *a* or a representation of an *a*'. Imagine a thing that can be used in the way that a gun is used, but made from materials typically used to *represent* guns: imagine a gun made of paper. If it can be used as a gun, it is a gun. Apply these principles now to the question about pornography. If something is used as a female sex object, then even if made of paper it *is* a female sex object, and not a mere depiction of one.

Within its context of sexual consumption, the pornography used *as* a woman *is* a woman, and not a representation of one.<sup>64</sup>

Vadas draws two conclusions, both controversial, and it is the second which concerns us here. She says that pornography is not speech; and she says that pornographic objects are in the same ontological class as flesh and blood women. When pornography is manufactured for use, she says, a new category of reality is created and populated: the category of individuals who are both women and non-persons. It then becomes true that *women are not necessarily persons*. In this way the treating of things as human beings has implications for the status of real human beings. The harm to flesh-and-blood women is that they are now members of a class of beings that are not necessarily persons. And this has implications, she says, for the way that flesh-and-blood women are treated in sexual contexts:

Since, where pornography is manufactured-for-use, men's sexual relations with women are conceptually unrelated to their female partner's personhood, it follows that men's sexual relations with women will, under these conditions, be conceptually unrelated to any and all person-related characteristics or abilities their female partners might have . . . Now consent, everyone would agree, is a person-related ability. . . . it follows that under these conditions women's consent is conceptually outside the practice of the sexual.<sup>65</sup>

The real harm done to flesh and blood women is that we are placed in the same ontological category as pornographic objects; that person-related properties are not essential to women; and that person-related actions **(p.353)** such as consent are therefore conceptually irrelevant to sex with women. If I understand Vadas correctly, her conclusion is that when objects are treated as women (in sexual contexts), *in virtue of that very fact* women are made to be objects. The argument offered by Vadas is interesting and striking, and has the great merit of addressing explicitly the question of two solipsisms in pornography, and their connection—the question provoked by MacKinnon's apparently punning remark that in pornography 'the human becomes thing'—and offering the strongest possible interpretation of that connection.

### 4.4. There is a Causal and Constitutive Connection

So far we have considered (briefly) two variants of the claim that there is a *constitutive* connection between the two solipsisms in pornography: the weaker version, defended by myself (elsewhere), and the stronger version defended by Vadas. Let us consider (briefly) the claim that the connection between the two solipsisms in pornography is a *causal* one. One could hold that there is a constitutive connection *and* a causal one (perhaps pornography is an act of subordination, *and* causes subordination); or one could hold that there is simply a causal connection. This latter is, perhaps, the commoner way of understanding the idea that pornography somehow brings about (or 'perpetuates') the subordination of women.

Perhaps there is a causal connection that has to do with human psychology. Perhaps there is a causal connection between the local solipsisms in general, and not simply in sexual contexts. When we treat things as people, perhaps we teach ourselves how to treat people. When we project human qualities on to the inanimate, perhaps we teach ourselves how to treat human beings. A child's reactive relations with a doll may be rehearsal for relations with people. My habitual rage towards a recalcitrant motor car may nurture habitual rage towards recalcitrant people. Reactive engagement with the fictitious may teach one reactive engagement with the real. And, turning our attention to the sexual solipsisms, perhaps the causal claim is plausible when restricted to pornography of a certain kind. Perhaps there is pornography that celebrates rape, that makes its readers think and experience sexually as Leonard thought and experienced sexually, that makes its reader feel good and powerful and strong and free, by treating an inanimate thing as a human being that is a woman, a defeated enemy, conquered, unable to escape, half terrified, crying 'no', obeying from fear **(p.354)** and awe. Perhaps habitual sex with this pornography could teach one how to treat women sexually. This solipsism of treating things as women could lead (causally) to a solipsism of treating women as things. On this understanding the subordination of women arises not from the sexual use of an inanimate thing 'as a woman', *simpliciter*, but from the sexual use of a particular kind of pornographic inanimate thing: one that has a certain (violent) content, and is made to be used in a certain (violent)

way. Given that restriction, this would be one of the weaker versions of the causal claims I listed above.

Alternatively, the facts about human psychology might have something to do with the *projection* that is common to the solipsism of treating things as people, and (sometimes) the solipsism of treating people as things. Projection is involved in the activities of animating the inanimate; projection is also involved in some of the objectifying attitudes. Recall that on Haslanger's analysis, one part of the objectifying attitude is an illusory projective belief that women have by nature the properties they are 'seen' to have. Recall too that Leonard moves from the private theatre of fantastic events 'in his head', to a projective conclusion about what Maria is actually like. He finds his thoughts 'irresistably exciting', and he substitutes projection for knowledge of other minds: 'he could not believe she would not be aroused'. Perhaps the projective aspect of one solipsism could lead (causally) to the projective aspect of the other, though to suggest this is to speculate. If habitual projection in pornography use were to lead one to habitual projection with real people, then that would be a strong version of the causal claim: there would be something about the very activity of (sexually) treating things as people that builds habits of projection that can result in (sexually) treating real people as things.

### 5. Concluding Reflections

Feminists have said that pornography instantiates two solipsisms: somehow, in pornography, things are treated as women, and women are treated as things. Here I have emphasized that it is the latter claim that is central, and distinctive of feminism. I have suggested that the former solipsism is irrelevant to feminist argument, except in so far as it has implications for the latter solipsism. And I have considered some different ways to understand **(p.355)** the idea that one solipsism might well have implications for the other: that there may be a causal connection, or a constitutive one.

Recall that there was a possible negative answer to the question about a connection between the two solipsisms in pornography. According to that answer, there is no connection at all, and it is a mere coincidence that pornography happens to instantiate both solipsisms. Suppose (as I do not) that the negative answer were correct. Would that mean that we should ignore the solipsism of treating things as people? I am not sure. Perhaps there can be misgivings about pornography's animation of the inanimate that are not exactly feminist misgivings. Recall the voice in Winterson's novel. 'Why hesitate when you could simulate?' cries the advertiser of a brave new Virtual world, a world of teledildonics and virtual lovers. Winterson's narrator is unimpressed. 'For myself . . . I'd rather hold you in my arms. . . . Luddite? No, I don't want to smash the machines but neither do I want the machines to smash me.' In the world of Virtual sexuality, one treats machines as people—but the narrator does not say that people are thereby treated as machines. Winterson's narrator does not say that women are thereby made things; the concern is not strictly, not distinctively, a feminist concern.

It is something else, surely, a broad concern that has aspects that are both epistemic and moral. It has something in common with the struggles of the meditator, who quietly hopes that the figures in their hats and coats are not, after all, automata in disguise. It has something in common with the unease provoked by the (philosopher's) prospect of life in an experience machine. And it has something in common with Kant's general concern about the life of one who 'must shut himself up in himself', who must remain 'completely alone

with his thoughts as in a prison’—a prison from which he says it is our duty, epistemic and moral, to escape. **(p.356)**

Notes:

(1) This is a slightly revised version of ‘Sexual Solipsism’, *Philosophical Topics* 23 (1995), special issue ‘Feminist Perspectives on Language, Knowledge and Reality’, ed., Sally Haslanger, 181–219. It has a companion piece, ‘Love and Solipsism’, this volume. The solipsist's predicament is in René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), trans. John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), e.g. at p. 32.

(2) For one lively exception see Rosalind Hursthouse's discussion of some similar examples, in ‘Arational Actions’, *Journal of Philosophy* 88 No. 2, 1991, 57–68. She observes that there can be something touching and endearing about them.

(3) Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), ed., M. B. Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 191–2.

(4) The two quotations are from Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949) trans. H. M. Parshley (London: Pan, 1988), 29, 286. More precisely, oppression is (as discussed below) the *inflicted* degradation of a free human being into an object. In interpreting de Beauvoir, Michèle le Doeuff discusses the existentialist notion of a ‘de facto solipsism’ which reduces people to their functions in relation to a subject, and she compares the conceptual status of woman to the status of a secondary quality. See *Hipparchia's Choice*, trans. Trista Selous (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 52, 102.

(5) Jeanette Winterson, *Written on the Body* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), 97–8.

(6) Catharine MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 109.

(7) Melinda Vadas, ‘The Manufacture-for-use of Pornography and Women's Inequality,’ *Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (2005), 174–93 (published posthumously), 21–2.

(8) Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on Ethics* (1775–1780), trans. Louis Infield (London: Methuen, 1930), from notes made by Brauer, Kutzner, and Mrongovius, ed., Paul Menzer, 163.

- (9) Barbara Herman, 'Could It Be Worth Thinking about Kant on Sex and Marriage?', in *A Mind Of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, eds., Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993)
- (10) MacKinnon, *Only Words*, 109.
- (11) *Ibid.*, 25–6 (emphasis added)
- (12) First Meditation, in Descartes, *Meditations*, 22.
- (13) Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue* (1797) trans. Mary Gregor (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 144.
- (14) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 202.
- (15) Christine Korsgaard's work in 'Creating the Kingdom of Ends: Responsibility and Reciprocity in Personal Relations', *Philosophical Perspectives 6: Ethics* (1992), 305–32
- (16) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 202–3.
- (17) Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 126.
- (18) *Ibid.*, 471
- (19) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 205–6.
- (20) *Kant: Philosophical Correspondence*, trans. Arnulf Zweig (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1967)
- (21) The exchange of letters between Kant and Maria von Herbert is the topic of 'Duty and Desolation', this volume.
- (22) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 167, 202–3.
- (23) *Ibid.*, 205–6
- (24) Ian McEwan, *The Innocent* (London: Picador, 1990), 54–60.
- (25) Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth* (London: Vintage 1991), 153
- (26) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 163.
- (27) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 162–3.
- (28) *Ibid.*, 163

- (29) Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 122–3, 140–1.
- (30) Langton, 'Love and Solipsism'.
- (31) P. F. Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', in *Freedom and Resentment* (London: Methuen, 1974), 1–25.
- (32) See also Martha Nussbaum's excellent study, 'Objectification', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 24 (1995), 249–91. The thoughts expressed in this section are further developed in Langton, 'Autonomy-denial in Objectification', this volume, the author having by then had the advantage of engaging with Nussbaum's proposal.
- (33) Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', 9.
- (34) Strawson, 'Freedom and Resentment', 5.
- (35) *Feminism Unmodified* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), 50, 122. See Sally Haslanger, 'On Being Objective, and Being Objectified', in *A Mind Of One's Own: Feminist Essays on Reason and Objectivity*, eds., Louise M. Antony and Charlotte Witt (Boulder, Co.: Westview Press, 1993), 85–125.
- (36) MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 119.
- (37) Haslanger, 'On Being Objective and Being Objectified'. Her proposal is discussed in Langton, 'Feminism in Epistemology: Exclusion and Objectification', this volume; and 'Beyond a Pragmatic Critique of Reason', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 71 (1993), 364–84.
- (38) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 163.
- (39) The tyranny of the 'beauty myth' on women's attitudes to themselves has been described by many, including Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*.
- (40) De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 21.
- (41) Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*, 163; *Doctrine of Virtue* 101, 103.
- (42) De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 29.

(43) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (1943); trans. Hazel Barnes (London: Methuen, 1966), 404.

(44) Roger Scruton, *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1986)

(45) Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 173–9, italics added. The book as a whole has more to offer than my own discussion may suggest: it is sometimes interesting, illuminating, acutely perceptive—and sometimes bewildering, ignorant, one-sided, depressing.

(46) *Ibid.*, 298

(47) *Ibid.*, 305, 317

(48) Scruton, *Sexual Desire*, 302.

(49) *Ibid.*, 177

(50) *Ibid.*, 177

(51) See Ronald Dworkin, in ‘Do We Have a Right to Pornography?’, in *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 335–72. His article and (briefly) the problem of embarrassment, are discussed in my ‘Whose Right? Ronald Dworkin, Women, and Pornographers’, this volume.

(52) The following figures are cited by Naomi Wolf, in *The Beauty Myth*, 159–60, 166. A 1980 study of marriages in the US suggested that there had been assault in twenty eight per cent of those surveyed; other US studies suggest violence in twenty one per cent of relationships, ninety five per cent of it directed towards women; Diana Russell, *Rape in Marriage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). In a Toronto survey one in four girls in their final year of high school reported having been sexually forced; Jane Caputi, *The Age of Sex Crime* (London: The Women's Press, 1987), 119. One in four women students at Auburn University reported having been date raped, with similar figures for other US universities; Robin Warshaw, *I Never Called it Rape* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1988), 13–14. More than half of adolescent boys in a UCLA study think it okay to force sex on woman if he is sexually aroused by her, e.g. if 'she gets him sexually excited', according to Goodchild et al., cited in Warshaw, 120. A proportion of male college students perceived faces expressing distress to be more attractive than faces showing happiness, Wolf (p. 166) and Warshaw (p. 197) giving the proportion as thirty per cent (a relativized figure), but better read as twelve per cent (see footnote 40, 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', this volume).

(53) Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 107.

(54) Ian McEwan, *The Innocent*, 83–5.

(55) Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 144.

(56) MacKinnon, *Only Words*, 109.

(57) Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, 88.

(58) These labels are from Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, ed., J. McDowell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 358. The make-believe game of mud-pies and of shadow-boxing are his illustrations of fantasies that are (respectively) existentially conservative and creative.

(59) Kant says 'it is not so easy to produce the rational proof that the unnatural . . . use of one's sexual power is a violation of duty to oneself'. He then goes on to assert that such a use is incompatible with respect for humanity in one's own person,

*Doctrine of Virtue*, 88. So he does say that it involves treating *oneself* as a thing.

(60) See *American Booksellers, Inc. v. Hudnut*, 771 F2d 329 (7th Cir. 1985). For discussion of pornography's effects, see Edward Donnerstein, Daniel Linz, and Steven Penrod, *The Question of Pornography: Research Findings and Policy Implications* (New York: Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1987); for a discussion of causation in this context, Frederick Schauer, 'Causation Theory and the Causes of Sexual Violence', *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 4 1987, 737-70. For sample feminist argument see Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, and *Only Words*; Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (London: The Women's Press, 1981); Melinda Vadas, 'A First Look at the Pornography Civil Rights Ordinance: Could Pornography Be the Subordination of Women?', *Journal of Philosophy* (1987), 487-511; Langton, 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', this volume; Jennifer Hornsby, 'Speech Acts and Pornography', *Women's Philosophy Review* 10 1993, 38-45, reprinted in *The Problem of Pornography*, ed., Sue Dwyer (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995).

(61) See 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts', this volume.

(62) Jennifer Saul interprets and criticizes Vadas, and offers an alternative account of the connection in 'On Treating Things as People: Objectification, Pornography, and the History of the Vibrator', *Hypatia* 21 (2006), 45-61 *presupposes*

(63) Vadas, 'The Manufacture-for-use of Pornography', 185.

(64) Vadas, 'The Manufacture-for-use of Pornography', 186.

(65) *Ibid.*, 190



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