Vicissitudes[1]

Tender and delicate flower, thus were
you to grace the world for but
an instant in order more
swiftly to be withered!
The Marquis de Sade

INTRODUCTION

Life is difficult, if not simply impossible. And one of the things that makes it difficult – that causes us pain, anxiety, and fear – is change, that cosmic dance without apparent end that forces us to revise perpetually our thoughts and actions. We all desire some degree of stability in our lives; we all wish to escape from change, or, at least, to be able to control it so as to minimize its more unsettling effects. For change upsets our plans and hopes, it confuses our relations with others, it renders our bodies weak and old, and it brings death.

These considerations have made the problem of mutability one of the central concerns in the history of thought. Philosophy, in particular, has paid special attention to the mutability of the world, and some thinkers have gone so far as to define the very essence of philosophy as an attempt to solve the problem of change. "The very masterpiece of philosophy," writes the Marquis de Sade, "would be to develop the means Providence employs to arrive at the ends she designs for man, and from this construction to deduce some rules of conduct acquainting this wretched two-footed individual with the manner wherein he must proceed along life's thorny way, forewarned of the strange caprices of that fatality they denominate by twenty different titles, and all unavailingly, for it has not yet been scanned nor defined."[2] It is thus the aim of philosophy to construct a metaphysical interpretation of change and to develop the ethical implications which follow from that metaphysic. What we want from philosophy is an explanation of the world that will give us a way of coming to grips with the world's vicissitudes; we want, that is, a philosophy of change.

Philosophical reflections upon the problem of mutability appear not only in the works of technical philosophers but also in the writings of social scientists, historians, and literary artists. And it is instructive for the philosopher, so often trapped within the confines of his own discipline, to examine and appreciate the contributions to philosophical discourse of thinkers in fields other than academic philosophy. But

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[1] Originally published in *Kinesis* (Spring 1970), 106-124.

[2] The Marquis de Sade, *Justine, or Good Conduct Well Chastised* (1791), in *The Marquis de Sade,* I, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse (New York, 1966), p. 457.

while it should be an interesting task to uncover the philosophies of change embodied in the works of social scientists and historians, considerations of time, space, and present intellectual preference require that this essay be limited to a discussion of the idea of mutability in literary works. More specifically, it is the aim of this essay to analyze the treatment of the problem of change in three novels: Samuel Beckett's *Murphy,* Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha,* and the Marquis de Sade's *Justine.* I have chosen to examine these works because of their highly philosophical character and because of their rather explicit concern with the problem of change.

Murphy is the story of the worldly misfortunes of an alienated individual and of his search for escape. Murphy, an absurd, unenthusiastic outsider, drifts through life, through human relationships, through pain and misery, and through humiliation until he finds a much desired out. Coerced by his lover, the prostitute Celia, into looking for work (for the first time in his inactive life), Murphy takes a job as an attendant in a mental hospital. Thus introduced to the wonderfully private and imperturbable world of the psychotics, he sets out to achieve "transcendence," i.e., psychotic withdrawal from the world.

Hesse's *Siddhartha* is also a story of an individual's search for transcendence. The tale is set in ancient India (sixth century B.C.) and reveals the author's infatuation with Oriental mysticism. The goal of Siddhartha's life is self-realization and peace. He pursues this goal by turning, first, to religion, then to a career as a man of the world (meaning the social world), and finally to the simple life of a ferryman on a river. This last way of life brings him to his long sought fulfillment. He stops striving for "answers" and learns to accept the world in its totality. In this way, Siddhartha finds release from suffering.

Like *Murphy* and *Siddhartha, Justine,* by the Marquis de Sade, recounts the life of an individual who is "assailed by the blows of fate" (p. 711) . Sade's novel centers upon the contest, if "contest" is the right word for a conflict in which one of two opponents stands no chance of victory, between virtue and vice, good and evil. The book describes the sad life of the virtuous Justine in a world without virtue, a world in which evil always triumphs over good. The heroine's life is filled with one catastrophe after another: She is orphaned at the age of twelve and thrown out into the streets by her relatives; she is subsequently robbed, beaten, raped, enslaved, and sexually assaulted in countless ways by numerous libertines; she is convicted of several crimes of which she is innocent; and, just when she may look forward to a bit of peace and comfort in the home of her long-lost sister, the poor girl is struck dead by a flash of lightning. Throughout this incredible tale, Justine's persecutors not only go free, but are favored with fame and prosperity. They evidently know something which Justine cannot or will not recognize. But more of this later.

Each of the above works centers upon the question, What meaning, if any, can life have in a mutable world? The characters in these three novels are exposed repeatedly to the impact of change. Siddhartha's entire life is spent in search of a way out of the "going about" *(Samsara)* of the world with its transient hopes, fears,

pleasures, and triumphs. In *Murphy,* Celia's grandfather, Mr. Kelly, who "did not look a day over ninety," is an invalid who must watch the day-by-day disintegration of his body.[3] And Murphy and his associates are engulfed in the miasma of shifting human relationships: Miss Counihan and Wylie betray Neary. Then, Miss Counihan and Wylie, who are lovers, conspire against one another. Neary conspires against Miss Counihan and Wylie in turn. Earlier, Neary sets out to steal Miss Counihan from Murphy (who was, prior to Wylie, her lover). And Cooper, who is supposedly Neary's man, complies with all (pp. 195-201). Ah, the inconstancy of love and friendship! As Beckett parodies, "all good things come to an end" (p. 89). Justine, too, as suggested above, is subjected to the hardships of change. But Sade's criminals, Justine's persecutors, are also aware of the world's caprices. Madame Dubois, one of Sade's most courageous villains, points out that "a catastrophic miscarriage might this instant plunge me from the pinnacle to the abyss" (p. 697). Change is a constant threat to the hopes of the virtuous and vicious alike.

Thus Beckett, Hesse, and Sade are led to explore, through their characters, the metaphysical status of change and ways of life that make sense given the sort of world described in various ontologies. The works in question, therefore, contain several implicit philosophies of change which work themselves out, for good or ill, in dialectical tension with one another.

METAPHYSICAL CONSIDERATIONS

[Lewis E.] Hahn [of Southern Illinois University] has described three metaphysical perspectives on change which are relevant to the present discussion: Transcendism, Eternalism, and Temporalism. Each of these attempts to answer two questions: (1) What, if anything, is unchanging? and (2) What is man's relation to that which does not change?

The *Transcendist* perspective holds that there is an eternal, supernatural realm beyond the world of change. This transcendent, spiritual order guarantees eternal life to the individual human soul. Various religions (e.g., Christianity, Islam, certain Jewish sects, and many primitive cults) have upheld this metaphysical perspective on mutability.

Sade gives us an example of Christian Transcendism in the ontology of the angelic Justine. Again and again, amid the misfortunes of her existence, Justine looks for consolation to "Heavenly God's rewards" (p. 713), to "that eternal felicity" (p. 495) which, she says, awaits her "in a better world" (p. 481). For Justine, there is a God, a good God, who has created the universe; He dwells in an eternal realm above this changing world; He has implanted within our bodies an immortal soul which gives us "the assurance of a rebirth, in the life still to come." Whatever happens, then, is God's will and is to be viewed as part of the divine plan. In this manner, Justine's

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[3] Samuel Beckett, *Murphy* (New York, 1938), p. 115.

Transcendism permits her to see the world as intelligible (pp. 547-48). Justine does not give any proofs for her position; she seems to regard her Transcendism as a matter of faith, a faith which renders the world meaningful and gives hope to the believer.

According to the *Eternalist* view, man is a finite and mortal being living within a universe the changes of which can be explained by reference to something more fundamental which is unchanging. Philosophers have given the name "substance" to this underlying, unchanging something and have defined it as the basic matter (atoms, elements, etc.) and/or structure (moral order, laws of nature, etc.) of the universe. Most Eternalists are likely to be naturalists who account for change by reducing it to unchanging substance (e.g., matter, moral order, laws of nature, or combinations thereof). And being naturalists, they naturally deny the doctrine of human immortality.

For the Eternalist, therefore, Justine's Transcendist notions are absurd. And several of Sade's villains speak for the Eternalist view. They formulate their position within the context of an attack upon religion. Thus, the Comte de Bressac asks of Justine, "If all Nature's productions are the resultant effects of the laws whereof she is captive; if the perpetual action and reaction suppose the motion necessary to her essence, what becomes of the sovereign master {God] fools gratuitously give her" (p. 513). And the highwayman, Coeur-de-fer, argues that the idea of God is an illusion based upon fear and ignorance, a myth which has been substituted for scientific explanation. The idea of God, that is, was created in order to account for the otherwise inexplicable events in nature. God, as Coeur-de-fer puts it, was conceived as the "motor" of nature, the hidden cause of all worldly happenings. But now that the laws of motion have been discovered, it is no longer necessary to posit a motor behind or above the appearances of nature; now these appearances are fully explicable in terms of mechanistic principles (pp. 496-97). The God hypothesis is no longer needed.

Bressac and Coeur-de-fer thus adopt the mechanistic-materialism which was prominent in eighteenth-century thought. This metaphysic not only removes the necessity of God, but also denies human immortality. Since all there is, is the constant mutation of matter according to natural laws (note that both the material and the structural concepts of substance are employed), there can be no soul that survives the individual life. Coeur-de-fer, therefore, scoffs at Justine's hope for rewards in the life-hereafter: Since death is merely the disintegration of matter and structure, both the virtuous and the vicious man will "meet the same end and the same fate" (p. 497). The purely material character of existence precludes the very existence of the soul and thus renders all propositions concerning immortality ridiculous. All is matter in motion according to law. Both Transcendism and Eternalism hold that there is something which is unchanging. Our third metaphysic of change, *Temporalism,* denies this contention. The Temporalist . . . denies both the idea of an eternal supernatural order and the idea of an eternal natural order. There

is no Heaven, no Hell, no God, no substance, and, needless to say, no personal immortality. All is process, movement, event, history, and flux.

Beckett, Hesse, and Sade all give expression to the Temporalist perspective on change. While Sade analyzes both the Transcendist and Eternalist positions (as has been shown), as well as the Temporalist view, the Beckett and Hesse novels maintain a Temporalist framework throughout. Neither Beckett nor Hesse views Transcendism or Eternalism as a serious topic of discussion; for Beckett, the world is far too silly to possess any sort of order, and, for Hesse, the world-process is too overwhelming to be encompassed by any system of organization.

Is it possible that the world is a confused, meaningless, and absurd process, an aim at nothing? The opening paragraph of Murphy describes life as nothing more than a series of meaningless routines. Even the changes which alter our personal routines (e.g., the condemnation of the mew in which Murphy lives which pushes him into making "other arrangements") are themselves meaningless events which are to be expected in a world devoid of rhyme and reason. It is in this sense that the "sun shone, having no alternative, on the nothing new" (p. 1). Neary, Murphy's pal, (going beyond William James's intention) calls the world a "big blooming buzzing confusion" (p. 4). And, by Chapter 12, Celia is perceiving life as an "old endless chain of love, tolerance, indifference, aversion and disgust," as a ceaseless stream flowing from past to future (pp. 255-57). This view of life as constant, incomprehensible mutation is reinforced by Neary when he comments, "Life is all rather irregular" (p. 271).

But if the world is pointless, what happens to our attempts to ease or root out the miseries of life? To this question, Murphy's acquaintance, Wylie, might offer his conservation of misery principle: "I greatly fear . . . that the syndrome known as life is too diffuse to admit of palliation. For every symptom that is eased, another is made worse. The horse leech's daughter is a closed system. Her quantum of wantum cannot vary" (p. 57). But all is not lost (or is it?) : "The advantage of this view . . . is, that while one may not look forward to things getting any better, at least one need not fear their getting any worse. They will always be the same as they always were" (p. 58).

Life is a "syndrome." Changes in the world, then, are constant and inevitable; but they do not bring about any absolute improvement in the conditions of life. The one thing that we can count on, in Wylie's view, is the total quantity of misery in the world and the truth that the palliation of life's miseries is impossible. It is, of course, quite possible to eliminate particular symptoms; but we must recognize that such partial solutions merely shift a given quantity of misery from one place to another (pp. 58-59). Beckett's Temporalism thus takes the form of a metaphysic of meaninglessness.

Less depressing is the Temporalist framework of *Siddhartha.* Siddhartha is born a Brahmin, becomes an ascetic *(Samana),* rejects asceticism, becomes a rich man, rejects that role, and so on. Late in life, he is reunited with his old friend,

Govinda. Siddhartha reminds Govinda of the transience of the world: "Remember, my dear Govinda, the world of appearances is transitory.... The wheel of appearances revolves quickly . . . . Where is Siddhartha the Brahmin, where is Siddhartha the Samana, where is Siddhartha the rich man? The transitory soon changes . . . . You know that."[4]

Yes, the world changes. And if the world changes, so does Being. For Siddhartha is a pantheist (if the word makes sense in a nontheistic context). Being is immanent in the world. The changes in the world are changes in Being. Is this not a contradiction? Can that which becomes (i.e., that which is not yet) *be?* Do not the concepts of Being and Becoming exclude one another? Not for the Temporalist. Siddhartha, while contemplating his river, "saw that the water continually flowed and flowed and yet it was always there; it was always the same and yet at every moment it was new" (p. 104). This suggests something which is rather difficult to put into words. The river is constantly changing and it never changes. Both A and not-A are true. Thus, everything follows. That is why Vasudeva, Siddhartha's comrade, asks, "is not every life, every work fine?" (p. 105).

Being, then, for Siddhartha, is immanent process, the continual transmutation of the world, the perpetual cycle of birth, life, and death (p. 152). The world is not, contra Beckett, meaningless – it transcends meaning.

And what of Sade's Temporalism? Doesn't the mechanistic materialism described above make him an Eternalist? It would, if he were to stop with a mechanistic account of nature. But he goes beyond mechanism. Despite his many statements of the mechanistic hypothesis, nature is not, for Sade, "an indifferent mechanism. There is such significance in her transformations that one might play with the idea that she is ruled by an evil genius. Nature is actually cruel and voracious, informed with the spirit of destruction. She `would desire the utter annihilation of all living creatures so as to enjoy her power of re-creating new ones.'"[5] Nature is a condition of tension and conflict. It is a dialectical equilibrium maintained through the conflict of good and evil. Evil, then, is as necessary to the maintenance of nature's balance as is good. Thus, Clement, a monk who fulfills his sexual desires through whipping the bodies of young girls, argues: "Wolves which batten upon lambs, lambs consumed by wolves, the strong who immolate the weak, the weak victims of the strong: there you have Nature, there you have her intentions, there you have her scheme: a perpetual action and reaction, a host of vices, a host of virtues, in one word, a perfect equilibrium resulting from the equality of good and evil on earth; the equilibrium essential to the maintenance of the stars, of vegetation, and, lacking which, everything would be instantly in ruins" (p. 608).

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[4] Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha,* trans. Hilda Rosner (New York, 1951), p. 95.

[5] Simone de Beauvoir, "Must we Burn Sade?" in *The Marquis de Sade,* II (New York, 1966), p. 44.

The equality of good and evil! How outrageous! But Sade goes even further. He wants to show that evil is *more* essential to nature's equilibrium than is good. To set the stage for this coup, the author has the Comte de Bressac depict nature as a constant mutation of matter, not according to law, but by caprice.

> Nothing is lost in the immense melting pot where variations are wrought: all the material masses which fall into it spring incessantly forth in other shapes. . . . [And if nature] stands in need of more individuals, she inspires lust in us and behold! there are creations; when destructions become necessary to her, she inserts vengeance, avarice, lechery, ambition into our hearts and lo! you have murders; but she has not ceased to labor in her own behalf, and whatever we do, there can be no question of it, we are the unthinking instruments of her caprices (pp. 518, 520).

Sade becomes more and more animistic in his statements about nature: *she* has *needs* and *intentions;* we are the instruments of *her caprices; she inspires* our impulses.

But let us follow the Comte de Bressac further to his portrayal of nature as destructive principle. Bressac describes creation as the destruction of an initial, motionless state, which, strangely enough, he calls "chaos."[6] Existence, as we know it, is motion: "The primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion, which agitates her at all times . . ." *(p. 520).* And this motion is the result of destructive acts, "a perpetual consequence of crimes," and can only continue so long as there are criminal and destructive acts. Thus, the individual who "most nearly resembles . . . [Nature], and therefore the most perfect being, necessarily will be the one whose most active agitation will become the cause of many crimes." And the virtuous man, from this standpoint, is actually the enemy of nature since he desires a state of stability, that is to say, a state without motion or change (pp. 520-21). Nature is not morally indifferent (as mechanism suggests) : she actively supports the destructive acts of the deviate and the criminal. Nature is process, destructive (that is to say, creative) process.

Evil, then, comes in the form of change and is a constitutive element of the world. Evil is an active, necessary principle; it is essentially a mutation, a destruction which leads to further creative transformations. Further, if Being is identified with the world process and non-Being with changelessness, then evil, which is destructive alteration, comes closest to Being, while good, which seeks stability, veers toward non-Being. Thus does Sade revise the Western philosophy of good and evil.

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[6] This usage is not so strange, however, when we consider that in a state without reference points against which motion could be judged, there could be, strictly speaking, no motion. Sade does not elaborate this idea; but cf. the description of the third zone of Murphy's mind, below.

Three varieties of Temporalism are therefore revealed in *Murphy, Siddhartha,* and *Justine* respectively: a metaphysic of meaninglessness, a metaphysic of immanent process, and a metaphysic of destruction and evil.

ETHICAL EXTENSIONS

As stated at the outset, a philosophy of change must not stop with the construction of a metaphysic of change, but must also provide us with an ethic whereby we may "proceed along life's thorny way." . . . [E]ach metaphysical perspective on change may be accompanied by a variety of ethical reactions all seeking to answer the question, How is one to live, given such and such a metaphysical interpretation of change? The full range of ethical reactions vis-a-vis change is too broad to be encompassed in an essay of this nature. The following discussion is therefore confined to the ethical reactions to mutability represented in *Murphy, Siddhartha,* and *Justine.*

Justine, we recall, is a Transcendist: she believes in God, Heaven, and the immortality of the soul. She also believes that this world is a stage (or series of stages) upon which our eternal destinies are decided; while virtuous behavior in this world is rewarded through salvation in the hereafter, so vice and crime are punished through damnation (p. 481) . "Is this existence other than a passage each of whose stages ought only, if he is reasonable, to conduct . . . [man] to that eternal felicity, the prize vouchsafed by Virtue? . . . . [And] do you imagine God's justice does not await . . . [the criminal], that he will not have to pay in another world for what he does in this" (p. 495). So God avenges the injustices in this world; and one's salvation depends upon one's performance in the dramatic conflict between good and evil. This may be called the "drama of salvation" ethic.

One must be virtuous if one desires salvation. But what is virtue? Virtue, according to Justine, is obedience to God's commands. But how is one to know the nature of God's commands? One must turn to the "sacred dogmas" of the Church, for it is in these doctrines that God's commands are revealed and embodied (p. 547). Justine's advocacy of virtue thus takes the form of *a doctrinal* drama of salvation ethic; i.e., salvation is to be attained through the adherence to "true doctrine."

But Justine's ethic is more than doctrinal – it is *militant.* Her hope and, as she sees it, her duty is to convert others from vice to virtue, to show them the way to God's compensation. "Ere a week was gone by," Justine remarks in one place, "I had begun to labor at the conversions after which I thirsted" (p. 544); and in another place, speaking of the young Rosalie, our evangelist exclaims, "I had the most ardent desire to bring her to discharge her primary religious duties" (p. 547). Time and again, Justine seeks the conversion of sinners; and time and again, unfortunately, she fails. But she remains faithful to the end and never tires of searching for converts (which, sad to relate, she never finds).

From the Eternalist viewpoint, of course, Justine's ethic is pure nonsense and we might expect the ethical reactions of an Eternalist to be quite different from those outlined above. Sade suggests one ethical reaction which follows from the mechanistic naturalism developed by some of his characters. This is the ethic of scientific exploration. Given the view of nature as the mutation of matter according to law, one's aim in life should be the fullest possible description of natural processes. As we might expect, however, the Sadean Eternalist interprets this ethic in rather curious and unethical ways. Hence, the physician Rodin and his associates carry out, in the name of the advancement of science, brutal experiments upon human beings (one of whom is Rodin's own daughter – anything for science) (pp. 550-54). But not all of Sade's presentations of the ethic of scientific exploration are so objectionable or ironic. There is, for example, the place where he defends his own investigations into abnormal psychology. These descriptions of horror, Monsieur de Corville (speaking for Sade) tells Justine, are "useful to whoever seeks to perfect his understanding of enigmatic man. . . . These tableaux help toward the development of the human spirit; our backwardness in this branch of learning may very well be due to the stupid restraint of those who venture to write upon such matters. Inhibited by absurd fears, they only discuss the puerilities with which every fool is familiar, and dare not, by addressing themselves boldly to the investigation of the human heart, offer its gigantic idiosyncrasies to our view" (pp. 670-71). Thus, the inquiry into nature (including man's perversities) contributes to the "development of the human spirit." Such is the essence of the ethic of scientific exploration.

This ethic thus accepts the world of change (Eternalistically interpreted) and seeks to understand it; the Transcendist's belief in a higher order beyond this world is tantamount to escapism. Justine's ethic constitutes, in the view of the Sadean naturalist, a needless rejection of the world and a senseless renunciation of human reason.

But the metaphysic of change which emerges as ultimate in *Murphy, Siddhartha,* and *Justine is* Temporalism; and a careful examination of the three novels reveals three contrasting reactions to a world of total mutation. For Murphy, any hope in this world of flux is futile. The expectation of improvement in one's condition is doomed to frustration; for the changes that are wrought in our lives are hardly ever, if ever, what we expect or desire. Hence, Celia's hope for a "new life" for Murphy and her results in all her hopes being dashed. She pushes him into finding work in the hope that the responsibilities related to earning a living will "make a man of him." But the work he finds, in the "Magdalen Mental Mercyseat," only provides him with the opportunity of further withdrawal from the so-called responsibilities of outer reality. Celia's attempt to change Murphy, therefore, produces, not a change in the direction of his life, but an acceleration in the direction in which he was headed all along; ". . . by insisting on trying to change him she had lost him" (p. 190). The desire to work things out in this world, to alter things for the better, is thus bound to failure. Considerations such as these are what lead several characters in *Murphy* to contemplate (and some to commit) suicide.

Even life's simple pleasures (which Murphy enjoys periodically) lead to frustration. There is, for example, one point at which Murphy almost affirms the world in a vision of things that is practically mystical.

> Murphy receded a little way into the north [of the park] and prepared to finish his lunch. He took the bisquits carefully out of the packet and laid them face upward on the grass, in order as he felt of edibility. *They* were the same as always, a Ginger, an Osbourne, a Digestive, a Petit and one anonymous. He always ate the first-named last, because he liked it the best, and the anonymous first, because he thought it very likely the least palatable. The order in which he ate the remaining three was indifferent to him and varied irregularly from day to day. On his knees now before the five it struck him for the first time that these prepossessions reduced to a paltry six the number of ways in which he could make his meal. But this was to violate the very essence of assortment . . . . Even if he conquered his prejudice against the anonymous, still there would be only twenty-four ways in which the bisquits could be eaten. But were he to take the final step and overcome his infatuation with the ginger, then the assortment would spring to life before him, dancing the radiant measure of its total permutability, edible in a hundred and twenty ways! (pp. 96-97).

This realization comes as a revelation to Murphy. He sees that he cannot enjoy the "fullness" of the bisquits "until he had learnt not to prefer any one to any other" (p. 97). Judgment, preference, and the desire for order deprive us of the beauty of multiplicity and prevent us from enjoying the world in its full dimension. Here, Murphy has glimpsed the world that the pantheistic mystic, Siddhartha, as we shall see, comes to accept.

But Murphy is not Siddhartha. The world's perversity is not to be denied. As Murphy's attention is diverted from his lunch, a Dachshund eats his bisquits and Murphy is deprived of the opportunity of carrying his newly acquired wisdom to experience (pp. 97-100). Murphy is inconsolable at this turn of events and, once again, gives vent to his sense of futility: "'Oh, my America,' he cried, 'my Newfoundland, no sooner sighted than Atlantis' " (pp. 102-103). Again, frustration and sadness are the rewards of glad expectations.

Murphy's futilitarianism, however, is only the first stage of his reaction to change. The second stage is withdrawal and the search for escape. His contemplation of the bisquits and their possibilities of combination had produced in him a nearly joyous acceptance of the world of flux. But the loss of his lunch plunges him in the opposite direction from world-affirmation: he falls first into indifference (which he identifies with freedom), and then into a trance-like torpor which separates "his mind from the gross importunities of sensation and reflection" (p. 105). He denies the world, withdraws into himself, and enters the solipsist fantasy world of his mind. In reaction to his futilitarian view of life, Murphy turns to the escape offered by fantasy.

Murphy achieves release from the ordinary world by entering the world of his mind. It is therefore necessary to outline the character of this mental world. Murphy's mind (which, he believes, is separate from his body and immune to the difficulties of

the world) consists of three zones. The first of these is the zone of light in which the "elements of physical experience [are} available for a new arrangement." In this zone, Murphy derives pleasure from revising the physical world to suit his own interests, which is the opposite of his actual worldly experience. "Here the kick [in the pants] that the physical Murphy received, the mental Murphy gave. It was the same kick, but corrected as to direction.... Here the whole physical fiasco became a howling success." The zone of light, that is, gives Murphy a pleasure which he never derives from actual experience, namely, the pleasure of "reprisal" (p. 111) .

The second of Murphy's mental zones is that of half light which contains "forms without parallel" in the physical universe. Here, he is free to contemplate beatitudes which the ordinary world never offers, visions without any relation to the world of nature and society (pp. 111-12). These visions, it seems, are freely-chosen hallucinations over which logic and experience have no control.

The third zone is that of darkness. It is "a flux of forms, a perpetual coming together and falling asunder of forms." The first zone contains physical elements the rearrangement of which brings Murphy pleasure; the second zone, the zone of contemplation, gives him "states of peace." But the third zone, which contains "neither elements nor states," sends Murphy into ecstasy. The dark zone is pure becoming "without love or hate or any intelligible principle of change. Here there was nothing but commotion and the pure forms of commotion. Here he was not free, but a mote in the dark of absolute freedom. He did not move, he was a point in the ceaseless unconditioned generation and passing away of line." The first and second zones are pleasant. "But how much more pleasant was the sensation of being a missile without provenance or target, caught up in a tumult of non-Newtonian motion. So pleasant that pleasant was not the word" (pp. 112-13). As Murphy continues the exploration of his mental world, lie begins to dwell in this third zone more and more. "Thus as his body set him free more and more in his mind, he took to spending less and less time in the light, spitting at the breakers of the world; and less in the half light, where the choice of bliss introduced an element of effort; and more and more in the dark, in the will-lessness, a mote in its absolute freedom" (p. 113).

Murphy thus rejects the paltry flux of the physical world in preference for the absolute flux and freedom of his mind. As the novel draws to a close, Murphy moves ever closer to, and finally achieves, complete psychotic withdrawal. But he gets even more than he bargained for: While he is enjoying a catatonic stupor, a fire breaks out in his room and he is consumed in the ensuing conflagration (pp. 251-53). Murphy attains transcendence via psychosis and death. Insanity you say? No matter. Murphy is beyond caring.

To Murphy's futilitarian and escapist ethic, Siddhartha opposes the ethic of quietistic acceptance. It is not that Siddhartha is incapable of appreciating the frustrations that can lead one to Murphy's conclusions, for Siddhartha's life is filled with hardships, frustrated hopes, failures, and experiences of meaninglessness. In his youth, Siddhartha sets out to achieve release from suffering. He attempts to

appease the world through sacrificial and ritualistic religion. That failing, he turns to asceticism in the hope of escaping the world of flux. Asceticism, like sacramentalism, fails and Siddhartha decides to enter into the social world in quest of self-fulfillment and pleasure.

Thus, in the second phase of his life, Siddhartha becomes a hedonist. But his hedonism soon involves him in the confusions of the social world, in Samsara (p. 78). "The world had caught him; pleasure, covetousness, idleness, and finally that vice that he had always despised and scorned as the most foolish acquisitiveness" (p. 80). He finds himself enmeshed in "the midst of his satiated, tepid, insipid existence" (p. 81). At this point, Siddhartha experiences nausea and despair (p. 88) and thinks of suicide: "There was no more purpose, there was nothing more than a deep, painful longing to shake off the whole confused dream, to spit out this stale wine, to make an end of this bitter, painful life" (p. 89). Siddhartha, then, like Murphy, reaches a point of utter despondency and nihilism.

But Siddhartha does not commit suicide. He does quit, however, the frantic going-about of society and becomes a ferryman. In this phase of his life, he achieves peace through the quietistic acceptance of the world; i.e., he ceases his attempts to appease, escape from, or control, the world. The flowing river, a symbol of the process of Being, teaches him to "listen, to listen with a still heart, with a waiting, open soul, without passion, without desire, without judgment, without opinions" (p. 109). Receptivity, openness, patience – these are the proper attitudes toward existence. Peace, therefore, is acceptance and "letting go": "Therefore, it seems to me that everything that exists is good – death as well as life, sin as well as holiness, wisdom as well as folly. Everything is necessary, everything needs only my agreement, my assent, my loving understanding; then all is well with me and nothing can harm me" (p. 145).

Siddhartha stresses that his quietism does not entail the rejection of anything. He views his whole life, including its pains, absurdities, and errors, as necessary and good. He comes to see Being as a great and beautiful dance, a constant Becoming without end; but, unlike Murphy, Siddhartha is invigorated and made joyful by this vision. It is, then, precisely at the point where Siddhartha ceases to search for peace that peace is attained. The abandonment of desire turns out to be the fulfillment of desire.

For the Marquis de Sade, there can be no question of abandoning desire, for Sade is a radical egoist. Here a biographical note is necessary. Sade, as an individual with rather pronounced eccentricities,[7] found himself estranged from many

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[7] Sade's sexual eccentricities included sadism, masochism, sodomy, coprophilia and coprophagy, fellatio, and cunnilingus. His writings contain many more examples of sexual heresy which he himself never acted out. Cf. *The 120 Days o f Sodom, in The Marquis de Sade, II (New* York, 1966), *passim.*

values of society. The central question of his life and work is, How can the individual maintain his integrity in the face of community demands? "On the verge of his adult life he made the brutal discovery that there was no conciliation possible between his social existence and his private pleasures."[8] Sade's extremely deviant individuality could find full expression only in writing, in the imaginary world of fiction. His deviance cut him off from others: "The salient feature of his tormented life was that the painful experience of living never revealed to him any solidarity between other men and himself."[9] Sade paid dearly for his deviance. He spent approximately thirty of his seventy-four years in prisons and lunatic asylums. In his work, he defends ferociously that which cost him so much – his deviance.

Sade's philosophical egoism is, therefore, an extension of his own existence, his being. Since his existence was defined by society as criminal, and since his deviance was considered a crime, Sade's philosophy is a defense of crime in egoistic terms.

In Sade's Temporalism, nature is portrayed as capricious and destructive. And man, if he is to fulfill his potentialities, must imitate nature. The natural process does not reveal to us any rules, guidelines, or standards for our choice of values. Values are relative to cultures, historical epochs, and ultimately to individual psychology.[10] But if a man is to be free, he must not permit society or history to determine his values; he must rather, after the fashion of nature's caprices, assert his own choice, even against the most stringent opposition.

It is Sade's view that all men do, in fact, pursue only that which they take to be in their own interests; the motive for every human act is a desire on the part of the actor for his own fulfillment. Even so-called altruistic acts are ego-centered: they either bring pleasure to the agent (e.g., the pleasure of seeing others happy), or they are done out of the hope for gain (i.e., future pleasures).[11] Sade's philosophy of man is a development of this psychological egoism.

Sade's view of nature causes his egoism to take on a particularly harsh character. Nature is a state of "discord, war, and agitation."[12] And man is very well adapted to nature. "All men," says Coeur-de-fer, "are born isolated, envious, cruel, and despotic; wishing to have everything and surrender nothing, incessantly struggling to maintain either their rights or achieve their ambition" (p. 494). Society, moreover, which is merely the institutionalization of conflict, does not do away with the egoistic and aggressive instincts of men. Society is actually the embodiment of a special form of egoistic conflict: it is a conspiracy of the rulers

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[8] Simone de Beauvoir, p. 7.
[9] Ibid., p. 18.
[10] Sade, *passim*
[11] Ibid., p. 669.
[12] Simone de Beauvoir, p. 57.

against the ruled. The notion of the social contract is an illusion foisted upon the ruled in order to pacify them; and the autonomous man must never permit himself to believe in such a contract. Why should either the strong man or the weak man submit to a contract that deprives the former of at least part of his strength and the latter of the opportunity to become the stronger through a seizure of power? If there is a contract, it must be between equals; i.e., the social contract is either made between strong men in an effort to preserve their strength against the disenfranchised, or it is a conspiracy of the weak to deprive the strong of their power thereby transforming the weaker class into the stronger. In either case, says Coeur-de-fer, society becomes the instrument of ruling interests (pp. 493-94). Society, in Sade's view, far from overcoming the conflict of the state of nature, is simply an expression of that conflict, a state of unending tension and antagonism. Here, he is even more severe than Hobbes.

Sade moves from psychological to ethical egoism. Given his picture of nature, man, and society, the individual's only hope is self-assertion, the ruthless pursuit of one's self-interest.[13] And in this pursuit, Sade argues, one must turn to deviance and criminality, for these are often the only means to self-fulfillment. We arrive, then, at the point where the Sadean philosophy of crime becomes explicit.

Crime, in the first place, is pleasurable. And here, Sade offers observations not fully appreciated in the history of thought until the rather recent rise of the science of abnormal psychology. Of all the acts that yield pleasure, the libertine Roland argues, those acts that yield the most pleasure are criminal acts. "I have found in evil a kind of attractiveness which always redounds to my lust's advantage; crime ignites my appetites; the more frightful it is, the more it stimulates." And Roland goes on to point out, a century before Freud, the relation between criminal acts and sexuality: "In committing . . . [crime], I enjoy the same sort of pleasure ordinary folk taste in naught but lubricity, and a hundred times I have discovered myself, while thinking of crime, while surrendering to it, or just after having executed it, in precisely the same state in which one is when confronted by a beautiful naked woman; it irritates my senses in the same way, and I have committed it in order to arouse myself as, when one is filled with impudicious designs, one approaches a beautiful object" (pp. 679-80).

But, in the second place, crime is also necessary to self-realization. Sade defends both oppression and the resistance to oppression. Oppression is allowed in the Sadean ethic because it is a result of self-assertion. At one point in *Justine,* the monk Clement decides to whip Justine's breasts with birch rods. "Oh Father!," the girl pleads, "They are so delicate! You will kill me!" Clement's reply reveals the oppressor's attitude, the psychology of oppression: "No matter, my dear," he says, "provided I am satisfied" (p. 596).

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[13] Sade, pp. 487, 491, and *passim.*

But it is also the right of every individual to resist oppression. Sade's defense of crime is not merely a defense of tyranny. True enough, he does defend tyranny. But he also recognizes the right of the tyrant's victim to rebel against the tyrant. All men, in Sade's view, have the absolute right to pursue their own interests by whatever means necessary. The real question is, Do all men have the courage to seize power?[14] Sade thinks that most men lack this courage, and he is probably right. But that a man, if he wishes power and liberty, must assert himself against all opposing wills, and must declare and seize his individuality and freedom, is, for Sade, a fundamental dictate of existence.

Sade recognizes fully the oppression that takes place amid the hopeless corruption of society. Civilization is, he points out repeatedly, the repression of many individualities (the ruled) so that a few (the rulers) may fulfill themselves.[15] It is the right of every oppressed person to plot (alone or with his fellows) against a given social order and to attempt to take control of that order. Sade's ethic, therefore, takes a revolutionary turn. From this point of view, criminal action is the only avenue to self-fulfillment available to the disenfranchised. Dubois states,

> The callousness of the Rich legitimates the bad conduct of the Poor; let them open their purse to our needs, let humaneness reign in their hearts and virtues will take root in ours; but as long as our misfortune, our patient endurance of it, our good faith, our abjection only serves to double the weight of our chains, our crimes will be their doing, and we will be fools indeed to abstain from them when they can lessen the yoke wherewith their cruelty bears us down. Nature has caused us all to be equals born . . . ; if fate is pleased to upset the primary scheme of the general law, it is up to us to correct its caprices and through our skill to repair the usurpations of the strongest (p. 481).

The sword, says Dubois in another place, "is the miserable man's only resource" (p. 698). Hence, Sade's philosophy of crime becomes a rationale for revolution.

We begin to understand the essence of Sade's ethic as well as his reasons for attacking virtue. The urge to self-fulfillment is the will to power, the desire for authenticity through the exercise of power. Happiness, then, is the greatest possible expenditure of energy.[16] The defect of virtue, of abstract morality, is the passivity that it requires. Justine, full of virtue, *asks* her persecutors for her rights, she *pleads* for her freedom. But rights and freedom are not gifts – they are conquests. We cannot ask an oppressor to respect our rights and expect him to do so; we must *force* him to recognize our independence of his will; we must, if necessary, use violence in resisting his designs; and perhaps ultimately we shall have to kill him. Virtue, therefore, insofar as it entails submission of the will

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[14] Ibid., cf. p. 698.
[15] Ibid., cf. pp. 651, 662, 685, and *passim.*
[16] Maurice Blanchot, "Sade," in *The Marquis de Sade, I* (New York, 1966), p. 65.

(heteronymy), is the death of authenticity and freedom – a renunciation of selfhood. The good life, for Sade, is the active assertion of one's identity, one's freedom, and one's values through the exercise of power. Submission in any form is sin and deserves the oppression that is its lot. And Sade defends criminality because he believes, rightly or wrongly, that it is a rejection of submission, an assertion of autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Each of the novels discussed in this essay concerns itself with the problem of mutability. And each formulates at least one metaphysical perspective on change and at least two ethical reactions to the changing world. Furthermore, it is clear that there is an intimate connection between the metaphysical and ethical aspects of the philosophical inquiry into change. An ethical reaction to change is not a reaction to change itself, but to the *idea* of change framed in some metaphysical perspective; or, to put this point somewhat differently, it is impossible to separate one's ethical response to change from one's metaphysical assumptions (conscious or unconscious) concerning the nature of change.

Thus, Beckett's Temporalism, which defines the world as meaningless change, elicits, within the dramatic context of the novel, Murphy's futilitarianism which, in turn, precipitates the hero's escape into fantasy. It is, moreover, no accident that Siddhartha's odyssey through life takes him through several ethical stages: from ritualism, through asceticism, through hedonism, and culminating in quietism. Siddhartha's life fits perfectly the form of Temporalism developed in Hesse's novel – a Temporalism depicting the world as immanent process. Sade's Temporalism, too, evokes its own ethical reactions: the Dionysian character of nature dictates an egoistic ethic, a philosophy of crime.

This connection between the metaphysical and ethical sides of the problem of change is true, not only of Temporalism, but of Transcendism and Eternalism as well. Justine's doctrinal and militant drama of salvation ethic is inseparable from her Transcendist view of the world; this metaphysical-ethical complex is, in fact, expressed frequently in single sentences throughout the text. And finally, the ethic of scientific exploration formulated by Sade in some places is particularly well adapted to the form of Eternalism (mechanistic naturalism) found in parts of *Justine.*

Now, lest there be misunderstanding, it is *not my* contention that the metaphysical perspectives discussed in this essay lead necessarily to the ethical reactions described above. Other (in fact, many other) ethical reactions are feasible within the metaphysical contexts herein analyzed. Further, there are varieties of Transcendism, Eternalism, and Temporalism which have not entered into this analysis, but which might be found, in other contexts, to be at the roots of the kinds of ethical reactions with which this essay has been concerned. I am not, that is, arguing that there are logical connections between a given metaphysic and a

given ethical reaction or range of reactions. What I do contend is that wherever and whenever someone reacts to the changing world in terms of some ethic, it is possible to discover some metaphysical assumption (s) concerning change at the root of that ethic. What the specifics are in any such situation must be determined through analysis and description in that situation. Presuppositions concerning logical relations will not help. As Beckett writes, *"Quid pro quo!"*[17]

George Cronk

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[17] Beckett, p. 2.