

PLEASURE MACHINES



Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806): 'The Swing' 1767

Pleasure and liberty became increasingly associated as enlightenment thinkers began to conceive of well-being (eudaimonia) as a civil right ..

Preference & prejudice
('tastes'), prohibition,
permission and prescription form
the complex **moral** framework of
social conduct & etiquette* ...

i.e., customs, manners

As 'puritanism' was challenged
by 'liberalism' morals began to
be taken as arbitrary cultural
conventions rather than as
absolute (divine) or natural
(law) prescriptions ...

The most radical expression of this 'conventionalist' view was that of The Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), the most 'scientific' that of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) ...



Donatien Alphonse François de Sade

Masters of Darkness (Channel 4 documentary 2002) ...

The Marquis de Sade **1 2**

Sade proposes a fantasy of the sexual (from which his sexual fantasies derive) that is based in a quantitative, 'scientific' theory of pleasure and pain ...

The guiding idea of Sade's sexology is a *law of diminishing returns* – to get the same effect the level of stimulation has to be increased – sex acts thus have to become more and more intense and extreme ..

Speech by 'Noirceuil' in 'Juliette' p. 267

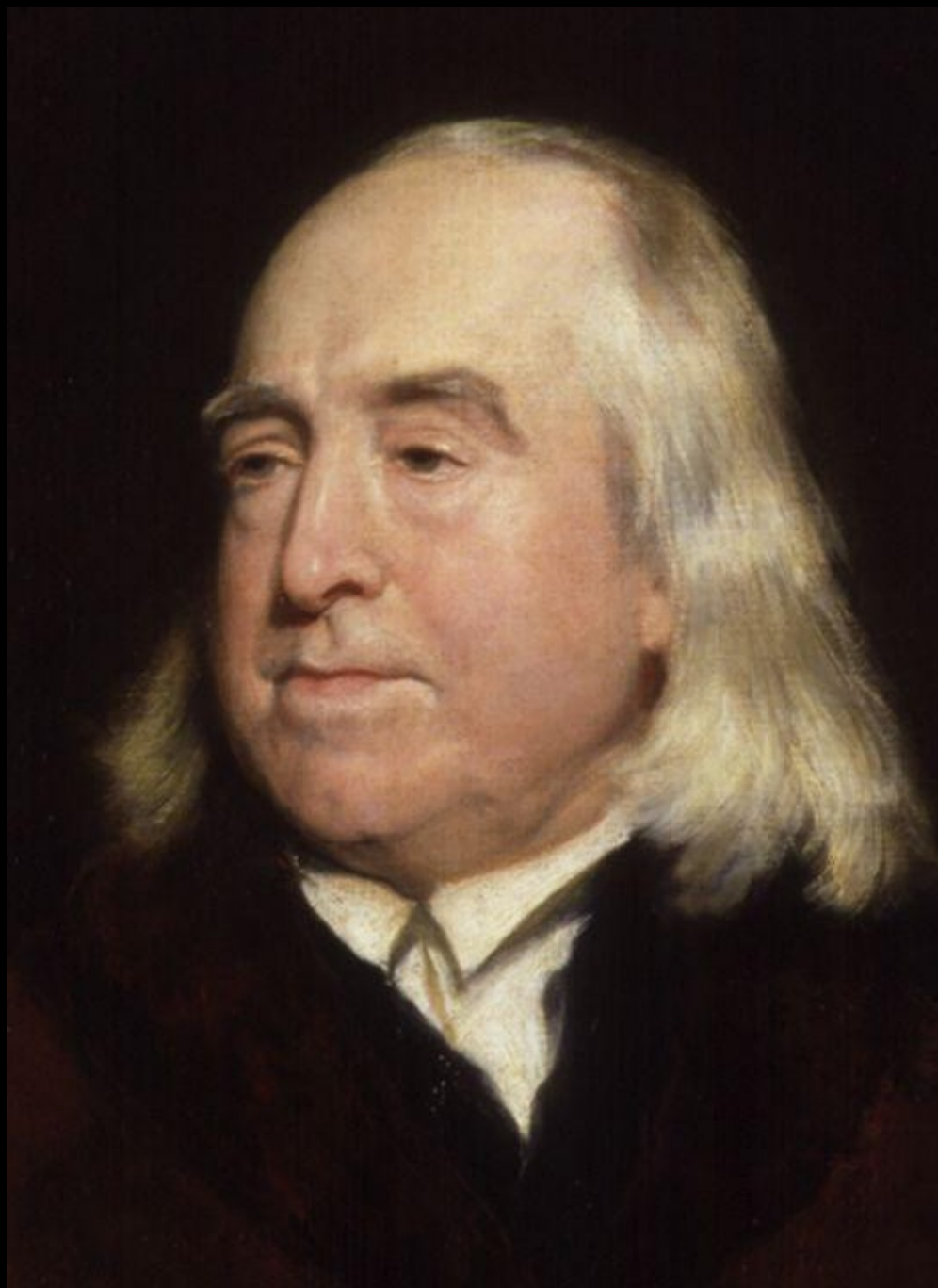
" ... pain is the consequence of a defective relationship between objects foreign to us and the organic molecules composing us ... instead of composing harmoniously with those that make up our neural fluids as they do in the commotion of pleasure, the atoms emanating from these foreign objects strike them aslant ... and never fuse with them."

Noirceuil speech cont., 'Juliette' p.269

"Do not all passions require victims? ... the intenser the sufferings of this object, the more entire its humiliation, its degradation, the more thorough will be your enjoyment."

Given this law of diminishing
returns, Sade's libertines
require an ever greater supply
of sexual resources (libertines,
'slaves') - this idea is taken
to its murderous conclusion in
'120 Days of Sodom' * ...

*1785



Jeremy Bentham

Along with Helvetius, Bentham developed modern 'utilitarianism', the view that we seek the greatest benefit (or **utility**) given current circumstances, resources and estimation of the consequences of our acts ..

The **felicific calculus**

Bentham, 1789, 'Principles of Morals and Legislation'

1.6

"An action ...[is]... conformable to the principle of utility ... when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any to diminish it."

Expected Utility - now
understood in terms of
trade-offs and opportunity costs
('marginalism') - is a
cornerstone of contemporary
political-economic and strategic
thinking ...

Bentham's 'felicific calculus'
is a 'scientific' quantitative
theory of pain and pleasure as
much as Sade's - both extol
forms of enlightenment
machination* ..

*understanding natural processes as machine processes

Libertinage ...

In England, the 'Hellfire' clubs associated with Sir Francis Dashwood* and others have become a signal myth of the period ..

*1708-81

Francis Dashwood, 15th Baron le Despencer by William Hogarth from the late 1750s



The emergence of 'sexology' ...

In the Enlightenment sexual
experience and practice began to
be examined in political-moral and
in more general
'anthropological' and
'scientific' terms ..

In his 'History of Sexuality'*
Michel Foucault** notes the
development from the
Enlightenment of a 'scientia
sexualis' (sexology) ...

*1976-84 **1926-84

Female sexuality (ostensibly)
was often the focus of erotic
literature* most notably in John
Cleland's 'Fanny Hill'** and
Sade's 'Juliette'*** ..

*[The School of Women](#) - Nicholas Chortier eds. 1678, 1757
1748 *1797

Fanny Hill (Memoirs of a woman of pleasure) ...



FANNY EMBOLDENS WILLIAM

'Juliette' 1800 Dutch printing



