

HPRS5042/6042 COMPLEX BODIES: QUESTIONING GENDER, RELIGION, & SEXUALITY

Dr Angus M Slater

QUEER THEORY

In the last lecture we continued our examination of Queer Theory, having a look at some key scholars like Larentis and Jagose, but also some of the key characteristics of Queer Theory's social and political activism.

In this lecture, we move on from that discussion towards one that is more orientated towards the body – the concepts of pain and suffering, their meaning, and their relationship with our bodies.

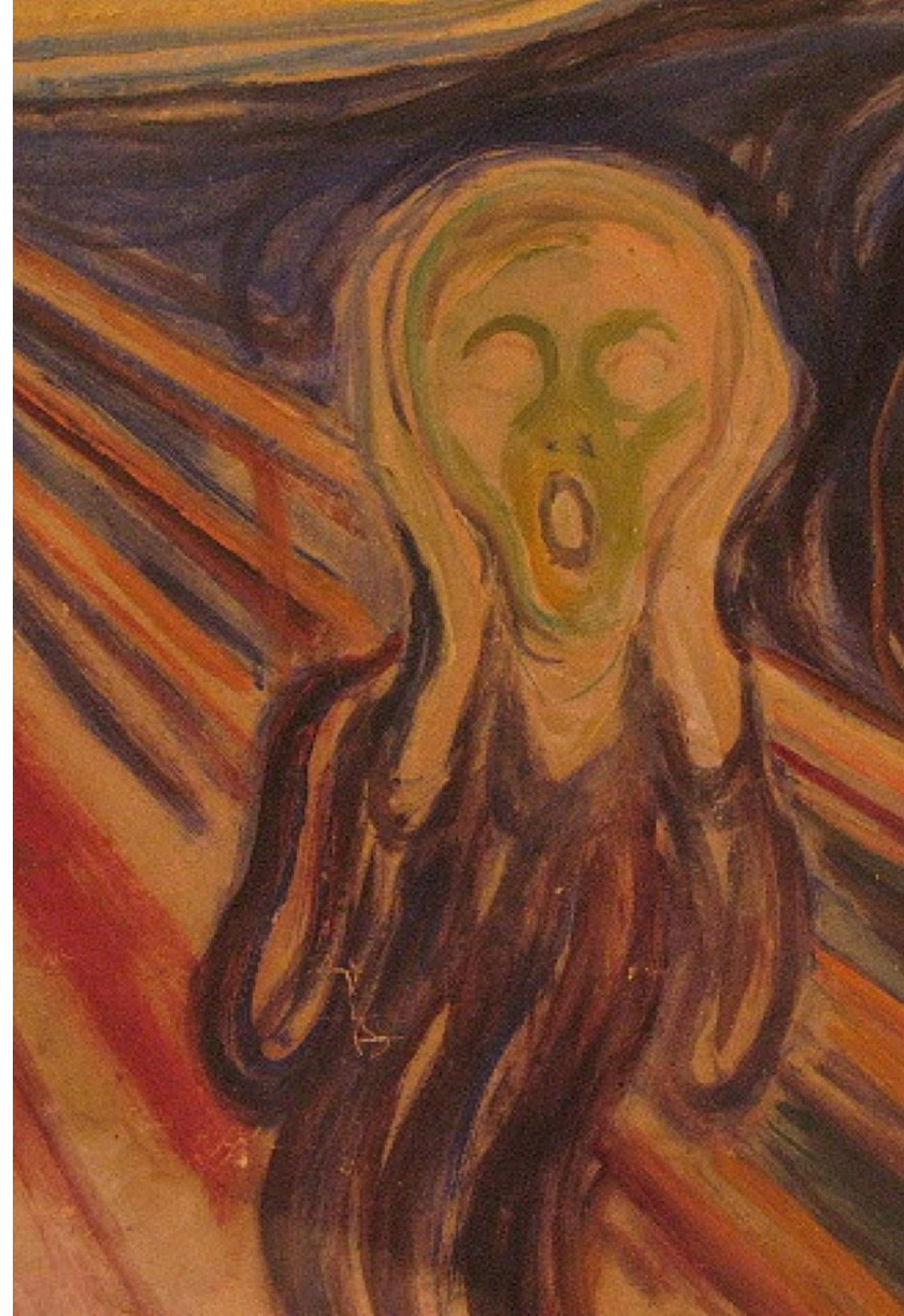
PAIN, SUFFERING, AND THE BODY

PAIN / SUFFERING / THE BODY

So far, we have looked at some examples of theory that attempt to uncover the way in which our societies operate.

We are now moving on to looking at the way in which these theories operate in particular circumstances.

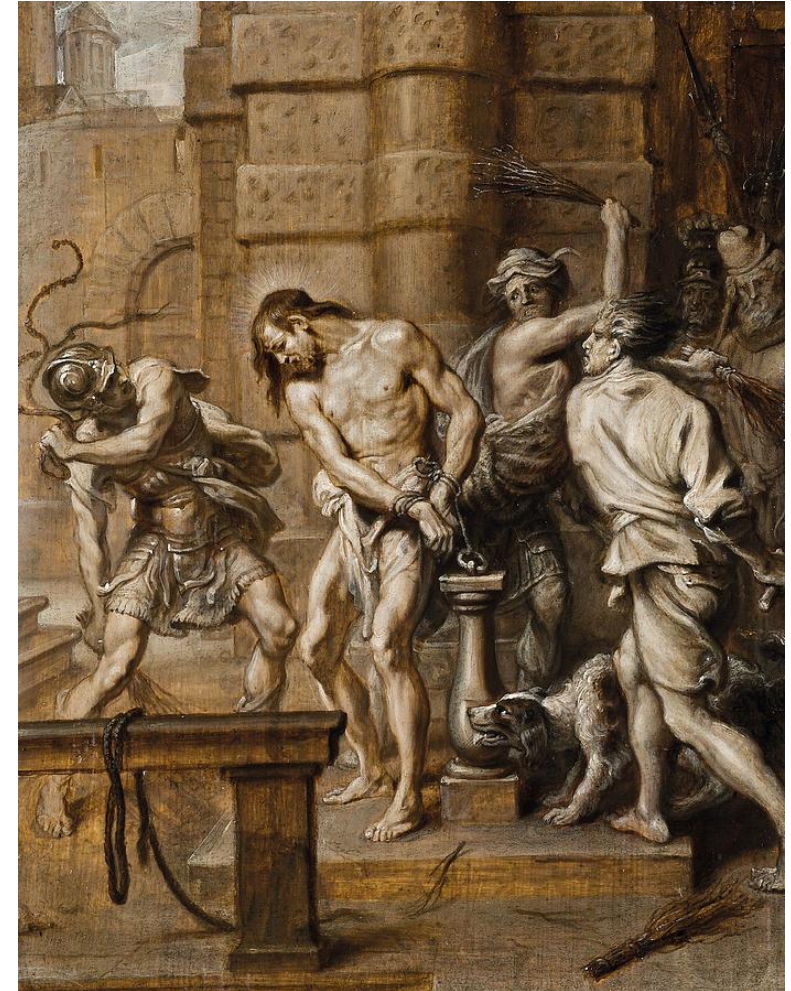
We begin with looking at the way in which we understand pain, suffering, and their connection to our bodies.



PAIN / SUFFERING / THE BODY

We being here, with suffering, as an example of the way in which our bodies impact the way we think of things, the way we feel things, and the way we understand things.

We are going to look at some theoretical understandings of where violence comes from and why the suffering of others impacts on us, and then next session, we are going to look at how these have played out in the cultural production of art.



The Flagellation
Diepenbeeck, Abraham Jansz. van
(1596-1675)

PAIN / SUFFERING / THE BODY



"A Girl in Pain," by Mila Aleksić

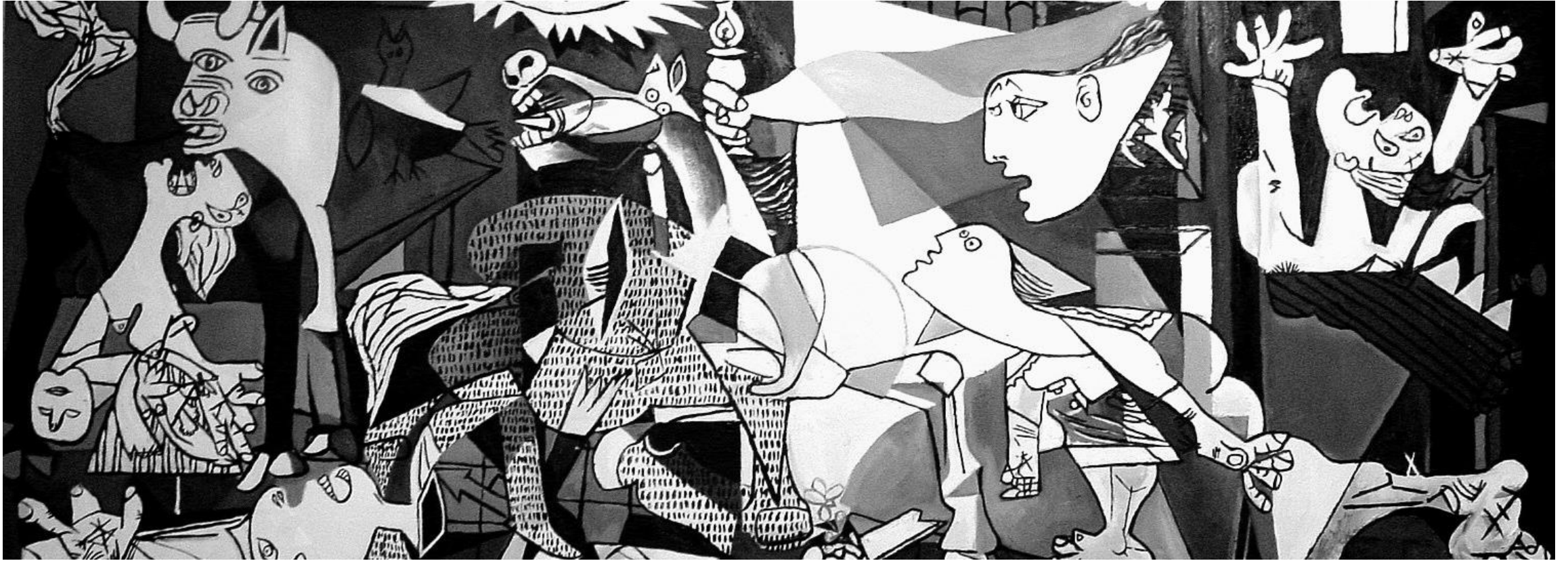
The notion of pain is bound up with conceptions of physical pain, emotional suffering, and the way that our bodies interact with our reality.

Pain is, by virtue of its universality and its affective power, one of the best places to begin to uncover aspects of our experience of reality and its meaning for us.

Pain can be physical, emotional, or social or a combination of these.



IS PAIN GOOD? |



IS PAIN NECESSARY?

**BENTHAM
AND DE SADE
ON PAIN**

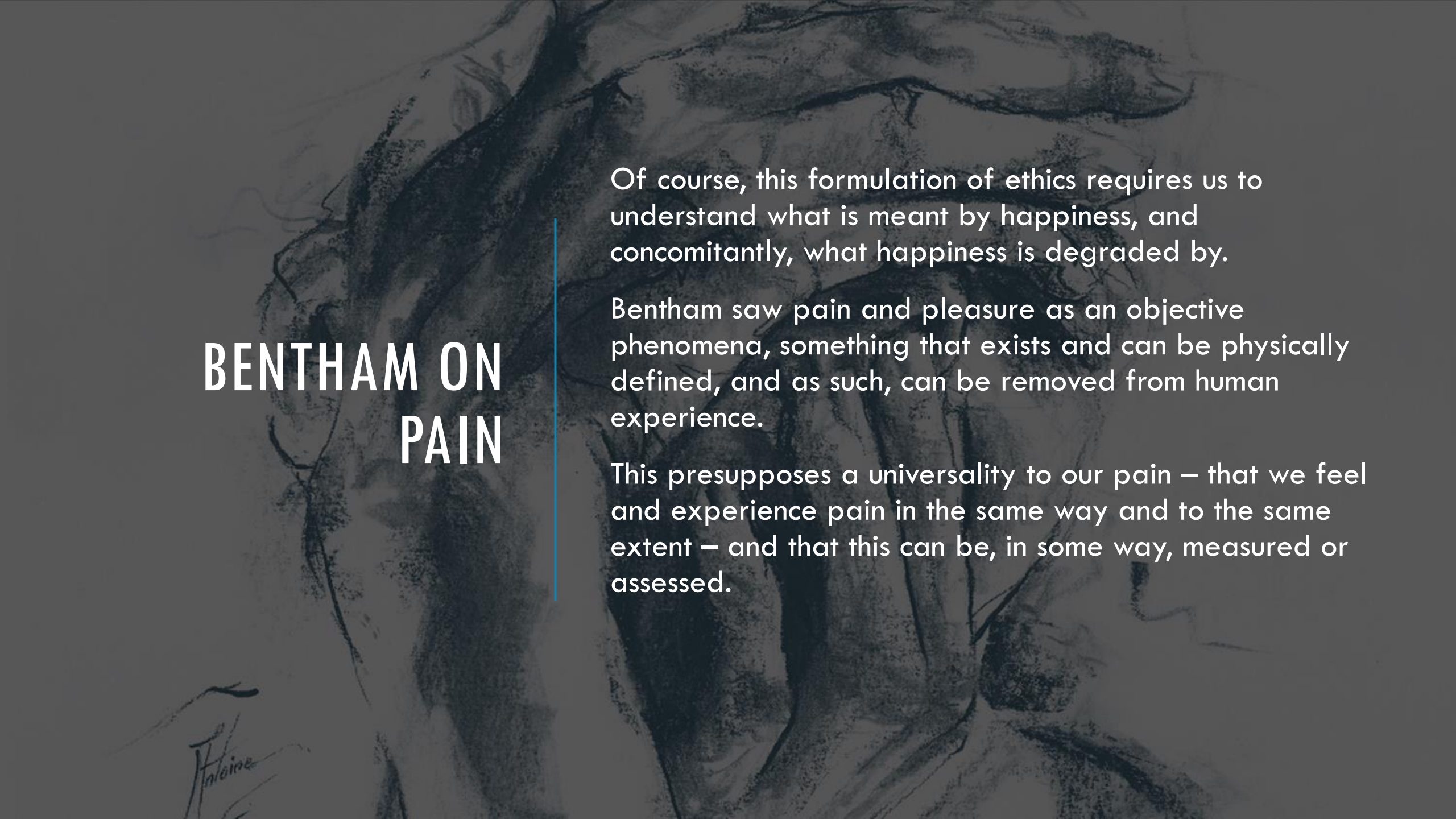


BENTHAM ON PAIN

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was a philosopher, famous largely for his work on how we should judge the morality of actions, with his work laying the foundational parts of the philosophy of **utilitarianism**.

“The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.”





BENTHAM ON PAIN

Of course, this formulation of ethics requires us to understand what is meant by happiness, and concomitantly, what happiness is degraded by.

Bentham saw pain and pleasure as an objective phenomena, something that exists and can be physically defined, and as such, can be removed from human experience.

This presupposes a universality to our pain – that we feel and experience pain in the same way and to the same extent – and that this can be, in some way, measured or assessed.

BENTHAM - *AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINCIPLES OF MORALS AND LEGISLATION*

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility* recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. (1970, 11)

BENTHAM ON PAIN

For Bentham then, pain (and pleasure) are objective realities that exist in order to govern our actions.

Pain guides us away from actions, pleasure guides us towards actions. Morality is pain / pleasure, with the good being the reduction of pain and the maximisation of pleasure.

Pain is there not necessary, nor does it serve a good. Pain has no meaning beyond this.



DE SADE ON PAIN

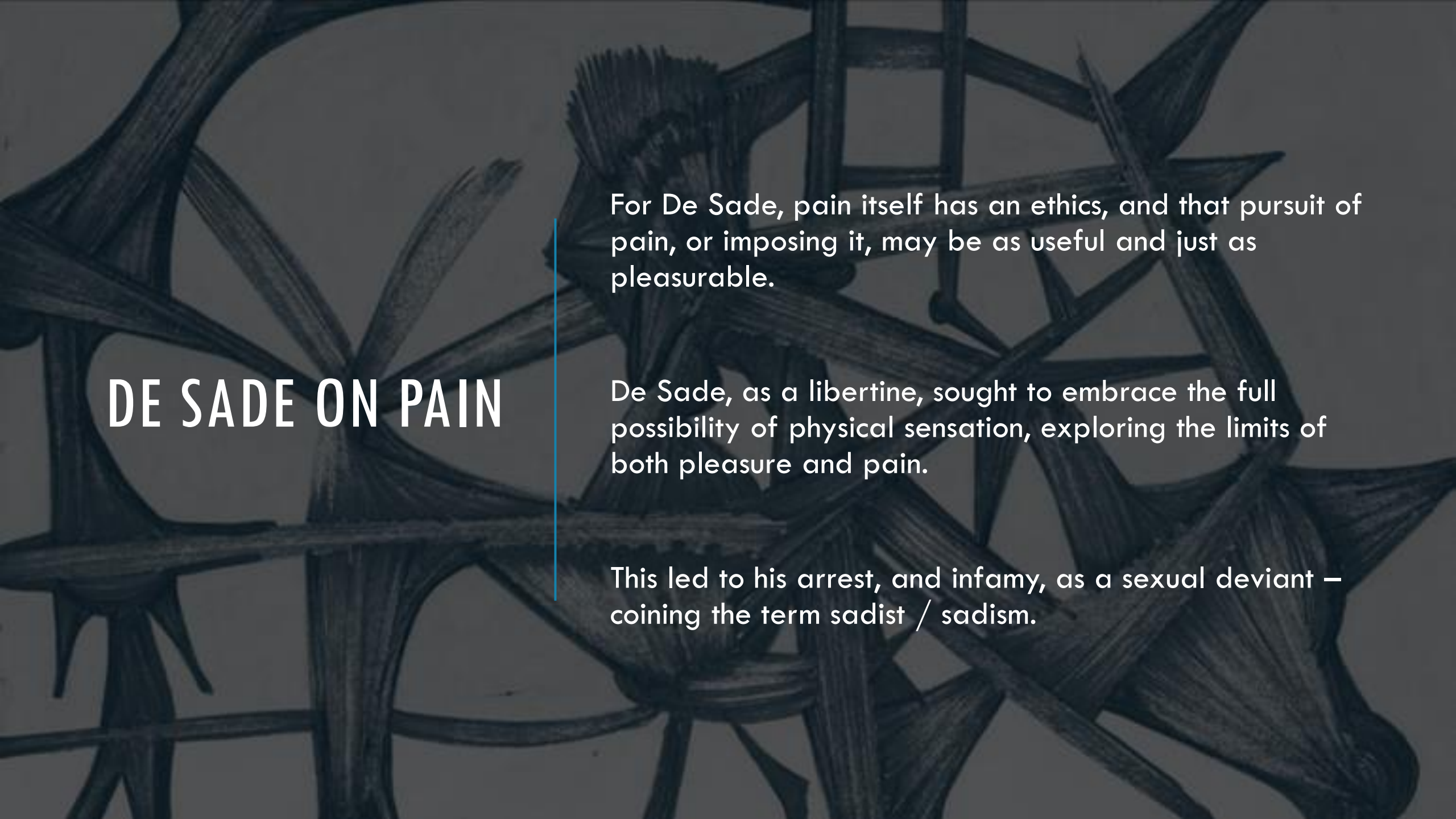
In contrast, and almost at the same time, the Marquis De Sade (1740-1814) developed an alternative approach to understanding the philosophical basis of pain.

De Sade understands pain as intimately connected to our bodily experience, indeed as the only reliable source of truth within a world in which we are engaged in producing a series of deceptions and lies about our emotions.

For De Sade, pain is inherent to our bodily experience and an intimate part of our conception of pleasure. We cannot have one, without the other.



“The Night” – Max Beckmann
1918-1919



DE SADE ON PAIN

For De Sade, pain itself has an ethics, and that pursuit of pain, or imposing it, may be as useful and just as pleasurable.

De Sade, as a libertine, sought to embrace the full possibility of physical sensation, exploring the limits of both pleasure and pain.

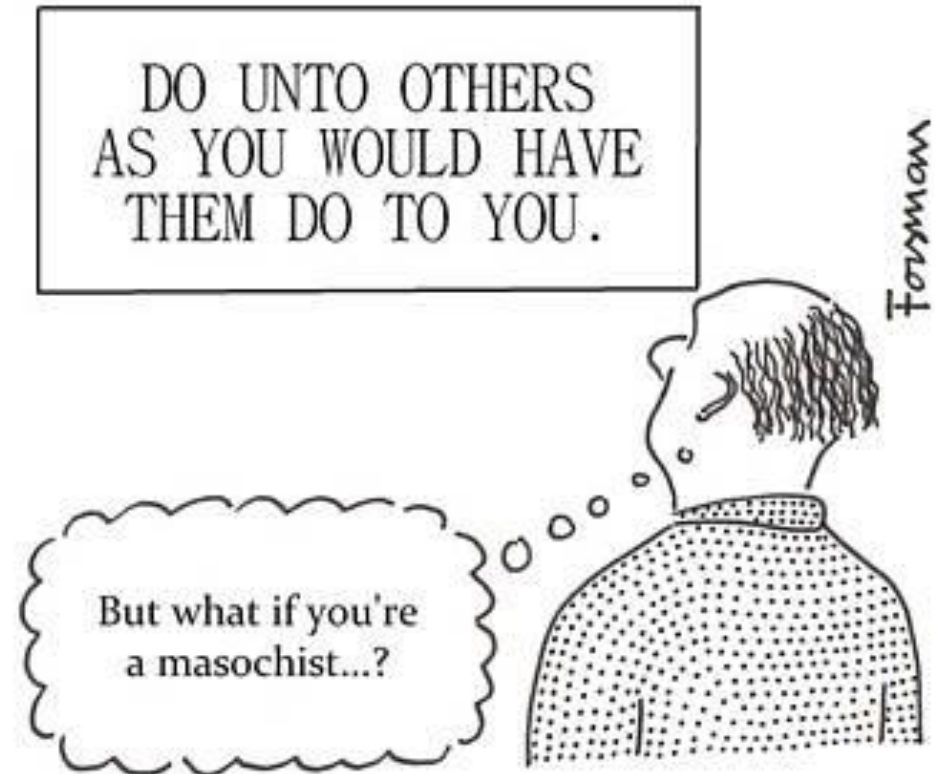
This led to his arrest, and infamy, as a sexual deviant — coining the term sadist / sadism.

DE SADE ON PAIN

Ironically, given his arrest and imprisonment, De Sade viewed the State as having the purpose of managing and regulating the infliction of pain.

For De Sade, the state does this through the mechanism of the law (drawing on notions of naturalness) and violent punishment to the contravention of social norms.

- 1 – How might this connect to Foucault's work on the notion of discipline and regulation?
- 2 – What is the role of pain and / or suffering in social punishment?
- 3 – How does our legal and social system view pain? Suffering?

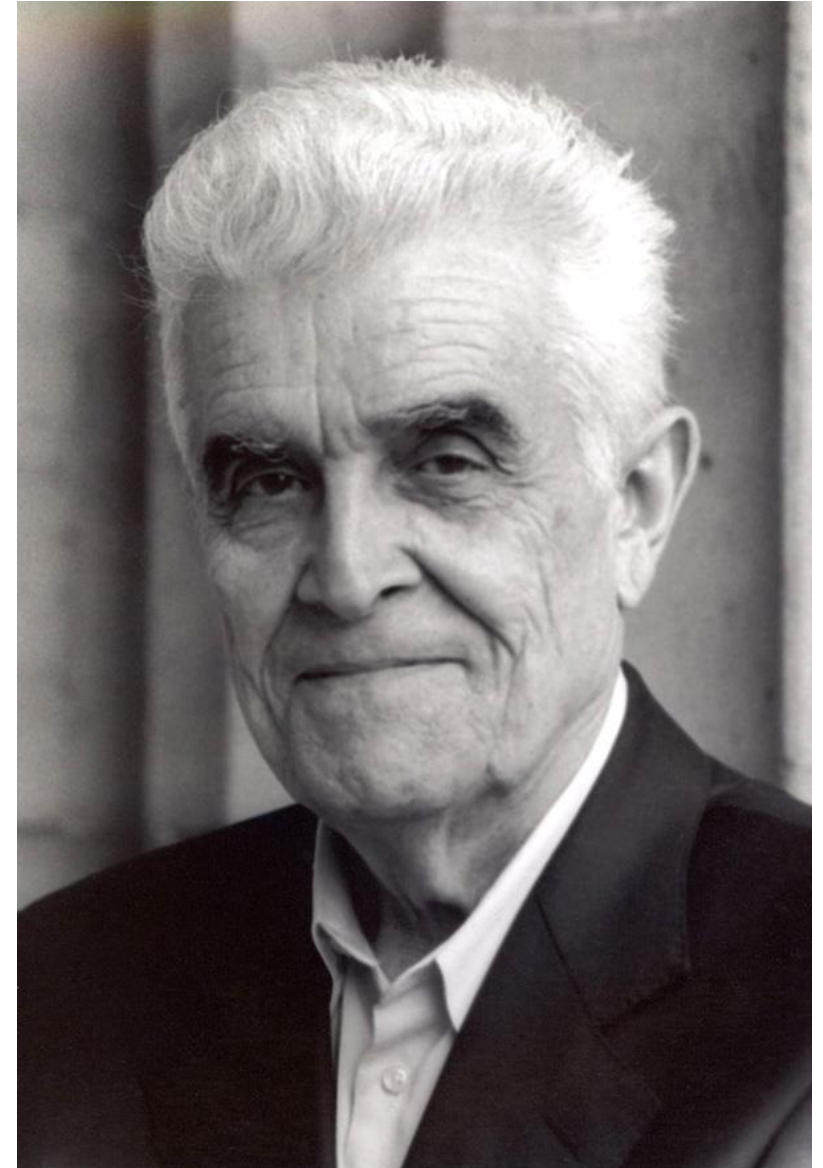


**RENE GIRARD:
MIMETIC DESIRE &
THE SCAPEGOAT
MECHANISM**

PAIN - DESIRE AND VIOLENCE

Having looked, a little, at pain as a social and philosophical concept I want to turn toward looking at some building blocks of pain – desire, whether to inflict pain or retreat from pain; and violence, either self-inflicted or inflicted onto us.

One of the key thinkers of these questions is Rene Girard (1923-2015), who begins by asking the question of why we want what we do?





WHAT DO YOU WANT? WHY DO YOU WANT IT?

Desire, Olja Sofronijevic,
Ceramics, 2019



GIRARDIAN DESIRE

Girard's fundamental concept is called 'mimetic desire'.

Girard noticed that humans are fundamentally imitating creatures — we copy what other things do and do them ourselves.

Indeed, imitation is the basic mechanism of learning (we learn inasmuch as we imitate what our teachers do), and neuroscientists are increasingly reporting that our neural structure promotes imitation very proficiently (for example, 'mirror neurons').



GIRARDIAN DESIRE

However, according to Girard, most thinking devoted to imitation pays little attention to the fact that we also imitate other people's desires, and depending on how this happens, it may lead to conflicts and rivalries.

If people imitate each other's desires, they may wind up desiring the very same things; and if they desire the same things, they may easily become rivals, as they reach for the same objects.

For Girard, imitation is the useful aspect of copying others, while mimesis is the mechanism that explains the problematic outcomes of that imitation.

DESIRE TO VIOLENCE

So what does desire have to do with violence and pain?

Girard studied the anthropological basis of myths and pre-modern societies, noticing that collective violence was a central part of society itself.

Only one man can be king (despite all desiring it), but all can share in collective violence against an other.

This collective aspect of violence allows for the expression of desire that cannot be met elsewhere, maintaining social cohesion.

DESIRE TO VIOLENCE

Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.

Rene Girard

DESIRE TO VIOLENCE

Think of the forms of violence common to our societies: bullying, sacrificial victims, marginalisation and exclusion etc etc.

- 1 - What role do these human behaviours play?
- 2 - What do these expressions of violence build up?
- 3 - Why might society want to encourage certain forms of violence against others?



Nicolae Maniu *Sacrificial morning*, 1988

DESIRE TO VIOLENCE

For Girard, violence is the key to maintaining society – without violence, imitation becomes mimesis, desire becomes rivalry, and society dissolves under its unresolved tensions.

Society requires (directed) violence in order to hold together under the strain of our imitative desires.

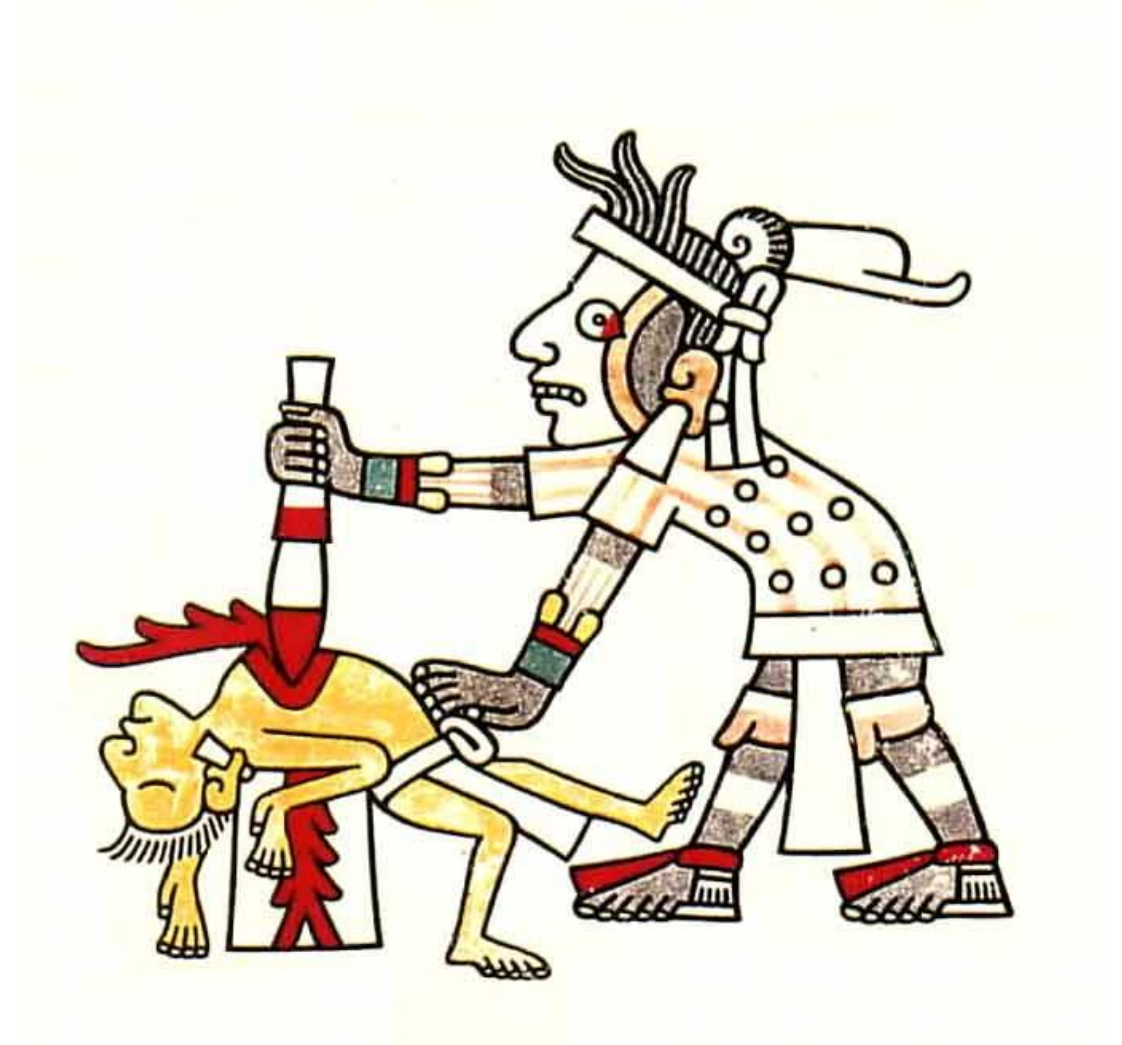
But where can this violence be safely directed?

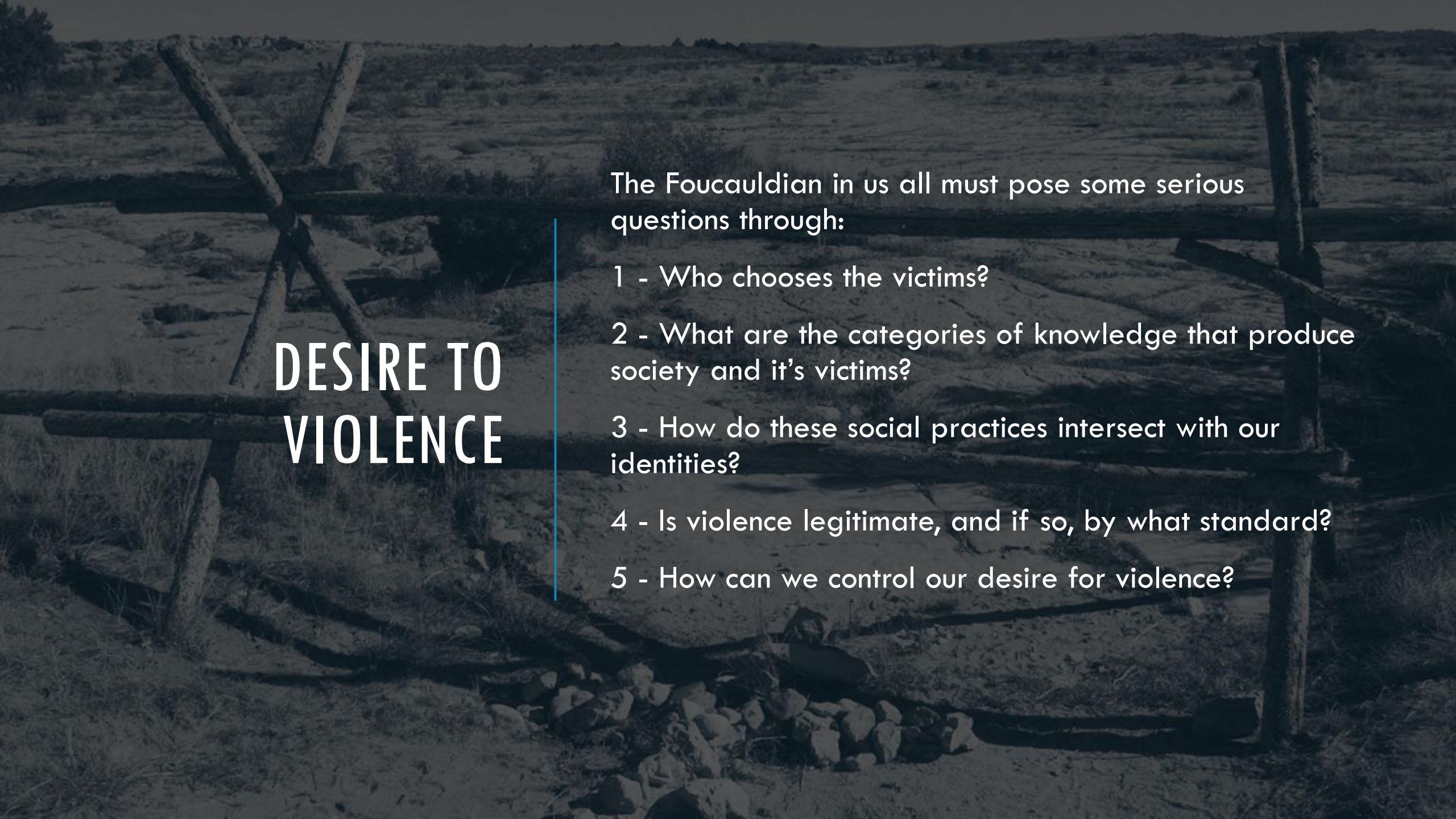


DESIRE TO VIOLENCE

Girard sees the unifying power of violence most clearly in the notion of sacrifice – the majority scapegoating a victim in order to exorcise their desire for violence. By engaging in sacrifice in this way, not only is the community bound together through shared guilt, but also the violent urge is diminished through shared action and the satisfaction of desire.

Pain and violence are therefore necessary for society – without them, and without the victims of them, society would not be able to exist.





DESIRE TO VIOLENCE

The Foucauldian in us all must pose some serious questions through:

- 1 - Who chooses the victims?
- 2 - What are the categories of knowledge that produce society and its victims?
- 3 - How do these social practices intersect with our identities?
- 4 - Is violence legitimate, and if so, by what standard?
- 5 - How can we control our desire for violence?

EMMANUEL LEVINAS & SUFFERING

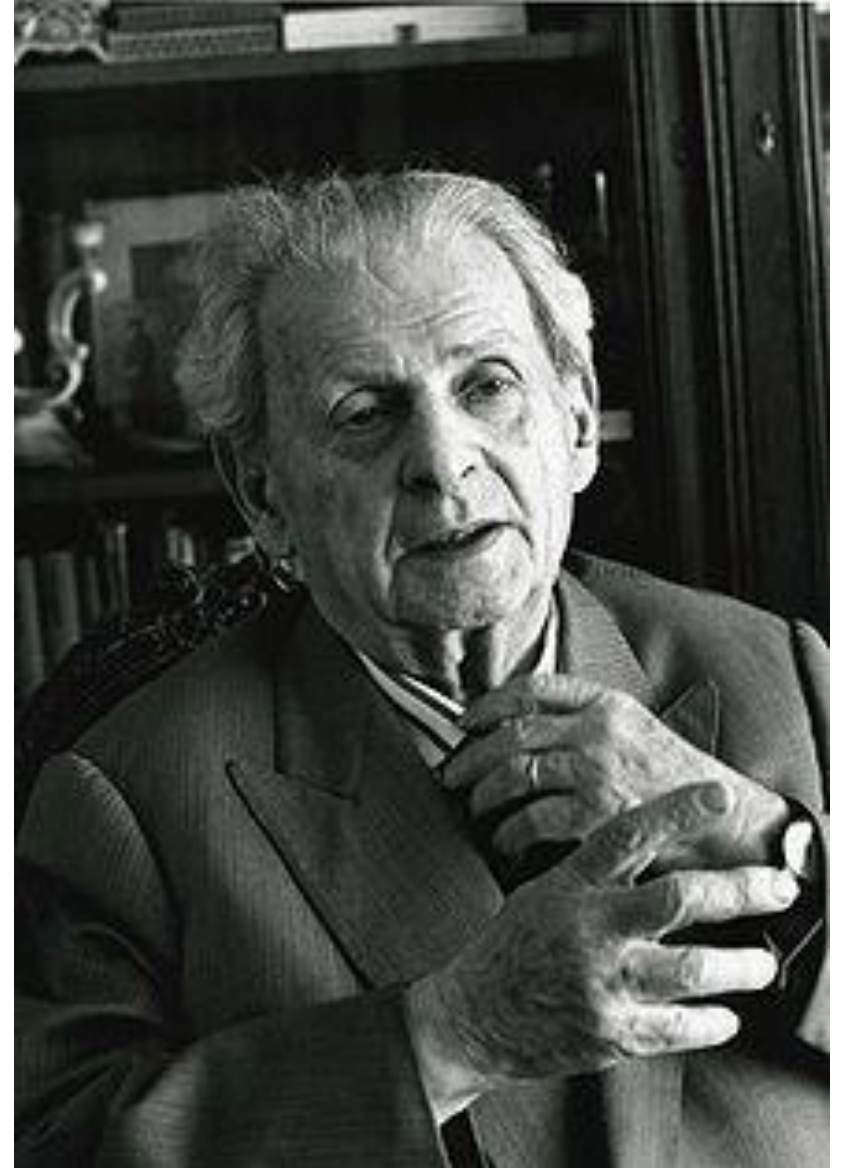


ETHICS AND SUFFERING: EMMANUEL LEVINAS

In the early work of Levinas (1905-1995), suffering is identified as the way in which humans come to understand the limits of our selves - whether through sickness, age, violence etc. - and the approach of “alterity” or difference.

As something we all share, Levinas describes compassion as ‘the nexus of human subjectivity’ and the ‘supreme ethical principle’.

Levinas’s later phenomenology of suffering as passive, meaningless, and evil, functions as a refutation of rational explanations of suffering e.g Bentham



ETHICS AND SUFFERING:

“...the suffering for the useless suffering of the other, the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the other, opens suffering to the ethical perspective of the inter-human”

Levinas, E. (1998). Useless Suffering. *Entre nous: Thinking-of-the-Other*, 65.

ETHICS AND SUFFERING: EMMANUEL LEVINAS

Levinas means that suffering takes its ethical significance from the response of others to the person who is suffering.

“Values” in society are usually unstated and unexamined, but are critical.

We believe the ethical demands of the suffering of those in greatest need with least resources should be prioritized (one example is Farmer’s “preferential option for the poor”).

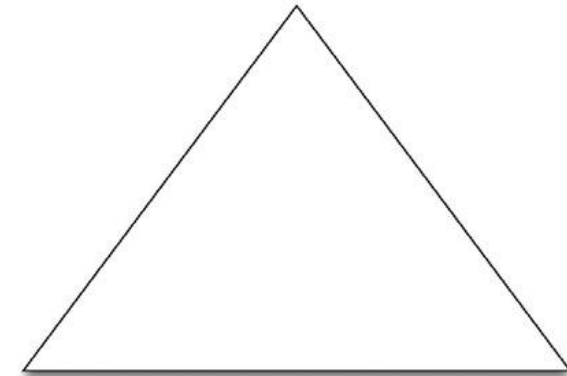


SUFFERING AND SOCIETY

Suffering can also be caused by social forces, as well as individuals: Global and local economics, politics, social institutions, social relationships, culture, e.g. **structural violence**.

Direct violence / cultural violence / structural violence.

Direct Violence
(i.e. behavioral acts)



Cultural Violence
(i.e. elements that justify violence)

Structural Violence
(i.e. patterns of inequity)

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

“...such suffering is ‘structured’ by historically given (and often economically driven) processes and forces that conspire – whether through routine, ritual or as is more commonly the case, the hard surfaces of life – to constrain agency. For many, ..., choices both large and small are limited by racism, sexism, political violence, and grinding poverty.”

(Farmer, 40)

READING

Your reading for this session is Girard, R, (1988) "Sacrifice" in 'Violence and the Sacred', London: Continuum, p.1-40

A permalink to this book is included on the Moodle page.

Yes, it is long and yes, it is complicated. Give it your best shot.

When you are struggling, read this:

<http://www.imitatio.org/brief-intro>

