

CRUELTY, SADISM, AND THE JOY OF INFLICTING PAIN FOR ITS OWN SAKE

DANIEL STATMAN

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA, ISRAEL

ABSTRACT: The paper offers a theory of cruelty that includes the following claims: First, cruelty is best understood as a disposition to take delight in the very infliction of suffering on others. Thus understood, cruelty is the same phenomenon as that studied and operationalized by psychologists in the last decade or so under the heading of everyday sadism. Second, for people to be cruel, they need not have proper understanding of the moral standing of their victims. Third, ascriptions of cruelty do not depend on judgments regarding the moral wrongness of the assumed cruel act. Fourth, since cruelty is primarily a property of agents rather than of actions, and since actions are not always a reliable indication of cruelty, identifying cruelty is a more challenging task than usually thought.

KEYWORDS: cruelty, sadism, indifference

CRUELTY is one of the worst vices, maybe the worst.¹ It is also often referred to as the paradigm of evil (McGinn 1997: 61–63). Nonetheless, it has received relatively little philosophical attention in the analytic tradition, Shklar (1984) and Kekes (1996) being the main exceptions. Also, philosophical discussions of cruelty have tended to disregard psychological research, especially recent developments in the study of what has come to be known as “everyday sadism.” In this paper, I offer a broad account of cruelty informed by this research and discuss some of its normative implications.

More particularly, the paper argues for the following claims:

- A. Cruelty is best understood as a disposition to take delight in the very infliction of suffering on others (or in the active watching of such infliction).
- B. Thus understood, cruelty is the same phenomenon as that studied and operationalized by psychologists in the last decade or so under the heading of everyday sadism.
- C. For a person to be cruel, he² need not have proper understanding of the moral standing of his victims.

- D. Ascriptions of cruelty do not depend on judgments regarding the moral wrongness of the assumed cruel act.
- E. Since cruelty is primarily a property of agents rather than of actions, and since actions are not always a reliable indication of cruelty, identifying cruelty is a more challenging task than usually thought.

In section I, I analyze the definition of cruelty as a disposition to take delight in the suffering of others for its own sake. In section II, I show how psychologists have been studying cruelty under the title of sadism. I mention the main results of this study and show how it enriches our understanding of the nature of cruelty. In Section III, I criticize the claim that taking delight in the suffering of others is insufficient to serve as a definition of cruelty because cruelty also requires an understanding of the moral standing of the people concerned. Section IV then shows that it is not so easy to establish that people are cruel and that ascriptions of cruelty are often biased and motivated. In section V, I analyze the relation between cruelty and wrongness, arguing that a cruel motivation can turn an otherwise permissible action into a wrong one. In section VI, I offer some concluding thoughts.

I. CRUELTY AND ENJOYING SUFFERING FOR ITS OWN SAKE

What is the best way to understand the notion of cruelty? Let me start by saying that cruelty is not a feature of *states of affairs*, e.g., states of affairs involving great pain or suffering. Such states are bad, regrettable, and sometimes tragic, but they can be described as cruel only if the term is used in a very loose way.

This encourages the thought that ‘cruel’ is better seen as a property of *actions*, that is, what is cruel is *the bringing about* of (serious) pain. But this too is insufficient because bringing about pain by mistake would not count as an instance of cruelty. So maybe cruelty has to do with *knowingly* bringing about pain and suffering? This wouldn’t suffice either. As Kekes notes (1996: 836), dentists and physical fitness instructors knowingly cause pain to their patients/trainees, but are not regarded for that reason as cruel. Pain for them is a mere by-product; they don’t *intend* it. Maybe, then, cruelty has to do with *intentionally* inflicting pain. This characterization makes progress but is still insufficient. To see why, consider an officer who is deliberately harsh with his cadets, causing them much pain, physical and psychological, for the sake of toughening them. The officer wants his cadets to suffer, albeit as a means to making them better officers. Nonetheless, he would not count as cruel. It seems, therefore, that the very infliction of harm, be it as a side effect (as in the case of a dentist) or even directly intended (as in the case of the officer), is not cruel for that reason alone.

What’s missing is the observation that when a person behaves cruelly, he regards the pain he inflicts as an end in itself and takes delight in it. Indeed, this has become the most common understanding of cruelty among philosophers, for instance, by Robert Adams who says that cruelty is “a settled tendency to aim at and delight in, the pain and humiliation of others for its own sake” (2006: 40)³

One of the paper’s referees expressed the worry that defining cruelty in terms of such a tendency or *disposition* has the counterintuitive implication that people

can be cruel even if they never actually carry out cruel acts. This is because, for a disposition to materialize, some conditions (physical, social, psychological and so on) need to be satisfied, but the existence of the disposition does not depend on their satisfaction. In response, let me say first that it is hard to imagine a life in which the conditions for the “activation” of cruelty are never satisfied, and second, that the idea of a disposition that is never manifested is incoherent. As Maria Alvarez put it (2017: 79), “a person does not have a character trait unless she has manifested it in some way, at some time: someone who has never had a generous thought, feeling, reaction or action is not a generous person; and someone who has never had a malicious, courageous, or timid thought, feeling, or has acted accordingly does not have the corresponding character trait.”

A different worry stems from the thought that one can act cruelly in the sense just explained without having a *disposition* to cruelty.⁴ To the extent that this is possible, it means that people can act out of character; that even though they don’t have the character trait of cruelty they can act cruelly. I cannot explore this question here. I will just say that, in my estimation, these would be exceptional cases. Most of those motivated to act out of cruelty are cruel *people*.

Tying cruelty to a disposition to aim at and delight in the suffering of others does not rule out the possibility of talking about cruel *actions*, but only derivatively; a cruel action is one carried out from a cruel motivation (Kekes 1996: 837). In this sense, cruel actions belong to a wider category of actions such as compassionate actions, kind ones, vengeful ones and so on, that cannot be described as such without reference to (mental) properties of their agents. An action isn’t vengeful if its agent did not have revenge in mind when executing it, isn’t kind without being an expression of the agent’s kindness, and isn’t cruel unless motivated by a cruel motivation.⁵

One might suggest in response defining cruel actions independently of their motives or intentions. One might suggest that cruel actions are simply actions that cause unjustified or unnecessary suffering (see Hursthouse 2012: 16). But think of a doctor who, on the basis of her best medical knowledge, causes pain to some patient that turns out to be unnecessary. Or think of her causing such pain inconsistent with the accepted medical knowledge, just because of her fatigue or because of some innocent mistake. In both cases, the doctor would be causing unnecessary, hence unjustified pain, but it could be regarded as cruel only in the loose sense indicated above. One might suggest improving this definition by talking of an *intention* to cause unnecessary or unjustified pain, but I doubt whether this would help. First, this would again include an essential reference to the agent in the characterization of an action as cruel. Second, this revised definition is ambivalent between two readings: A *de re* reading according to which the agent intends to cause pain which happens to be unnecessary, and a *de dicto* reading according to which the agent intends to cause pain *because* it is unnecessary. In the former, I think neither the action nor the agent should be seen as cruel (except, again, in a rather loose manner). In the latter, he definitely should, but, in my view, this is so just because the case satisfies the above condition of intending pain for its own sake.

Cruelty is often defined disjunctively, suggesting that cruelty is either taking delight in the suffering of another or being indifferent to it. However, as argued

by Mayes (2009: 30–31), the second disjunct has no explanatory power. Cruelty is a property of agents that is supposed to shed light on their actions insofar as they are carried out as a result of this property. Yet, while the expected delight in the victim's suffering can play this explanatory role, indifference cannot. The fact that most of us don't help those starving in the Third World is not explained by any psychological benefit that we gain, or hope to gain, by our indifference. Thus, while the delight taken in the suffering of others provides a positive motive to make them suffer, hence an explanation for why people behave cruelly, this is not the case with indifference.⁶ I realize that traits of character can be looked at from other perspectives as well, but, following Butler (1988), I'm interested here in how they figure in *explanations of motivation and behavior*. Since, as explained, indifference is not helpful for this endeavor, I'll omit it in what follows and refer to the delight taken in the causing (or active watching) of suffering as the essence of cruelty.⁷

I should add that I'm also skeptical about the usefulness of referring to indifference as a way of simply describing, rather than explaining cruelty. The reason is that judgements concerning indifference are typically based on normative judgements regarding what one ought to have done, or ought to have considered. To say that, in doing x, S was indifferent to some property of S, p, is to assume that S should have considered p, which would have assumingly made him behave differently than he actually did. For instance, when animal rights advocates claim that meat-eaters or meat-cookers are cruel as they are indifferent to animal suffering, they are not merely describing the latter's behavior but morally judging it. They assume that such suffering should be taken into consideration and also that doing so would lead to the abolishment of the meat industry.

Back to Adams's definition. As you recall, the definition refers to two conditions: (a) its "for-its-own-sakeness," and (b) the delight the agent takes in the victim's pain or suffering. Although both conditions can be found in definitions of cruelty, their exact meaning and the relation between them need some clarification.

Condition (a) seems to imply that when the infliction of suffering is not for its own sake, but for the sake of some other goal, namely, when it is *instrumental*, it is not a case of cruelty. But that seems wrong. Torturing an innocent person instrumentally, for instance in order to terrorize his friends, is not for that reason alone non-cruel. Non-instrumentality, therefore, is not a necessary condition for cruelty. It is not a sufficient condition either. Within some versions of retributivism, making criminals suffer in accordance with their desert is what justice demands (or at least permits). It is not an *instrument* for the assumed realization of justice; it *is* the realization of justice. Yet such infliction of suffering need not be *cruel* (though it might be).

At this point, it might help to turn to condition (b) which seems to be doing most of the work here. When agents enjoy inflicting or watching others inflict suffering on others, such enjoyment seems a sufficient condition for cruelty, regardless of whether the suffering inflicted is for its own sake or for the sake of some other goal (like in the torture case) and even regardless of whether the infliction is objectively justified. Think of the harsh training officer mentioned above, but assume that this time he is a true sadist who chose the career of an officer in the specific base in which he is stationed precisely because of the opportunities this offers him

to cause pain to the cadets subject to him. The pain he inflicts upon them does not exceed the pain licensed by the army regulations, but he does so joyfully and seeks opportunities that might grant him such joy. He is obviously cruel.

Thus, cruel people enjoy making (and watching) others suffer, and, because of that, seek opportunities to facilitate and promote this enjoyment. The enjoyment sought is “for its own sake” in the sense that the cruel derive pleasure from the very infliction (or watching) of pain, regardless of whether it is otherwise beneficial or justified. For the cruel, the very infliction of suffering on others is pleasurable, a fact captured by the common characterization of cruelty as inflicting suffering just “for fun.”

Let me be more precise in describing the pleasure we’re talking about. I do not refer to the notion of pleasure as a by-product of achieving other ends. Arguably, when a person gets pleasure from avenging a rival, his end was *revenge*, not pleasure, which he experiences only as long as he manages to realize this end (Hume 1751: 301–302). Applying this notion to the present context would mean that the pleasure the cruel feel and seek is the pleasure driven by the successful realization of another end. But this seems an odd picture of the cruel person’s psychology. His enjoyment is driven by the very infliction of suffering on others, not by his satisfaction in the successful realization of some other end. He enjoys inflicting (or watching) suffering, just as he enjoys, say, hiking, playing basketball, or having sex.

Thus understood, is such enjoyment also a necessary condition for cruelty, or only a sufficient one? In other words, can one aim at the suffering of others for its own sake (neither as an instrument for some perceived good, nor as a realization of justice) without hoping to *enjoy* it? Conceptually, the answer seems to be yes. As Stocker put it, “just as helping another can be the direct and proper object of desires and appetites, so can harming others” (1979: 748, followed by Battaly 2015: 99). Note, however, that Stocker talks about harming within certain moods and circumstances, usually against an offending party, which seems to show that the harmer does not value the infliction of harm for its own sake, otherwise he would inflict it on anybody. True, according to Stocker, the harming is sometimes directed at others as well, but such harming is usually not that serious and, in any case, is limited to the time span of the relevant emotions. I am, therefore, skeptical about how helpful it is to view such harmers as *cruel*. Without ruling out this possibility, I conjecture that the great majority of real-world cruel people are not of this kind, but are people who enjoy inflicting suffering on others and are motivated by the expectation of such enjoyment.

One should be cautious not to take the above conditions too literally. If cruelty consisted of the enjoyment of suffering “in itself,” then cruel people would enjoy inflicting suffering on anybody and watching any person in pain. But this is not the case. Cruel people are rather selective in the objects of their cruelty. Usually they don’t take delight in the suffering of their parents or their buddies, while they often do take such delight in the suffering of the homeless, their female partners, the members of perceived inferior minorities, and so on. So it’s not the infliction of suffering *per se* that brings delight to its perpetrator, but something that has to do with the intricate relations between this infliction and other goals and desires, including, but not limited to, the will to power.⁸ The “for-its-own-sake” language

tends to obscure this fact and lend the impression that cruelty nourishes on blood (so to say), being indifferent to whose blood it is, what the social circumstances are, and so on. The factors that affect the selectivity of cruelty/sadism are only just starting to be explored (see Dinić et al. 2021, esp. 55).

Finally, the fact that human beings enjoy the very infliction of suffering should be understood in a way that leaves open the possibility that this enjoyment is grounded in a desire for something else. Nietzsche, for instance, thought that the urge for cruelty is a manifestation — a distorted one in his view — of the will to power, which he regarded as the more fundamental force in human nature.⁹ Yet it would be absurd to say that because the real goal of inflicting suffering is *power*, or *domination*, it fails to meet the for-its-own-sake condition and, therefore, strictly speaking, is not cruelty. We must interpret the for-its-own-sake condition in a way that would avoid this result; cruel actions occur whenever people non-derivatively (or “directly”)¹⁰ enjoy the infliction or the watching of suffering, regardless of whether this enjoyment is grounded in more basic human goals, desires or interests, of which the agents are rarely fully conscious. Similarly with the view found in Augustine, according to which the ultimate attraction in committing evil, particularly acts of cruelty, is the very transgression it involves.¹¹ This ultimate motivation wouldn’t of course make the direct delight taken in inflicting suffering any less cruel.

The proposed analysis of cruelty in terms of the delight taken in the infliction of suffering makes the phenomenon under discussion appear rather mysterious. Why would anybody enjoy the very infliction of pain on others, if not carried out either as a means to achieve some desired goal, or as a perceived realization of (retributive) justice? *What is there to enjoy in such circumstances?*¹²

The common way to understand this question is within evolutionary theory (how did the evolution of cruelty promote the survival of our ancestors?), as are the proposed answers. Elsewhere (Statman 2019), I expressed some skepticism about the force of evolutionary explanations in such contexts because of their speculative nature. In this vein, Nell’s evolutionary explanation for cruelty (2006) has been rejected by Ainslie, arguing that there is no evidence that animals enjoy the very infliction of pain on their prey; “It is not clear whether a cat plays with a mouse partially in order to savor the distress of the victim, or merely since it is an optimally challenging game” (2006: 224). Be that as it may, for the last several thousands of years, cruelty has been an undeniable aspect of human nature. Regarding *humanity*, Hume famously said that “it is needless to push our researches so far as to ask *why* we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient that this is experienced to be a principle in human nature” (1751: 219, note, italics added). The same might be true of cruelty. Whatever its evolutionary genealogy, we have to come to terms with the fact that it is “a principle of human nature.” How much so will become even more evident in the next section.

II. CRUELTY AND EVERYDAY SADISM

Does empirical psychology confirm the existence of cruelty thus understood? The surprising thing one discovers when turning to the psychological literature is that the notion of cruelty is hardly in use there. Its exact meaning is not discussed and,

more importantly, it is not operationalized. That does not mean that psychologists are uninterested in the phenomenon under discussion. They are. It just falls under a different title, that of *sadism*. When we look at the way *sadism* is defined in the psychological literature, we find the same definition as that offered by philosophers for *cruelty*; “sadistic individuals take pleasure in causing or witnessing acts of cruelty, in which the suffering of others in itself is rewarding” (Johnson et al. 2019, 127).¹³

Philosophers unfamiliar with the ways in which psychologists conceptualize the phenomenon at hand might respond by suggesting that while sadism is a clinical concept, restricted to ill persons, this is not the case with cruelty. But, following the work of Buckels et al. 2013, there is growing interest among psychologists in “everyday sadism,” defined as “a pleasure-driven form of aggression demarcated by having an enjoyment of cruelty in normal, everyday situations” (Erickson and Sagarin 2021). This form of aggression shows that one “can have sadistic impulses while remaining psychologically normal” (Paulhus and Dutton 2016, 115).¹⁴

Unlike the concept of cruelty, that of sadism *has* been operationalized by psychologists. First, several questionnaires measuring the level of sadism have been proposed. They include questions such as “I have hurt people for my own amusement,” “In video games, I like the realistic blood spurts,” and “I have tormented others without feeling remorse.”¹⁵ Second, some creative experiments have been conducted to test the seeking and enjoyment of the infliction of suffering in circumstances in which doing so is non-instrumental and unprovoked. One such experiment tested cruelty carried out on bugs (or at least believed by the participants to have been carried out), another on cruelty carried out on people (using “white noise”). The growing literature in this field has yielded the following results:

Everyday sadists have lower levels of disgust sensitivity, demonstrate a willingness to harm bugs, experience reward when doing so, and demonstrate a willingness to implement unprovoked aggression toward an unknown other. Everyday sadism positively predicts time spent playing violent video games, enjoyment of Internet trolling, behavioral delinquency in boys, rape myth acceptance and sexual violence in men, hostile femininity in women, and adversarial sexual attitudes in women. (Erickson and Sagarin 2021: 1).¹⁶

Cruelty, or everyday sadism, is therefore widespread. We can now understand why Buckels et al. (2013) chose Nietzsche’s famous saying that “to see others suffer does one good, to make others suffer even more” (*Genealogy of Morals*, 2:6) as an epigraph to their influential paper on the topic. The wide presence of cruelty among normal people seems to confirm Nietzsche’s point that cruelty has deep roots in the human psyche.¹⁷ The real question is not “how can people be so cruel?”¹⁸ but how is it that, in spite of the human attraction to cruelty, most people manage to behave in a more or less civilized manner.¹⁹

Realizing that cruelty is “part of being human” (Taylor 2009: 232) is helpful in understanding the causal link between cruelty (or sadism) and boredom. This link has been empirically established by Pfattheicher et al. (2021), who have shown that boredom increases sadistic behavior, especially when people don’t have other alternatives. In such circumstances, sadistic behavior is increased even among individuals who are generally low in dispositional sadism. But surely bored people would choose to do something only if they found it exciting. Usually, they get

enough excitement and interest from other activities, hence, given the social condemnation of bullying, they are content with these other activities. But when they are bored, when no other activities or events excite them, they are driven to action by their primordial attraction to cruelty with the emotional high that comes with it.

I've been assuming throughout that "actively" watching people suffer is also a form of cruelty, which can be called indirect cruelty. Similarly, there are two forms of sadism, direct (causing pain to others for its own sake) and indirect, or *vicarious* (taking pleasure in watching the suffering of others). Given the apparent prevalence of such indirect sadism expressed, *inter alia*, by the excitement of watching gladiators, public torture scenes, or snuff films, one would hope that it is a separate phenomenon, unrelated to "real," direct cruelty. But the empirical study of sadism does not confirm this hope. The Varieties of Sadistic Tendencies Questionnaire (Paulhus and Jones, 2015) comprises separate subscales for direct and vicarious forms of sadism. Items on the direct subscale include items like "I like to physically hurt people," whereas items on the vicarious subscale include items like "I like to watch YouTube videos of people fighting" or "In car racing, it's the accidents I enjoy most." It has been shown that "although structural analyses revealed separate factors for direct and vicarious sadism, they were highly correlated. Hence, the same people who like to hurt others also like to watch others being hurt" (Paulhus and Dutton 2016: 113). Although taking delight in watching people suffer is less dangerous and less morally repulsive than taking delight in *making* them suffer, it seems to be connected to the same dark aspect of humanity exposed mercilessly by Nietzsche.

Finally, note that vicarious sadism is close to *schadenfreude*, which has led some writers to see the latter as a mere manifestation of the former (Stein 1992). Others draw a distinction between the two (Ben-Ze'ev 2014), regarding *schadenfreude* as much less bothersome.²⁰ I won't be able to explore here the relation between these two phenomena. I note that although, in both *schadenfreude* and sadism, one derives pleasure from the suffering of others, the psychological factors that influence the former — perceived deservingness (Feather 1989), envy (Smith at al. 1996), dislike (Greenier 2021) and just world belief (Pietraszkiewicz 2013) — are not those that influence the latter. Not all cases of enjoying the suffering of others are subject to the same psychological mechanism.²¹

III. CRUELTY AND MORAL UNDERSTANDING

A basic proposition in my argument has been that taking delight in the infliction of suffering is sufficient for cruelty. This proposition, however, has been challenged by Dana Nelkin who argued that "the mere taking of pleasure in the pain, and even in being the instrument of pain, does not entail cruelty or contempt" (2015: 368). While the taking of such pleasure is necessary for cruelty, it is insufficient. To motivate her objection to the above view, Nelkin invites us to imagine an opposite case to cruelty:

Imagine a creature who lacks all moral understanding and does not see others' interests as fundamentally reason-giving, but who, along with beer and cigarettes, enjoys watching car chases and other people enjoying themselves.

He doesn't care about other people in the sense of taking their interests to be reasons for acting. He just enjoys seeing them having a good time. (2015: 367)

In Nelkin's view, even though this creature [henceforth 'C'] enjoys watching people enjoy themselves, since C lacks all moral understanding, we would be reluctant to describe it as *kind*. For C, the enjoyment of watching people enjoy themselves is no different than the enjoyment of watching car chases. C can't be kind because kindness assumes a recognition of the moral standing of others (henceforth, 'MSO'). Similarly — on the opposite side of the spectrum — cruelty requires more than a distinct emotion, namely, delight in the suffering of others. The cruel person is one who acknowledges the moral standing of his victim, but does not regard it as a reason to refrain from inflicting pain on her.²² Thus, in Nelkin's view, cruel actions occur only when perpetrators act with "sufficient understanding of the concept of the moral standing of others" (2015: 371). Without such understanding, they "can have a number of bad qualities, but not cruelty and other paradigm moral vices in particular" (*ibid.*).

The particular context of this claim is a debate about whether psychopaths, stipulated as having no capacity to see the interests of others as reason-giving, can exhibit ill-will in the form of contempt or of cruelty. Against Gary Watson (1996) who argues that they can, Nelkin argues that they cannot. For the sake of the present discussion, we can bracket the issue of psychopaths. It is interesting to note, however, that, for psychologists, psychopaths are not cruel in the strict sense of the word. I refer mainly to Buckels et al. who conclude from their studies that "sadists possess an intrinsic appetitive motivation to inflict suffering on innocent others—a motivation that is absent in other dark personalities [including psychopaths]" (2013: 2207). In their understanding, what characterizes psychopaths is their instrumental attitude to human beings, due to which they often harm and aggress against them. Unlike sadists, they derive no pleasure from doing so. The harm they inflict is not for its own sake.²³

Be that as it may be, the question is whether cruelty requires the additional condition suggested by Nelkin, namely, that the inflictor of suffering has a sufficient understanding of the concept of the moral standing of others (MSO). To start unpacking it, let me first address kindness. The main problem with Nelkin's thought experiment is that the creature she asks us to imagine is so bizarre that it is unclear what can be learned from it with regard to real human beings. Since kindness has to do with caring about other human beings, C is portrayed as not really caring about them but, nonetheless, for some mysterious reason, enjoying seeing them enjoy themselves. In other words, we should ask whether C understands that the people he watches *enjoy* themselves and that this is something that is good for them, i.e., something that contributes to their wellbeing. If he does, it is unclear in what sense it would be correct to say that "he doesn't care about the other people in the sense of taking their interests to be reasons for action" (Nelkin 2015: 367, cited above).

At any rate, in Nelkin's view, what's needed in order to attribute kindness to C, is that C acknowledges the moral standing of those whose enjoyment C finds enjoyable. Yet even Kant who denied the moral value of actions not carried out for the right reason (namely, out of duty) did not go so far as to deny aretaic titles

like ‘sympathetically attuned’ from agents motivated by positive emotions to help others. Although such agents might not have a clear concept of MSO and consequently won’t be motivated by this concept in their behavior, it still makes sense to talk of them as sympathetically attuned or as kind. In this way, enjoying watching people enjoy themselves *is* an indication of kindness, regardless of whether one has a sufficient understanding of the concept of MSO.²⁴ The question of whether they are morally inferior to those acting out of duty, as Kant thought, can be put aside for now. For the sake of the present discussion we only need the premise that such agents can be attributed positive aretaic properties, such as kindness, even when they cannot be attributed an understanding of MSO.

I should add that the additional condition that Nelkin proposes is far too intellectual. I, for one, have been in the business of moral philosophy for quite a while and still would have to work hard to explain to myself or to others what is meant by MSO. Maybe on Nelkin’s analysis that would just be a reason to doubt my kindness. But then I think of other people whose kindness is a source of inspiration to me and to others, but who would find it even harder than I do to explain the above concept — if they would understand the question at all. Nelkin’s condition unreasonably reduces the category of people who could qualify as kind.

Having rejected Nelkin’s argument for what is required for genuine kindness, her analogous move regarding cruelty seems unmotivated. Some cruel people have a sufficient understanding of the concept of MSO and, nonetheless, take delight in inflicting pain on others, but I see no reason to assume that cruelty must include such understanding. That’s why children too can be cruel²⁵ although such understanding cannot be attributed to them.

Heather Battaly makes a general point about the notion of vice pertinent to the present context. According to some views, she says, a person can be vicious only if she has “a conception of what is good or bad.” But, she goes on to ask, “isn’t vice easier to get than this?” (2015: 99). Having a conception of what is good or bad is, therefore, neither a condition for vice in general, nor for cruelty in particular.

Nelkin’s main motivation in making the understanding of MSO a necessary condition for cruelty is the thought that if those who enjoy the infliction of suffering lack such moral understanding, they are not sufficiently responsible for their behavior and cannot be appropriately *resented*. In my view, however, whether or not such people can be appropriately *resented* is a question we can bracket for the sake of the present discussion. Given the wide understanding of cruelty as inflicting pain for its own sake, and — in particular — given the empirical evidence for the existence of people who enjoy this infliction, it seems artificial to withhold the title of cruelty from such people just because they lack sufficient understanding of the notion of MSO. Accordingly, Nelkin’s claim could be reformulated along the following lines: While all cases of taking delight in the pain of others for its own sake fall under the heading of cruelty (and of sadism), only in some of them is resentment of those who take such delight appropriate, namely, cases in which the inflictors or watchers of pain have a sufficient understanding of MSO.

IV. IDENTIFYING CRUELTY

While ascriptions of cruelty are widespread in moral and political discourse, if cruelty is taking delight in inflicting suffering for its own sake (“for fun”), identifying it is more challenging than usually thought. This is because such identification relies on assumptions regarding agents’ emotional and motivational properties, assumptions whose basis is often indirect and shaky. In particular, the fact that some behavior is conceived as morally wrong and harmful is insufficient to ground the conclusion that it is cruel. The agent might sincerely believe that what he does is justified, and might sincerely regret the fact that it involves suffering (recall the non-sadist harsh officer).

Moreover, as pointed out by Baumeister and Campbell 1999, often even apparently clear cases of cruelty turn out not to fit the above definition. Accounts and memoirs by perpetrators of horrific actions like mass murder indicate that “far from being pleasant or satisfying, harming others leads most perpetrators to suffer physical and emotional distress” (212).²⁶ If such perpetrators are often not cruel in the sense explicated above, why is it that their victims and those who empathize with the victims misidentify them as such? Part of the explanation has to do with the fact that victims and perpetrators have different perspectives on the action carried out. For instance, victims tend to see the suffering inflicted on them as gratuitous, stemming from a sadistic motivation, while perpetrators offer reasons and explanations for their actions (211). An interesting manifestation of this discrepancy between victims and perpetrators has to do with their different interpretations of the perpetrators’ laughter; while victims take it as a sign that the perpetrators are enjoying themselves, in reality they often laugh out of discomfort (212).

One is tempted to say that, in the case of such discrepancies between the perspectives of victims and perpetrators, it is the former who should be trusted. This is because their personal account of the crime seems more reliable than that provided by the perpetrators, whose self-serving motivation in downplaying their responsibility and the magnitude of their crime is all too obvious. However, an empirical study by Stillwell and Baumeister (1997) sheds doubt on this assumption. The study asked participants to read a story about some transgression while identifying with either its victim or its perpetrator, and then to retell the story in their own words. Results indicated that simply assigning participants to identify with one or the other role in the event was sufficient to motivate them to distort the story in self-serving ways. And this held true not only for the perpetrators (i.e., the participants asked to take the perpetrator’s role), but for the victims as well: “Perhaps the most surprising finding of this investigation was that victims were just as inaccurate as perpetrators” (ibid., 1170).

The self-serving basis of the perpetrators’ motivation to downplay their blame is obvious; they want to appear less evil in the eyes of others and in their own eyes as well. The victims’ motivation in overstating the perpetrators’ evil and the magnitude of the harm meted upon them is not as obvious,²⁷ but we can bracket this issue for the sake of the present discussion. The important lesson from this study is that victims’ claims about the cruelty of their aggressors should be taken with a grain of salt. Victims are biased to see cruelty (or overstate it) even when it

does not exist (or when it exists on a lower scale), and such biased perception is possible precisely because the external behavior of wrongdoers does not provide clear evidence for their cruelty, namely, for them enjoying the suffering of their victims for its own sake.

V. CRUELTY AND WRONGNESS

As explained above, to say that some act is cruel is primarily to say something about its *agent*, which seems to imply that cruelty cannot serve as an independent criterion for the wrongness of *actions*. Since one can act cruelly even when inflicting justified suffering (recall the sadistic officer),²⁸ to say that an act is cruel seems to say nothing about whether it is wrong or not.²⁹

Or does it? The answer seems to depend on whether or not motivation can affect wrongness. Mill, Ross and a host of other philosophers have argued that the morality of an act is separate from the morality of the agent,³⁰ which would mean that an agent's cruel motivation has no bearing on the wrongness of his act. However, some philosophers, notably Sverdlik, have argued otherwise. In Sverdlik's view, acting on the desire to cause pain to a living creature can make an act wrong even when the act would be permissible if carried out for other motives. For instance, although killing birds might be permissible as a way of limiting their future population, if carried out for sheer fun, it is wrong (Sverdlik 1996: 340). A cruel motivation can transform an otherwise permissible act into a wrong one.

Sverdlik himself (2011) subscribes to a moderate version of this view, according to which there is no "strongly" wrong-making motive such that whenever a person acts from it, he acts wrongly by virtue of this motive alone. There are only "weakly" wrong-making motives, motives that sometimes make an otherwise right act wrong, such as in the example of the cruel killing of birds. My own view is that cruelty is so strongly wrong-making that all acts motivated by cruelty are, for that reason, *pro tanto* wrong. To inflict pain on others for its own sake is always to act wrongly.³¹ Nonetheless, sometimes such infliction of pain might be necessary to achieve a worthy goal like toughening cadets, or fixing a patient's teeth. How should we analyze such cases?

To clarify, what I have in mind is a person who ought to *x*, namely, for whom *x-ing* is the right thing to do, but cannot bring himself to do so without the expected delight in the suffering of others involved in the *x-ing*, and, at any rate, will not be able to *x* without enjoying this suffering. The dilemma, then, is whether he should go ahead and *x* in spite of the cruelty involved, because, objectively speaking, it is the right thing to do, or whether he should refrain from doing so.

Within a consequentialist framework, if the results of carrying out an act from a cruel motivation outweigh the results of refraining from doing so, the act is right. But this framework doesn't leave room for the idea that cruelty can turn permissible actions into impermissible ones because, for (act-) consequentialists, the one and only wrong-making property of an action is its negative contribution to overall valuable consequences. Agent-centered theories of morality, therefore, seem a more fitting framework to turn to. As Alexander and Moore recently explain (2021), at the heart of such theories is the idea

that morality is intensely personal, in the sense that we are each enjoined to keep our own moral house in order. Our categorical obligations are not to focus on how our actions cause or enable other agents to do evil; the focus of our categorical obligations is *to keep our own agency free of moral taint*. (Italics added)

This “intensely personal” aspect of morality seems to imply that if a person is motivated to *x-ing* by cruelty and he cannot *x* without expressing his cruelty, he should refrain from *x-ing* even if *x-ing* is expected to lead to better consequences, overall, than refraining from doing so. He has an agent-relative reason “to keep his agency free of moral taint,” upon which he would fail to act if he allowed his cruel disposition to lead him into action. Acting for the sake of the expected pleasure from making others suffer is a clear case of moral taint, if any is.

The agent-relative reason not to act cruelly grounds both first- and third-person judgments. If a person realizes that what motivates him in the infliction of pain on somebody is cruelty, he ought to refrain from such infliction even if it is justified in agent-neutral terms. Similarly for third parties who identify such motivation (an identification which is not easy, as mentioned earlier). Because of the cruelty involved, they may conclude that the agent ought not to carry out the otherwise justified act.

Some might find this conclusion puzzling; why should the agent’s mental state influence the wrongness of his action? Yet for those who accept the idea of agent-relative constraints, there should be nothing surprising in the idea of cruelty affecting wrongness. If one is required to abstain from *x-ing* against S even if doing so will lead to significantly better consequences (e.g., will save the lives of those five workers on the tracks) just because *x-ing* would express disrespect towards S, all the more so when the disrespect is so transparent and blatant as in cases of acting out of cruelty.

Is acting out of cruelty “always and unconditionally wrong” (Fish 2019: 107)? In one sense, it obviously is; intending harm for its own sake is always wrong.³² The more challenging question is whether cruel actions are always wrong *overall*, and the answer to this question might depend on one’s view in the debate between absolute and moderate deontologists. For the former, deontological constraints are absolute which, in the present context, would support the position that acting cruelly can never be overall morally justified; if one realizes that part of his motivation in *x-ing* is the delight he expects to get by the suffering that is inflicted by *x-ing*, then one never ought to *x*.³³ For the latter, when the stakes are high enough, it is legitimate to ignore the agent-relative restrictions. In the context of cruelty, that would mean that when the moral cost involved in refraining from the infliction of pain is too high, such infliction would be overall morally permissible (though undoubtedly *bad*³⁴) — in spite of being cruel.³⁵

VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In sum, I have argued for several claims. First, Cruelty is first and foremost a property of agents, not of actions. It is a disposition to take delight in the suffering of human beings (and of other sentient creatures) for its own sake. Thus understood,

cruelty is the same trait as that defined and studied in psychology under the heading of (everyday) sadism. Empirical research has confirmed the existence of this trait, which is distinct from the famous Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy).

Second, for psychologists, the attribution of sadism to somebody does not rely on any normative assumptions concerning the permissibility or impermissibility of the actions flowing from it. In that sense, sadism is a descriptive notion, which holds true for cruelty as well. Acts motivated by a desire to inflict pain for its own sake are cruel regardless of whether they would otherwise be permissible, while impermissible acts that are unmotivated by this desire are not cruel even if they cause suffering to human beings (or to other sentient beings).

Third, since cruelty refers to the agent's inner world, which is only partly and indirectly accessible to others, attributions of cruelty are often ungrounded and biased, reflecting the victim's desire (or that of those identifying with her) to depict the perpetrator in the worst possible light.

Fourth, the fact that attributions of cruelty do not rely on normative assumptions does not mean that they don't entail such assumptions. Inflicting suffering for its own sake is always wrong and despicable. This is one clear sense in which cruelty is a "thick" term; its content is descriptive yet its attribution includes or entails moral condemnation.

Fifth, that cruelty taints the action stemming from it, rendering it morally wrong, is easy to accept when the action is otherwise morally neutral. But even when the action is otherwise morally desirable, carrying it out from a cruel motivation might be wrong. How this is so is best explained by agent-centered versions of deontology. If one is required to refrain from killing somebody even if the killing would save the lives of five innocent people, just because the killing would manifest disrespect for humanity, one could also be required to refrain from acting out of cruelty even if the action would have otherwise been justified by virtue of its objective properties.

Finally, there is the question of why people are cruel. Evolutionary answers to this question seem to be too speculative, but we need not decide on this here. What's important is to realize that the tendency to cruelty is deep within the human psyche and, in all likelihood, is here to stay. Acknowledging this fact is a first step towards combating it. The next is to find psychological, educational and institutional ways to reduce cruelty or at least its manifestations, a task that goes far beyond the aims of the present paper.³⁶

ENDNOTES

1. See Shklar 1984 and, more recently, Adams 2006: 41 (“No vice seems more appalling to me than *cruelty*”). But see Kekes 1996.
2. Given that most cruelty is carried out by men rather than by women (see, for instance, Chabrol et al. 2009 and Foulkes 2019: 151), I’ll be using the masculine form when referring to perpetrators of cruelty.
3. Adams 2006: 40. For references to philosophers subscribing to this definition, see Dolovich 2009: 925n174. See more recently Väyrynen 2021 (“cruel acts must involve . . . qualities such as taking pleasure in causing others to suffer”).
4. See, for instance, Hurka 2006: 180, who argues that claims of the kind “X is a cruel act” need not make assumptions about the agent’s stable disposition to cruelty.
5. Nonetheless, and *contra* Robinson 2019: 85, an act is cruel only if it succeeds in inflicting suffering. A failed attempt to do so does not suffice. Cruel *acts*, in other words, have a success condition built into them.
6. As Mayes notes, there *is* a psychological principle that links pleasure and indifference, namely, the principle of habituation. But as this principle assumes an initially pleasurable stimulus, “this effectively means that indifference can be safely removed from the definition, as it is the pleasure that *precedes* indifference that explains our capacity for cruel behavior” (2009: 31, italics added).
7. Guy Kahane 2021 recently discussed the claim that “the universe is indifferent,” citing Dawkins who says that nature “is not cruel, only pitilessly indifferent” (2). For Dawkins, then, indifference is insufficient for cruelty.
8. One might think that self-esteem is also a relevant factor, particularly that *low* self-esteem leads people to inflict pain on others as a way of confirming their power and elevating their self-esteem. But the empirical research on the relation between self-esteem and aggression is unresolved (Ostrowsky 2010). See also Kramer 2017: 286–287, who argues for a conceptual rather than an empirical relation between sadism and a sense of inadequacy.
9. See Nietzsche 2002, 225, 229 and Nietzsche 2013, II:6, II:7. See also Reginster 2005 and Parmer 2017: 407. According to Foulkes 2019: 6, the question of whether the wish to obtain control is fundamental to sadism (i.e. cruelty, see below) is empirically yet undecided.
10. See the definition of cruelty offered by Baumeister and Campbell 1999: 211, “as the direct achievement of pleasure from harming others.”
11. See Alford 2006: 96: “The will to evil that Augustine discovers in himself is the will to transgress for its own sake.”
12. According to Wortham 2013: 131, Freud thought that “the ‘perversion’ of taking pleasure in pain still receives no satisfactory explanation” and “is itself little understood, if at all.”
13. Because sadism is regarded as a personality trait, its closeness to cruelty lends support to the view that cruelty too refers to a stable (negative) disposition, namely to a *vice* (see note 6 above).
14. According to Porter et al. 2014: 64, everyday sadism “differs from clinical sadism in that the individual does not harm others out of the need for cruelty but rather for the pleasure derived from the act.” Clinical sadism is often associated with sexual sadism which refers to deriving sexual satisfaction from the very infliction of pain on others.

15. These three questions are samples from, respectively, the Short Sadistic Impulse Scale (SSIS), the Comprehensive Assessment of Sadistic Tendencies (CAST), and the Assessment of Sadistic Personality (ASP). The content of all three scales reflect sadism as active enjoyment of others' suffering. For details and references, see Min et al. 2019.
16. These findings regarding a distinct psychological role played by sadism have led some scholars to propose adding it to the traditional Dark Triad of personality (narcissism, Machiavellianism and psychopathy), thereby creating a Dark *Tetrad*, which could shed light (if that's the right term to use here) on the diversity of malevolent attitudes and behaviors. See, for instance, Chabrol et al. 2009 and Međedović and Petrović 2015.
17. Nietzsche 2013, II:6.
18. In June 2022, a Google search yielded 53,000 results for this string and more than 160,000 for the string "Why are people so cruel?."
19. The claim that "deep in human psychology, there are urges to humiliate, torment, wound and kill people" (Glover 2001: 33) should not be confused with the situationist claim that in certain situations most people would wound or kill others (like the subjects in the Milgram experiment believed, or half-believed, they were doing). While both claims accept that acting cruelly is a real possibility for normal people, they differ in the explanation for this phenomenon. The former anchors the explanation in the above dark aspect of human nature, while the latter denies the very existence of character traits and anchors the explanation in the ways people are influenced by the situations in which they find themselves.
20. See Greenier 2021: 1233 ("schadenfreude is largely a mild emotional response. This should be considered a positive outcome. We are not sadists wanting *to* dance on the graves of our enemies").
21. Some cases of sadism seem morally all right, I mean sadism in the context of a voluntary BDSM relationship. Indeed, recent study (Erickson and Sagarin 2021) has shown that BDSM sadists tend not to score highly on the everyday sadism scales.
22. As shown by Talbert 2021, Nelkin is not entirely clear on this point because she often speaks of the mere *capacity* for such acknowledgement as sufficient for cruelty. For why this capacity cannot do the work required to ground an ascription of cruelty, see *ibid.*, 1242–1244.
23. *Contra* Paris 2017: 448, it is thus not the psychopath who is "the archetype of evil," but the sadist.
24. For a criticism of Nelkin along similar lines, see Talbert 2021, section 4.
25. See Chan and Wong 2019; Foulkes 2019: 6.
26. Westra 2020: 589, says that cruelty might be an exception to the general rule that trait attribution requires "numerous observations of the target in many different contexts," because observing even a single case of someone torturing a puppy "is very good evidence that they are cruel" (*ibid.*, n. 5). Following the arguments in the text, I regard such evidence as less conclusive.
27. See Minow 1993: 1413 ("It seems odd that anyone would emphasize their victimhood").
28. Another way of making the point would be to say that blameworthiness and wrongdoing come apart here, with cruelty fixing the former but not the latter. Thanks to Matt Talbert for suggesting this formulation to me.
29. This line of argument would have important implications for the legal sphere because it would mean that, *pace* the Eighth Amendment to the American constitution and other

legal documents, cruelty cannot serve as an independent criterion for the legal wrongness of certain forms of punishment. See Scarre 2003.

30. For references, see Sverdlik 1996, Section I.

31. Some philosophers, for instance, Goldstein 1989, believe that pleasure is intrinsically and unconditionally good, which would mean that even pleasure taken in the suffering of others is good. For them, cruelty would be wrong in spite of the pleasure it grants the perpetrator, not because of it.

32. According to Hanna 2021, “the fact that an act will harm someone is almost always a reason not to perform it, even if it’s permissible.” In my view, this applies only to cases of intending harm for-its-own-sake, typically cases in which the harmer takes delight in the harm he causes.

33. See also Matt Kramer’s claim that sadistic torture “is obviously wrongful in all its instantiations” (2017: 286).

34. See, for instance, Slote 2003: 136, and Smith 2018: 246.

35. This conclusion raises the following paradox which I’m not sure how to solve. Assume that in some extreme cases torture is morally permissible. According to the above conclusion, because acting cruelly is always pro tanto wrong, it is morally better that the torture is carried out by a non-cruel person. However, (a) such a person will probably be less efficient in torturing, and (b) by assigning this horrible task to a non-cruel person we might be tainting his soul, so to say, making him betray his most fundamental principles or — maybe worse — turning him into a cruel person himself. Thanks to Anat Shapira for suggesting this paradox to me.

36. For helpful comments on earlier drafts, I’m greatly indebted to Aliza Avraham, Nathan Hanna, Zohar Idelson, Iddo Landau, Sam Lebens, Ariel Meirav, Saul Smilansky, Steve Sverdlik, and Matt Talbert. Thanks also to Ruslan Rozhnev for his excellent research assistance.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Robert M. 2006. *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ainslie, George. 2006. “Cruelty May Be a Self-Control Device Against Sympathy.” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29: 224–225. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X06229054>
- Alexander, Larry and Michael Moore. 2021. “Deontological Ethics.” In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Archive*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/ethics-deontological/>.
- Alford, C. F. 2006. *Psychology and the Natural Law of Reparation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Alvarez, Maria. 2017. “Are Character Traits Dispositions?” *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 80: 69–86. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246117000029>
- Battaly, Heather. 2015. *Virtue*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Baumeister, Roy F., and W. Keith Campbell. 1999. “The Intrinsic Appeal of Evil: Sadism, Sensational Thrills, and Threatened Egotism.” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3: 210–221. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0303_4

- Ben-Ze'ev, A. 2014. "The Personal Comparative Concern in Schadenfreude." In *Schadenfreude: Understanding Pleasure in the Misfortune of Others*, edited by Wilco W. van Dijk and Jaap W. Ouwerkerk. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 77–90.
- Buckels, Erin, Daniel N. Jones, and Delroy L. Paulhus. 2013. "Behavioral Confirmation of Everyday Sadism." *Psychological Science* 24: 2201–2209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613490749>
- Butler, Douglas. 1988. "Character Traits in Explanation." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 49: 215–238. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107974>
- Chabrol, Henri, Nikki Van Leeuwen, Rachel Rodgers, and Natalène Séjourné. 2009. "Contributions of Psychopathic, Narcissistic, Machiavellian, and Sadistic Personality Traits to Juvenile Delinquency." *Personality and Individual Differences* 47: 734–739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2009.06.020>
- Chan, H. and R. Wong. 2019. "Childhood and Adolescent Animal Cruelty and Subsequent Interpersonal Violence in Adulthood: A Review of the Literature." *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 48: 83–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2019.08.007>
- Dinić, Bojana M., Miroslav Milosavljević, Jovana Mandarić. 2021. "Effects of Dark Tetrad Traits on Utilitarian Moral Judgement: The Role of Personal Involvement and Familiarity with the Victim." *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 24: 48–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajsp.12422>
- Dolovich, Sharon. 2009. "Cruelty, Prison Conditions, and the Eighth Amendment." *New York University Law Review* 84: 881–979.
- Erickson, Jennifer, and Brad J. Sagarin. 2021. "The Prosocial Sadist? A Comparison of BDSM Sadism and Everyday Sadism." *Personality and Individual Differences* 176. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.110723>
- Feather, N. T. 1989. "Attitudes Towards the High Achiever: The Fall of the Tall Poppy." *Australian Journal of Psychology* 41: 239–267. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00049538908260088>
- Fish, Eran. 2019. "Torture and Torturers." In *Jean Améry*, edited by Y. Ataria and E. Pitcovski, 105–118. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foulkes, Lucy. 2019. "Sadism: Review of an Elusive Construct." *Personality and Individual Differences* 151: 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2019.07.010>
- Glover, Jonathan. 2001. *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Goldstein, Irwin. 1989. "Pleasure and Pain: Unconditional, Intrinsic Values." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50: 255–276. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2107959>
- Greenier, Keegan. 2021. "The Role of Disliking, Deservingness and Envy in Predicting Schadenfreude." *Psychological Report* 124: 1220–1236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120921358>
- Hanna, Nathan. 2021. "Why Punitive Intent Matters." *Analysis* 81: 426–435. <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/anaa068>
- Hume, David. (1751) 1975. *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hurka, Thomas. 2006. "Virtuous Act, Virtuous Dispositions." *Analysis* 66: 69–76. <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/66.1.69>
- Hursthouse, R. 2012. "Virtue Ethics and the Treatment of Animals." In *The Oxford Handbook of Animal Ethics*, edited by T. L. Beauchamp and R. G. Frey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Johnson Laura K., Rachel A. Plouffe and Donald H. Saklofske. 2019. "Subclinical Sadism and the Dark Triad: Should There Be a Dark Tetrad?" *Journal of Individual Differences* 40: 127–133. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000284>
- Kahane, G. 2021. "Is the Universe Indifferent? Should We Care?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 103: 1–20.
- Kekes, John. 1996. "Cruelty and Liberalism." *Ethics* 106: 834–844. <https://doi.org/10.1086/233675>
- Kramer, Matthew H. 2017. *Liberalism with Excellence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mayes, G. Randolph. 2009. "Naturalizing Cruelty." *Biology and Philosophy* 24: 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10539-008-9120-3>
- McGinn, Colin. 1997. *Evil, Ethics and Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mededović, Janko, and Babon Petrović. 2015. "The Dark Tetrad: Structural Properties and Location in the Personality Space." *Journal of Individual Differences* 36: 228–236. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001/a000179>
- Min, Hanyi, Ivica Pavisic, Nicholas Howald, Scott Highhouse, and Michael J. Zickar. 2019. "A Systematic Comparison of Three Sadism Measures and their Ability to Explain Workplace Mistreatment Over and Above the Dark Triad." *Journal of Research in Personality* 82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2019.103862>
- Minow, M. 1993. "Surviving Victim Talk." *UCLA Law Review* 40: 1411–1446.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2002 (1886). *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by Judith Norman and edited by Rolf-Peter Horstmann. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. 2013 (1887). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Michael A. Scarpitti and edited by Robert C. Holub. London: Penguin.
- Nelkin, Dana K. 2015. "Psychopaths, Incurable Racists, and the Faces of Responsibility." *Ethics* 125: 357–390. <https://doi.org/10.1086/678372>
- Nell, Victor. 2006. "Cruelty's Rewards: The Gratifications of Perpetrators and Spectators." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 29: 211–224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X06009058>
- Ostrowsky, Michael K. 2010. "Are Violent People More Likely to Have Low Self-Esteem or High Self-Esteem?" *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15: 69–75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2009.08.004>
- Paris, Panos. 2017. "Scepticism about Virtue and the Five-Factor Model of Personality." *Utilitas* 29: 423–452. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820816000327>
- Parmer, W. Jared. 2017. "Nietzsche and the Art of Cruelty." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 48: 402–429. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jnietstud.48.3.0402>
- Paulhus D., and D. Dutton. 2016. "Everyday Sadism." In *The Dark Side of Personality: Science and Practice in Social, Personality and Clinical Psychology*, edited by V. Zeigler-Hill and D. K. Marcus, 109–120. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Paulhus, D. and D. Jones. 2015. "Measures of Dark Personalities." In *Measures of Personality and Social Psychological Constructs*, edited by G. Boyle, E. Saklofske, and G. Matthews. San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 562–594.
- Pfattheicher, S., L. Lazarević, E. Westgate, and S. Schindler. 2021. "On the Relation of Boredom and Sadistic Aggression." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 121: 573–600. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000335>
- Pietraszkiewicz, Agnieszka. 2013. "Schadenfreude and Just World Belief." *Australian Journal of Psychology* 65: 188–194. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajpy.12020>

- Plouffe, R., D. Saklofske, and M. Smith. 2017. "The Assessment of Sadistic Personality: Preliminary Psychometric Evidence for a New Measure." *Personality and Individual Differences* 104: 166–171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.07.043>
- Porter S., A. Bhanwer, M. Woodworth, and P. Black. 2014. "Soldiers of Misfortune: An Examination of the Dark Triad and the Experience of Schadenfreude." *Personality and Individual Differences* 67: 64–68. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2013.11.014>
- Reginster, Bernard. 2005. "Nietzsche on Pleasure and Power." *Philosophical Topics* 33: 161–191. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics200533221>
- Robinson, Jonny. 2019. "On Being Cruel to a Chair." *Analysis* 79: 83–91. <https://doi.org/10.1093/analys/any006>
- Scarre, Geoffrey. 2003. "Corporeal Punishment." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 6: 295–316. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1026072527441>
- Shklar, Judith. 1984. "Putting Cruelty First." In *Ordinary Vices*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Slote, Michael. 2003. "Review of *Natural Goodness and of Virtue, Vice, and Value*." *Mind* 112: 130–139. <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/112.445.130-a>
- Smith, Nicholas Ryan. 2018. "Right Action as Virtuous Action." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 96: 241–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2017.1352611>
- Smith, Richard H., Terence J. Turner, Ron Garonzik, et al. 1996. "Envy and Schadenfreude." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. 22: 158–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167296222005>
- Smith, Richard H., and Wilco van Dijk. 2018. "Schadenfreude and Gluckschmerz." *Emotion Review* 10: 293–304. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073918765657>
- Statman, Daniel. 2019. "Debunking, Vindication, and Moral Luck." *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 43: 203–223. <https://doi.org/10.1111/misp.12113>
- Stein, Ruth. 1992. "Schadenfreude: A Reply to Ben-Ze'ev" *Iyyun* 41: 83–92.
- Stillwell, Arlene M., and Roy F. Baumeister. 1997. "The Construction of Victim and Perpetrator Memories: Accuracy and Distortion in Role-Based Accounts." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23: 1157–1172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672972311004>
- Stocker, Michael. 1979. "Desiring the Bad: An Essay in Moral Psychology." *Journal of Philosophy* 76: 738–753. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2025856>
- Sverdlik, Steven. 1996. "Motive and Rightness." *Ethics* 106: 327–49. <https://doi.org/10.1086/233620>
- Sverdlik, Steven. 2011. *Motive and Rightness*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199594948.001.0001>
- Talbert, Matthew. 2021. "Psychopaths and Symmetry: A Reply to Nelkin." *Philosophia* 49: 1233–1245. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-020-00300-8>
- Taylor, Kathleen. 2009. *Cruelty: Human Evil and the Human Brain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Väyrynen, Pekka. 2021. "Thick Ethical Concepts." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/thick-ethical-concepts/>.
- Watson, Gary. 1996. "Two Faces of Responsibility." *Philosophical Topics* 24: 227–248. <https://doi.org/10.5840/philtopics199624222>
- Westra, Evan. 2020. "Getting to Know You: Accuracy and Error in Judgments of Character." *Mind and Language* 35: 583–600. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mila.12258>
- Wortham, Simon M. 2013. "Survival of Cruelty." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51: 126–141. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjp.12021>