

## BEING AND NON-BEING

**Being and Non-Being: The Existential Foundations of the Sadistic Killer**

## ABSTRACT

This article aims at a fusion of psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory and existential phenomenology in conditions first explored by Jean-Paul Sartre and Margaret Mahler. The topic describes the genesis of the sadistic killer, when considered as a once-abused infant, and attempts a subject-oriented existential account prioritising ontology as notionally revealing. A main contention is that the infant once confronted a fundamental existential terror threatening his own being, occasioned by an abusive mother and transformed, via an early emotion-driven construction of an unfulfilled partial-self—a self with holes—into a destructive hatred exercised in later encounters with females.

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**introduction**

The existential-phenomenological perspective is frequently set aside by Anglophone academic communities and its presence is much diminished in the English-speaking world. Despite a proliferation of institutions, like its continental counterpart Freudian psychoanalysis, it is much out of favour when compared to the empirical sciences, an opinion much as favoured by Ward *et al*, in their book *Theories of Sexual Offending*, prioritising predictive and empirical accuracy, internal coherence, external consistency, unifying power, fertility, simplicity and explanatory depth (Ward, *et al.* 2006).

We will contend our perspective actually fulfils much of such criteria, especially when,

“Phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research approach. Its primary position is that the most basic human truths are accessible only through inner subjectivity, and that the person is integral to a phenomenal field.” (Flood, 2010).

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In this article, we will be constantly challenging the “limits of thought” prevalent in a contemporary understanding of psychology. We will hold that ontology occupies a central place in theory construction where the power of any phenomenological account lies precisely in its *associative* resonance, one that ‘strikes a chord’ with the reader rather than arriving at the strict empirical significations that ordinary words effect. The evocation of appropriate comprehension in the mind of an empathic reader frequently derives from metaphor and various species of allusion that do not accord with the scientific attitude and, for us, refer to the earliest states of consciousness, mostly unavailable for empirical research (van Manen 1997; Van der Zalm & Bergum, 2000). Some critics will say that a divergence from empiricism invalidates our approach as a credible means of enquiry. We will respond by saying that our focus necessarily sets aside empiricism – and yet coherence and credibility are sustained for those who belong to a community of minds familiar with the cardinal works referred to and who can conceive of the states of mind we attest to.<sup>1</sup> Or, as Amadeo Giorgi writes, “Psychology is a field that is still in the process of defining itself” (Giorgi, 1975) so we will persevere with this approach towards his “deepened understanding of phenomenological philosophy” (Giorgi, 1994) that can provide alternative non-derivative conceptual frameworks. To achieve this, one must contextualise phenomenological exploration into the philosophical perspective that informs its methods (Spiegelberg, 1972; Creswell, 2007:15-41; Hennink et al, 2010:17-22; Maxwell, 2012:44-48).

A principle aim in this article is to claim certain relations between the theory of developmental psychoanalysis and a Sartrean existential phenomenology to be coherent and defensible. In the search for philosophical congruence, we must put aside not only cultural, scientific and worldly interpretations but also attempt (analogising the Husserlian suspension of judgement) envisagings concerning experiences we cannot exemplify through reported descriptions and standardised

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verification procedures. In the search to explain what might be the genesis of a consciousness that embraces the homicidal disposition, we are concerned with envisaging primordial modes of being, rather than mature ways of knowing, and we cannot easily approach those states through quantitative studies or even many qualitative participant interviews. It is simply not possible to study the earliest stages of consciousness empirically, for we cannot directly contact the 'lifeworld' or 'lived experience' of the neonatal. Nevertheless, we insist that it is from this primordial state of being that our theory obtains.

In existential phenomenology, any intense experience increases one's sensation of *being*—one's sense of being an *isness* as a consciousness. With this in mind, the intensity of sadistic experience refers us to issues in *ontology* that require background in studies in philosophy. We contend the study of ontology will provide the key to understanding some underlying issues unanswered by psychology. As Scrapec (2001) points out, "Serial murder tends to be analysed as an objective event, not as a subjective experience." The point of this article is not so much an attempt to reconcile divergent theoretical positions, or to convince the reader of the veracity of one viewpoint over others, as *an attempt to stimulate one particular exercise in conceivability*.

Along with psychoanalytical perspectives, a foundation in ontology does not lend itself to Ward's empirical concerns involving testability and whether, as a theory, it could ever be falsified. But we will counter that our topic belongs to such an early stage of child development that much will remain inaccessible due to memory loss and the pre-linguistic, pre-concept-forming nature of the early phases (Caston, 2015). Furthermore, that this reductive outlook (that certain psychological elucidations can be reduced to ontology) actually satisfies Ward's ideas concerning internal coherence, explanatory depth and simplicity.

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In the present essay, we shall bring this attitude to bear on one variety of sex offending—sexual sadism—but with particular regard to the sadistic killer as a being who attempts to achieve mastery over other beings through causing their extinction. In particular, that sadistic murder becomes more notionally accessible when one has achieved some facility in recondite philosophical thinking—for us, as provided by Sartrean existential phenomenology.

### **Proposing existential phenomenology**

It is arguable that those of us without the phenomenological focus cannot comprehend the primacy of subjective experience or the import of existential thought. For the empirical social scientist, there will always be 'a lack of data', putting at a distance via objectification and quantity-based theory that distances the enquirer too much from the subject of study. An increasingly large canon of criticism towards the objective stance has been provided by feminist scholars in the philosophy of science (Anderson, 1995a, 1995b, 2004a, 2004b; Campbell, 1998; Cole, 1979; Fonow, 1991; Greenwood, 2000; Longino, 1987, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2002).

From positions such as these, we shall present a depiction of the sexual sadist as a person who is existentially committed to *being* a sadist. That is, their sense of self - their ultimate commitment if you like - is towards affirming sadism as an integral part of a core identity; that to be a sadist, and to *be*, are one and the same thing. We shall later argue that the homicidal sadist is involved in a struggle with being itself - that his fascination with the power to produce non-being (as the intentional annihilation of another conscious being) is a deviant expression of our most fundamental urge:—the will to *be*. This kind of killer is literally involved in a struggle with life or death, but one where his own existence is reified by means of the annihilation of others. (Thus, all

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discourse in the phenomenology of being a sexual killer will reduce itself finally to a discourse on ontology.)

Here we can throw partial illumination on the 'inconceivability' of why a person should choose to be a sadist. For non-sadists the search for a cause, or an explanation for being a sadist is a puzzle without end. But, existentially, the answer is simple. "I am a sadist because that is *how I am*." One chooses being, and being a sadist, in one and the same instant, without hindsight, or appeals to reason or causality. This will be further explained later.

An outlook that assumes cultural conditioning as having a determinate primacy over personal choice, will similarly find the ontological commitment of the sadist as difficult to conceive. For most of us, the assumption of a culturally conditioned identity, along with interiorising received norms and values, seems a necessary part of our upbringing, together with the notion that we are not ultimately responsible for adherence to such conditioning, and values (including the rejection of sadistic impulses) and all this exists independently of human choice. But existentialism adopts the radical view that there are no 'values in themselves' awaiting discovery in the world and it is an original free choice that accounts for any personal moral outlook - that we are always radically free to challenge and refute the values inherited inside our situation, as evidenced by the minority that rebel: misfits, criminals, non-conformists, counter-culturists, sexual deviants—and murderous sadists.

### **Sartrean phenomenology**

In order to better understand the existential component in this account of the sadistic killer, we need to diverge into some purely philosophical conceptions. Sartre's major work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), explores consciousness as a mainly *subjective* phenomenon. For Sartre,

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consciousness has a number of necessary characteristics, the comprehension of which requires more than one reading in order to integrate his ideas into our psychodynamic and attachment theory perspective.

Firstly, consciousness is always conscious *of* something. This means consciousness always posits a transcendental object (something other than itself) but there is nothing *in* consciousness (as if it were a container); it is an *of*ness, not an *in*ness. Secondly, every consciousness is simultaneously a consciousness of itself. By implication, for the neonatal in the earliest stages of the primal situation, being aware of a tactile sensation, this conscious being-for-itself is simultaneously aware of this awareness (there can be no unconscious awareness). However, in the *prereflective* mode, prior to the ideational grasp of a continuous sense of personal identity, there is likewise not yet any consciousness of a continuous self. Sartre insists that this 'going out to grasp' is no more than the intentionality which is a facet of all consciousness itself. There is nothing 'behind' consciousness, nor any 'qualities' attachable to consciousness outside its objects. Sartre likens consciousness to a vacuum floating over the surface of the world. The lack of any continuous self ('standing behind') in prereflective consciousness is furthermore consistent with Mahler's explanation of the neonatal being unable to differentiate between self (body image) and other (mother image) (Mahler, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, pp.41 – 48). The philosophical term 'prereflective consciousness' may correspond to the experience of the infant in the pre-ego state where they are simply aware of *undifferentiated* impressions without any composite notion of self, world or Other; most significantly, in Mahler's 'pre-hatching' stage, without any discursive cognition or schematic knowledge concerning the body and the world.

However, for Mahler, the infant soon makes distinctions through 'hatching' as an entity conscious both of himself through a set of integrated impressions distinct from those of the mother and the

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world (see Mahler's explanation below). Though we make no claims about cognition, this event is comparable to Kant's transcendental deduction which insists that connectedness and unity in experience is necessary in order to *constitute* an objective world. But not only this: The *concept* of an objective is necessary for the unity of consciousness *as a self-consciousness* (Kant, 1781/2006 ; Strawson, 1966/2005, p. 9).<sup>3</sup>

### **The existential component within psychoanalysis**

In her *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (1975) Margaret Mahler, and her colleagues, explain the dynamics of ego formation within the context of libidinal development, in four substages, beginning from a half-sleeping, half-waking state in “an omnipotent, autistic orbit” (Mahler, 1975:41-51). Existentially, the mother and neonate comprise a ‘dual unity’ with one common boundary. The infant’s need for the mother is absolute (the mother’s need is relative). For the neonate, inside and outside are only gradually becoming to be sensed as different. After four or five months separation-individuation occurs at the second stage with ‘hatching’.<sup>4</sup> Via the instincts of self-preservation, the newly born infant begins to create a sense of self (N.B. *after* physical birth) through a sensory drama of differentiation which eventually achieves notional separateness from the mother and the beginnings of a cognitive understanding of the external world. In the third stage, of twelve to fifteen months, the infant undertakes ‘rapprochement’; a darting to and fro, away from the mother and back, as he begins to experiment with tiny voyages out into the world, soon rushing back to assuage anxiety (*ibid.* p. 76 - 108). In the fourth subphase, up to the age of three, the infant becomes a walking toddler and develops emotional object constancy; trust and confidence in the mother whose temporary absences now provoke little anxiety (*ibid.* pp. 109 – 120). Existentially, through the intrinsic intentionality of consciousness, individuation is an *accomplishment* (not simply innate) and must go through various stages of

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separation-individuation, reality testing, sometimes failing to manage a new step by regressing to the security of an earlier stage of attainment (*ibid.* p. 133). If the relationship with the mother is disturbed, problems abound in the emotion-based features of ego development, as we shall see.

Contemporary writers corroborate and expand upon Mahler's position concerning emotion. Fonagy *et al.*, describe disorganisation in terms of a disrupted perception of self and others. For Fonagy, the negligent and abusive mother seems not to regard her child as a mental agent who has thoughts, emotions and volitions of his own. The developing infant who, from her example, *internalises* the manners of the aggressive mother, fails to develop a general representation of persons who can be understood and cared for. This, in turn, and in agreement with our existential perspective, forestalls the development of *a sense of self* as a secure and cohesive being (Fonagy *et al.*, 2004). The child's emerging self is hampered and constrained by pain and conflicting emotions surrounding needs and their satisfaction that cannot establish 'sanctuary', together with conflicting cognitive processes---disorientation and dissociation---resulting in confusion and anti-social tendencies in later childhood (see also Kim, 2010:155).

In Mahler's first subphase, the infant dwells in a twilight state of union with the mother. Intramurally, this is where the infant and the mother *are one* and the consciousness of the infant, when it arises out of sleep, has no distinction-making capacities. Immediately after birth and during the symbiotic months of pre-ego life, the young infant, through internal perceptions, becomes familiar with a dim form of his own 'core' body-awareness; a resilience with boundary formation, texture, smell, the handling of transitional objects, marking a change from intramural to extramural life.

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From a philosophical point of view, and in accordance with Sartre's existential conception of the structure of human consciousness, what may seem lacking about consciousness in the early stages of this development is, "in its very absence still profoundly present in the heart of being" (BN 88). No matter how fleeting, remember, a consciousness is either a conscious consciousness, or it is not what we might *call* a consciousness. (In other words a consciousness that is not conscious of itself would not be a consciousness at all --- there are no half-way steps between consciousness and unconsciousness, the latter being synonymous with nothingness and a state of non-being.) For the neonate, experience will be disorganised and episodic. There will be *holes* in experience which weigh against the notional construction of body image and self.

"Human reality is its own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it is. Human reality is not something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that; it exists first as lack and in immediate, synthetic connection with what it lacks. Thus the pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world is apprehended by itself *as its own lack*. In its coming into existence human reality grasps itself as an incomplete being ... Human reality is a perpetual surpassing towards a coincidence with itself which is never given." (BN p. 89).<sup>5</sup>

From this quotation we can better elaborate on the state of the newborn. Where it is not "something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that", we can glimpse the ontological structure of an early being that is a being composed of 'holes'—parts that are missing in terms of a sense of a unifying self where it is requisite for us not to ascribe qualities to that which *does not yet exist*. The infant cannot detect or know what is currently missing as a notional set of attributes.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, it is the ordinary 'filling' of these holes, with perceived actualities in affective bond formation with the primary carer, that normally makes for a successful development and the

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accomplishment of the self/world distinction.<sup>7</sup> However, we are arguing that the abused child is deprived of the means by which an untroubled construction of self can occur without failure and abasement.

This again can be illustrated by considering the role of emotion. For the fortunate child, the mother's ministrations bring the positive emotions of love, caring, encouragement, and the 'being together' that provide the substance for a co-creation of self.<sup>8</sup> But with the abused child there is constant deprivation in the form of long absences, jolts, shocks, shoves instead of embraces, clumps instead of hugs, slaps as 'anti-caresses'; exclusions instead of invitations, denials instead of acceptances---constitutive of corrosive *absences of love* that impoverish, debilitate and deplete, rather than assist in development. And, worse still in later life, as a juvenile, "lack of a secure home space, maladaptive relationships, internalization of inappropriate behaviour, and a lack of significant family development" (Garrett, 2010:679).

It is important to realise that absences are treated as *real presences* in existential phenomenology; that what is not is as real and significant as that which is and that what is not is experienced as a real presence—the presence of an absence “as its own lack”. Unfortunately, our abused infant's development of self will be wrought through suffering and continual abandonments—contrasted by the positive components evolving within the fortunate child, replaced by presences that are characterised by negations and absences. The abused child not only suffers, by these '*négatités*', but becomes existentially 'half made up' via an accumulation of these lacks.

'*Négatités*' are "inhabited by negation as a necessary condition of their existence" (BN 21) where negation is not only a conceptual but also the *ontological* condition for positivity. Notions

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involving change, absence, otherness, desire, regret, fear, anguish—all involve negation as the intuition that something is missing.

So, the neediness of the abused child is a consciousness of lack, in the form of *being-a-lack*, a state of energy-depleted wanness that floats over the surface of the world, as a limbo in a penurious, half made-up condition—a being that, as yet, cannot completely *be*.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, this early being-for-itself (as a human consciousness) has the most fundamental desire *to be*; to *fully* exist (see *BN* p. xxvi). (Sartre always insists the cardinal aim, and the fundamental project, of the *for-itself* is *to be*.)

To repeat: Since consciousness is always a consciousness *of* something, there is nothing that rests 'behind' consciousness. Consciousness is always 'filled' by its objects. Sartre describes the case of possession as an attempted ontological fusion of *being-for-itself* with *being-in-itself*—a fusion of the intention-loaded 'nothing part' of our being with *things*. Being in a state of need, as a state of desiring, is to be aware of oneself *as a lack*, and as a non-fusion with the ever-elusive objects of desire. For the fortunate infant, it is the mother who provides for such a lack. It is she who allows him to appropriate her as 'his possession'; she 'infuses being' upon the child through bestowing her generous *presence* redolent with affections;— her body as the giver of warmth, her breast as the giving of sustenance, her voice as the sonorous provider of human fondness. The infant 'becomes these things' through an affective appropriation of that provided by the mother; that is, he integrates them into *a secure sensation of self* whereby his 'consciousness of' is replete with a benefic, positive experience of being.<sup>10</sup> It is important for us to remember that, previously, in the undifferentiated state, the infant had *no* impression of self to assume symbiotically. He did not "exist first in order to lack something," for this awareness of lack itself was his original mode of existing.

**The experience of lack for the future sadistic killer**

A comprehensive appreciation of these kinds of lack will eventually provide an explanation—on an existential phenomenological basis—for the adult sadistic killer.

But the delimitations of self and non-self are still unsteady and precarious. Mahler insists that the mother's continued emotional availability is essential for the child's autonomous ego to attain optimal functional capacity; as effected by smiling (mirroring), babytalk, playfulness, sharing in the infant's curiosity and adventures into the world, all towards facilitating a greater independence (*ibid.* p. 79). A now constant emotional involvement with the mother consolidates ego-development via these accomplishments, towards what will soon become self-support and self-sufficiency. And yet, for us, it is throughout Mahler's developmental stages that things can go badly wrong.

"It has been reported that the securely attached individuals tend to internalise significant others as benevolent, whereas the insecurely attached individuals tend to internalise self and others as ambivalent." (Blatt *et al.*, 1996 in Kim p. 156)

The condition of an infant attachment with the mother informs subsequent psychopathology and any observed dissociations. Procedural and reciprocal face-to-face interaction, up to around twelve months, usually establishes a positive emotional relationship. Secure infants are emotionally positive and are able to coherently express distress when necessary (Mahler, p.255). Positive affect is the *necessary* condition for congruence and attachment, involving internal representations, or 'working models', of self and others (*ibid.* p.261) which, in turn, lay the foundations for later social expectancies and interactive efficacy including empathy and a moral consciousness regarding others (Mahler, p. 262; Seifer & Schiller 1995; Beebe *et al* 2012). By the time the infant has

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become absorbed in his own autonomous functioning, to the virtual exclusion of the mother in later subphases, a pattern of affective relations between the two has been well established. Yet, looking from the developmental psychoanalytic perspective, where the subphases have been existentially fragmented or unsuccessful, specific adult characteristics may result, involving sexual-affective dysfunctions resulting in unhealthy fixations (for example, oral and anal sadism). In an early experience of trauma, the infant has been subject to galling upheavals that shape libido and the consciousness of his own being.

Existentially, the cold violence of trauma is both terrifying and life-threatening. The evolving psyche of the infant cannot adjust to this tumult, whilst simultaneously attempting to negotiate Mahler's subphases, and arbitrate a constant preservation of a sense of self. As already said, in terms of existential phenomenology, the being of this infant is plagued with holes; there is an experience of lack dispersed within any emerging totality. These holes have no predicative, positive qualities and remain strictly non-notional. They are characterised by their emptiness as unfulfilled desire and a blind yet directed rage, with nothetic consciousness of what is happening. In other words, at this very early stage of life the infant has been exposed to the vertiginous possibility of extinction or non-existence via 'unsupportive non-existences' in the form of non-caring, un-warmth, a continual non-affirmation of his presence in the world by the would-be supportive mother. He has been face-to-face with absences *as the prelude to an imminent existential extinction* (what we would call death),<sup>11</sup> as repeatedly precipitated by the behaviour of the careless child-bearer who, perhaps intergenerationally, lacks her own adequate "implicit personality theory" (IPT) (see especially Gara *et al*, 1992). Where rage and aggression become mutualised, the neglectful mother becomes a part of the *psychodynamic co-constitution of a violent subject*. This is because, existentially, the infant and the mother were recently only one, prior to

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the emergence of consciousness and any individuation on the part of the infant. Since the mother may have wilfully split herself off from this binary fusion (perhaps even starting with an unwanted conception), the infant will be an orphan before he is physically born. Ontologically, he is now a wholly embodied psychic half-being who is constantly thwarted in becoming a human psychic whole.

More recent research has reported a link between disorganised attachments in infants with later behaviour problems at school where difficulties with maternal attachment have been linked to inappropriate impulse-driven strategies (aggression) that are used for coping with stress with their peers (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999; Sroufe, 2003; Kim, 2010:154). And it is well accepted that older sex offenders have difficulty in forming mature attachments with others and have suffered loneliness, since whatever they can remember of their childhood, as the discrepancy between initially desired and later achieved levels of intimacy. Many such individuals have no friends in prison and shun the company of others. They even frequently voice negative self-evaluation as a kind of alienation from themselves (McCormack & Hudson, 2002; Marshall, 2010).

So what is to be his own 'remedy'? In a nutshell, and above all existentially, *murder* could well become a convenient and very apt form of *appropriating* the being of another through the use of his now adult power to annihilate—vengefully taking away the being of the primeval one who never fully gave it. Especially where most females are now symbolic of that first female who denied him. The act of murderous destruction will therefore depict an attempted *reclaiming* of being through the extinction of another. (But we shall see below that this reclaiming is futile.)

How can this be so? Where a Freudian conception of psycho-sexual development accompanies our existential account, it is not difficult to see how the features of violent sexual assault are

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informed by Freudian ideas concerning fixation—the biting and maiming of breasts as fixation on the oral-sadistic phase, the forced insertion of sharp objects into rectums to act out anal sadism. Significantly for us, many sex killers are fixated on the anal phase (Hurst II p. 308-311). At the end of an ordinary healthy continuum lies mature love with equality and reciprocity; but at the unhealthy end lies sadism, the requirement of power or dominance for sexual arousal and pleasures originally stemming from interiorising the abusive control and coercion by a powerful parent during early psychosexual development. The need for such dominance is most likely to occur during the anal phase (Freud, 1905/1977; 64-72; Silverstein, 1994). Later, the relish of, say, some forced decapitation may silence all possibility of *the voice* and symbolically destroy the thoughts (as in the head) of one who can think and speak rejectingly. Nor is it difficult to appreciate, here, that *power* has a greater significance than sexuality: for us, power is the force that governs ontology—to be, or not to be—sexual overpowering is merely one of its expressions (Scrapec, 2001:51; Marshall & Hucker, 2006). Perpetrators of sexual homicide extendedly enjoy power, control and domination as part of their murderous repertoire and, existentially, can now experience ‘a celebration of non-being against being’ (cf. Ressler *et al* 1996; Greenall, 2012:9).<sup>12</sup>

Episodic disempowerment, in the form of neglect, denial and abuse, can therefore act as a very early form of socialisation process whereby an instinctual, aggressive 'self-promotion' becomes more dominant, the less that the mother provides for a decent caring. Of cardinal significance, a positive means of survival requires the *cooperation* of this primary carer and when this does not happen the infant reacts with desperation and enragement, repeated occurrences thus setting an adverse pattern for all future encounters with later females. At such an early stage, the infant has no choice but to opt for any action that would guarantee his continued existence in the world.

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Consistent with classical developmental psychoanalysis, this pattern evolves as occasioned by the pre-eminence of a *caring* mother who, during Mahler's fourth subphase, initiates a moral consciousness in the infant when he interiorises her depictions of right and wrong. For the fortunate infant, anxious not to lose the love of the mother, rapidly adopts *her* codes of behaviour to ensure continued bestowals of affection (this affection being absent when the average infant incurs brief punishments). The capacity for moral action, and the discerning of right from wrong (classically) constitutes the formation of the superego (Freud, 1957; Mahler, p. 109). However, in the case of the adult sadistic killer, these developments have never taken place with efficacy because he has had no proper *contrastive* experiences of love and its abstention.<sup>13</sup> In psychoanalysis, compulsions arising into awareness come from an unconscious self that has been split off from the conscious self. The precise memories of an original abuse have been erased from awareness and its traces suppressed. In such a situation, our killer cannot be said to have full autonomy for his actions because of a gap in conscious knowledge and the split that exists between conscious and unconscious which *could* mould "an informed opinion" (*cf.* Hurst 1, 2003 p. 298). Being bereft of a full development of rational and affective faculties, the killer *must be less than a person as we normally conceive one*. Once again, ontologically, he has parts missing.

### **The sadistic killer as an abused child**

To complicate matters further, it is well documented that most adult perpetrators of child abuse were once themselves abused as children and this syndrome may emerge as intergenerational (Kaufmann & Zigler, 1987; Main & Goldwyn 198; Herzog et al, 1992). Young mothers with a personal history of abuse have difficulty with integration of what counts as acceptable and unacceptable in their past experience. The intergenerationally abused infant therefore once more starts off with confronting a lack---the ability of the previously abused mother to have an adequate

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conception of her own maternal provenance (see Herzog p , 94). Whereas, mothers who have integrated perceptions of themselves as children have less likelihood of abusing their own (*ibid* p. 96), abusive mothers have distorted, negative perceptions of their child; ignoring them, initiating less play and less verbal contact, being also critical, punitive and demanding. Significantly, this kind of mother is likely to find it difficult to remember her own pain and humiliation as a child. A lack of empathy combined with inflexibility and an underinformed knowledge of the ordinary problems of child rearing compounds intergenerational child abuse (Hanson, 2003).

And yet, philosophically, we take an 'I' to be present within, say, the psychological composition of emotion. It is an 'I' who loves or hates, an 'I' who intends the object of his anger when directed, in its individuated state, to a specific source—as the neglectful mother. Yet, contrary to the popular belief that posits a pre-existing 'solid ego', the existentially cumulative ego is more like a synthetic unity gradually constituted, unifying impressions over time. Common sense would say it is via consciousness of the ego that we come to know our emotional states and qualities. But Sartre reverses this process: it is my love and hate that, in reflection, make me become conscious of a 'me' (Sartre, 1957:59 - 61). Under this depiction, any enraged infant victim of maternal abuse creates a much debilitated sense of self within this fervent maelstrom. The ego is born via such emotion-laden experience, 'the one who suffers'. The visceral quality of enduring emotion (embodiment, increased heart rate, distress, etc.) further compounds the experience of a troubled self-consciousness in its very earliest appearances.

But since there is no continuously pre-existing transcendental ego for the infant to 'lean upon', there is likewise no previously established base to act as an anchor for this infant to cling to. This is an existential condition (the comprehension of which requires our best efforts of imagination), being on occasions simply 'a pure suffering' without sense or locus. In these 'enforced regressions',

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the developing self continuously re-fragments and the infant becomes precipitously aware of an imminent annihilation from which his proto-sense of self first emerged - in Sartrean terms '*un anéantissement*'—a made-nothingness. [footnote: This perhaps consciousness's first encounter with death – an notion that would require a separate article to explain from the existential viewpoint.] Reflective thought then becomes impossible because there is no reflecting-reflected on, no 'I' to cognise a *that* which is happening to a *someone*. Such a consciousness once more implodes into the singular prereflective awareness of 'pure suffering'. In this enforced prereflective awareness there is still consciousness which is conscious of itself—but it is not a 'reflecting-reflected on' constituting a person.

Within this matrix of conflicting impressions, the continually abused infant has been torpedoed during his attempts to accomplish selfhood and a state of affective equilibrium. But, most significantly, he has been emotionally damaged and only the most enduring negative emotions provide the basis for him the mode of his *being-in-the-world*. To be, and to be miserable, are one and the same. Moreover, emotion is a force-like state for him suffered passively and as an apprehension of that which exists in the world itself (not simply within his own experiential orbit). Anger becomes directed. Aggression is 'a towards'. It forms what later becomes an intrinsic “commitment” which, in childhood, becomes loaded with cognitions, in the form of established beliefs about others once the infant has conceived of the mother as *a consciousness* like his own (*cf.* Sartre, 1940/1972: 75 – 81). Hatred, as an enduring state, consolidates this original anger now evolved into a thetic consciousness aimed at other conscious beings. Purposive experience, in emotion, is directional (Gardner, p. 20). For the abused infant, it is the mother herself, who, over time, becomes intentionally transfigured into 'a hated one': as the one who imposed on him an original detachment and placed him as subject to her obdurate freedom (*cf.* *BN* p. 411). Thus the

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abused infant forms one of his first attributions of the Other—of woman—as the object of his anger and hatred; all this within the aforesaid precariousness of an original formation of self and others. Since this experience is unique and inceptive, most subsequent affective encounters with women will be based on this archetype (see Scrapec, 2001:58).<sup>14</sup>

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At the earliest of stages, the infant is confronted with a most fundamental existential experience (but only as a concept for us)—that of being or non-being. In his earliest experiences of being, through the obdurate neglect of the primary carer, the infant is confronted with that of non-being where his imminent future may be no more than a vertiginous descent into oblivion—developmentally, the contrary of what he has already achieved through Mahler’s stages of individuation. We have seen from Mahler that the consciousness of a self is fragile, episodic, and subject to repeated failures of attempt, even when things go well.

Yet, around the time of the fourth substage (emotional independence) of a walking toddler, some time in the second year of life (once the infant is well aware of the mother as a separate embodied and conscious being with her own intentions) he will likewise be better *cognitively* aware of any withholding behaviours on her part. The infant is now aware of the mother as a being with her own intentions – as a separate mind. It is at this stage that the infant experiences his desperation and an intentional rage now *reflectively directed at another*. He now has a thetic understanding of the actions of others being directed by their own intentionality (it no longer “just happens”). But the desperation of his condition can still only be assuaged *by* the mother---the being from whom he originally owed his presence in the world. The grasping of this situation *as a concept* will be the

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forerunner of more complex dispositions involving misogyny—eventually manifest as the hatred of all females.

### **The aims of sadistic murder**

We are now approaching a more complete existential account of the sadistic killer. The adult murderer as a once-abused-child has a pre-conscious horror of his early infant state which spectrally reminds him of his continuing lifelong humiliations of having no meaningful relations with the opposite sex (Greenall, p. 347). His emotions, as grievance-driven and other-directed, have taken on the aspect of a commitment – but not quite an ideology - as a set of precipitous demands on how the world should be altered for him, to provide his life with *a meaning* (cf. Sartre, 1940/1972:75-81; Soloman, 1997:224). His attempts are now to clutch at these tantalising forms and *make use of the female* as both the present object and a representative of the transcendent consciousness that once abused him. His desire is to appropriate and control the consciousness of this other (much as he was once non-optionally controlled by an abusing mother). He seeks to use her body as the tool by which she will now realise her own incarnate existence - but in a misery and humiliation that once (and still) parallels his own. He wants to appropriate and possess the flesh of the victim, but not within the reciprocity of ordinary lovers. Rather, in his consciousness of *her* now forced consciousness of her own being, as miserable and tormented, and, by his own imposition, *similarly losing command and her sense of identity*.<sup>15</sup> He wants to be a 'trascendence-transcending' towards the being of another (cf. *BN* p. 408).

It is written that sadistic killers lack empathy (Hanson, 2003; Covell *et al.* 2002). However, under the existential account, this is not really true because it is precisely his capacity to empathise with suffering that inspires certain actions. In his forced entries and throttling grasp, the sadistic killer

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is highly attuned to the consciousness of his victim and wants to 'accompany her' in her sufferings. (This why many sadistic killings are not done in haste - the killer wants his victim to *know* all that is happening.)<sup>16, 17</sup> During the act of murderous destruction, he wants to 'incarnate her' through his own agency and through her own acknowledged pain. This is very empathic. The sadistic killer wants to capture 'the grace and ease' of his victim and transform it, in her own eyes, into an unrefined atrocity via compulsion and violent abruptness. For him, natural grace and beauty have furnished this woman with a reason for existing—she is self-sufficient and free. Unlike her killer, she has a better ontological foundation for her existence; secure, caring, sharing, taken for granted, 'God given' (see *BN* on sadism, pp. 399 – 407). But this apparent wellbeing of her existence enrages him. He wantonly destroys her grace and independence by enforcing an unhappy self-knowledge of herself, now bereft of this capricious freedom—to force her to recognise herself as identical with tortured flesh and an expiring consciousness of selfhood. But this experience of possession is short lived; the conscious possession of her body is revealed, only in flashes, as the quality of finally being *his*. So, ontologically, he is symbolically reclaiming the being of one who denied him *his* being. His mission is aimed at *femininity itself*. But it is revealed to him only through a transient action effected, for the most part, in prereflective consciousness. As soon as he can withdraw to contemplate his deed reflectively, the impression of possessing her vanishes amidst her lifelessness. His victory is short-lived and she becomes a thing again (*cf. BN* p.595). His project of reclaiming his own being is once more thwarted.

But the aim of the sex killer is, especially, more than this: He wants to destroy her entire existence. So here we arrive at the crux of an existential elucidation of the sadistic killer;—*he wants to assume and enjoy the power of life or death over his victim. He wants to become a master of being and non-being*. Paralleling the primordial existential terror that once threatened him with extinction,

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he wants to hurl the victim into oblivion and eradicate any trace of the being that once commanded his. She will, thereby, no longer show herself as impenetrable and untouchable, no longer transcend his wishes to become a whole. In destroying the woman he also *absorbs* her into his being in the form of an ultimate appropriation, as a "possessor-possessing" (*cf. BN* p. 588). In her soon-to-be non-existence she now appears as an imminent 'pure transparency'--a transcendence transcended in the form of the imminent non-being decreed by himself (*cf. BN* p. 593). *He wants to exercise a godlike power over being and non-being* experienced in moments of ecstatic intensity. He wants to *reify* his own being, above, through and over hers, to finally become *himself* through the extinction of this perpetually despised Other.

Moreover, in killing her, he becomes her unique end; he is now her destiny (*cf. BN* p. 589). Moreover, this disposition typifies the Sartrean macro-level "wish of the *for-itself* to be God"—to 'possess the whole world', even, by claiming an omnipotence over being. For Sartre, this vain aspiration is,

"To be in the world is to form the project of possessing the world; that is, to apprehend the total world as that which is lacking to the *for-itself* in order that it may become *in-itself-for-itself*." (*BN* p.597)

An *in-itself-for-itself* would be a state of completion, a final purging of insatiable desires, a state of rest; an existential apotheosis, if you will.

However this ambition is permeated by illusion. The sadistic killer's apotheosis is short-lived and he quickly falls back into the state of ordinary being-for-itself, yet again in search of completion. His brief moments of ecstasy – his projected *being-for-itself-in-itself* – flounders in the realisation that a 'desire to become' is but an aim, and not a constitution. Desire is aim in transition. As a

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*négalité*, it is a lack of being that is pre-reflectively its own lack---the hole which seeks to be filled but cannot be filled. This is why sadistic killers often become serial killers. Within the shortcomings of his vision, his aimed at desires seem plainly a failure. He will have to try again.

### **The search of the in-itself to become a for-itself**

According to the current literature, the adult sadistic killer, like most of us, generally has no recollection of his primal situation. He is thus remains chronically underinformed concerning the genesis of his condition. Freudian commentators will assume his motivations are largely unconscious, but existential thinkers will say he may already have a 'good enough' knowledge of his condition to appreciate his situation (see Wilson, 2010). Thereby, *knowledge* becomes the key to his enlightenment and a freeing from previous 'deterministic' characteristics. The seeing of his own 'unconsciousness' - the making conscious of that which is hidden in his own plutonic past – can become his own potential liberation. It is *possible* for such things to be realised in therapy but this is outside the scope of our current enquiry (see Grof, 1988).

### **conclusion**

In this article we have given a persuasive account for understanding the ontology of the offender, his existential condition, his precarious *sense of being*, and perhaps to some extent, how it feels for the reader to *become* a nascent sadistic killer via efforts of the imagination. Most of this account does not refer to empirical studies, qualitative research and so on. It is entirely theoretical and is vulnerable to verificationist critiques applicable to all phenomenological interpretations. Nevertheless, some of Ward's criteria have been satisfied.

Amongst questions that have not been answered include at what point does our damaged infant arrive at concepts governing intersubjectivity (i.e. TOM – theory of mind) and of ascribing the

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mother as the conscious agent responsible for his misery? Assuming Mahler's account to be defensible, at what stage does the infant *ascribe* a causal connection between his experience and her behaviour?<sup>19</sup> Is there anything hidden, inside the cycle of intergenerationally abusive family systems, that may crystallise certain conceptions? And what of similar offenders who exceptionally evince "happy childhoods"?

Our account may be criticised from other perspectives. We have already seen that 'being' as a philosophical term is redolent with exceptional meanings; uncommon meanings that is, for newcomers to Sartrean thought, notionally cumulative rather than objectively denoting. We need to revise how we are to employ words such as Mahler's 'hatch' and Sartre's 'holes' outside their common contexts. We are forced to use terms, many with merely metaphorical allusions, comparable to adult experience which, at best, function as intimations to stimulate the conceivable rather than objectively display. For the early stages of infantile development it is implausible—and deceiving—to think these words could be applied with the same sense and denotation that we use in everyday descriptions of mature life—or even much of state-of-the-art psychology. Moreover, we cannot "go back" to our own dawns of consciousness, equipped with our later acquiredthetic skills to explain it. In this project of elucidation, we are attempting to construct meanings referring to consciousness at its *earliest* stages of development and we have few available means of refinement, comparison or referral through a language independent of its common usage. Advanced cognition arrives late in the day. Our notional access to the situation is therefore, confined to pioneering, innovative and *imaginative* constructs—perhaps themselves suffering from cavities—and what we, with an eye on the credible, regard as the possible.

Finally, in therapy, where the above account is regarded not only as credible but likely, the problem would then be how to assist the adult offender in making conscious any fragmentary remnants that

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might arise into consciousness. Do they exist as memories buried deeply in the unconscious? Many psychoanalysts believe they do (e.g. Grof, 1988). Are there therapists willing to accompany the client on such a dangerous mission? The full impact of "I did that" when one knows why and yet can be contemporaneously empowered to revise or rebuild a concept of self? But explanations of this sort must be the subject of research and experience in therapy best set aside for later essays. ■

*BN = Being and Nothingness*

### NOTES

1. One might even argue we are engaged in a nascent social constructionism.
2. Since most sadistic killers are male, I use the pronoun 'he' throughout.
3. It is this deduction that permits a developing cognitive awareness in the abused child's early individuating situation. In later reflective awareness, the neonatal begins to have a thetic awareness, a *judgmental* form; a consciousness *that* the world is configured in a certain way and that his (embodied) consciousness is also a part of it through the modality of disturbing affective experiences.
4. Like much of our vocabulary, "hatching" is metaphorical.
5. Compare "its own lack" with, "Man is the being by which nothingness comes into the world. But this question immediately provokes another: What must man be in his being in order that through him nothingness may come into being?" *BN* p. 24.
6. By analogy, one may compare this idea with partial blindness: the partially blind individual cannot *see* what is missing in his visual field, even as 'a hole'.
7. Infants that do not manage the transition remain in the pre-individuated state and are regarded as psychotic, as in the case of autism. See Mahler pp. 41-43.
8. As a primordial Heideggerian '*mitsein*'.
9. "The existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack." *BN* p. 87.
10. Concerning breast feeding, Sartre would say that the infant satisfying hunger makes the act of 'a towards', that is involving consciousness of its own lack, with the imminent possibility of 'thirst repletion'. (*cf. BN* p. 203.)
11. Even so, before 2 years, the child has no *cognitive* understanding of death. see Himebauch, A., Arnold, R., May, C., (2008) 'Grief in Children and Developmental Concepts of Death', *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Vol 11, No 2, p. 242.

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12. "a brutal and failed attempt at intimacy" "killing unrequited love" "power-assertive", Greenall, 2012:9, 'Understanding Sexual Homicide', JSA, Vol. 18, No 3.
13. "These men had become silent about their lived spaces and victimizations because they perceived themselves as deserving nothing better. They survived; that was it." (Garrett, 2010:761).
14. "Violence is displaced onto victims who represent something or someone of importance in the killer's experience." Scrapec, 2001, 'Phenomenology and Serial Murder', *Homicide Studies*, Vol 5 No 1.
15. This project is mostly successful. Many rape victims report fragmentation and loss of self, detachment from their bodies, a loss of totality, lack of motivation and a sense of direction in life (see Mui, 2005).
16. Few sex killers want to murder a victim in her sleep.
17. In examining the motives behind necrophile practices, it was noted that 68% of the individuals engaged in necrophilia in order to have an *unresisting and unrejecting partner* [my italics]. Or, we might say, to have a partner who is not conscious and can never return the threat as a 'transcending-transcendence' (see Rosman & Resnick, 1989:159).
18. "The existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack." *BN* p.87.
19. I would argue that none of this could take place without some rudimentary concept of intersubjectivity. That is, the infant is aware of himself as a conscious entity independent of the mother, but also of the mother as a conscious entity independent of him. In other words, separation-individuation is advanced enough to incorporate cognitions concerning reciprocal personhood.

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END

## BEING AND NON-BEING

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[title page]

### **Being and Non-Being: The Existential Foundations of the Sadistic Killer**

keywords: phenomenology ontology attachment individuation existentialism Sartre sadism homicide

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#### **Abstract**

This article aims at a fusion of psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory and existential phenomenology in conditions first explored by Jean-Paul Sartre and Margaret Mahler. The topic describes the genesis of the sadistic killer, when considered as a once-abused infant, and attempts a subject-oriented existential account prioritising ontology as notionally revealing. A main contention is that the infant once confronted a fundamental existential terror threatening his own being, occasioned by an abusive mother and transformed, via an early emotion-driven construction of an unfulfilled partial-self—a self with holes—into a destructive hatred exercised in later encounters with females.

**Being and Non-Being: The Existential Foundations of the Sadistic Killer**

ABSTRACT

This article aims at a fusion of psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory and existential phenomenology in conditions first explored by Jean-Paul Sartre and Margaret Mahler. The topic describes the genesis of the sadistic killer, when considered as a once-abused infant, and attempts a subject-oriented existential account prioritising ontology as notionally revealing. A main contention is that the infant once confronted a fundamental existential terror threatening his own being, occasioned by an abusive mother and transformed, via an early emotion-driven construction of an unfulfilled partial-self—a self with holes—into a destructive hatred exercised in later encounters with females.

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The purpose of this article is twofold: firstly to offer an aetiological account of certain forms of serial murder in terms of a developmental psychoanalysis fused with existential phenomenology and, secondly, to preserve the metatheoretical assumptions required to support such a position. It thus offers explanatory strategies and embraces theoretical pluralism.

In our time, metatheory as a constructive enterprise is not in good shape. Not only is it “hazardous to believe that there are standard criteria for judging the overall progress of a discipline or field of knowledge” (Fiske & Shweder, 1986:1) nor simply, “theories often overlap and, essentially, neglect each other’s existence” (Ward & Hudson, 1998:48), but also “There are prominent scientists who find it impossible to understand each other.” (Fiske & Shweder, 1986:2). ‘Understanding’ is thus a major problem and we shall argue an understanding of this article cannot take place without using an associated faculty—one’s imagination.

Ward, Polaschek and Beech – the most all-inclusive of current authors – offer a convincing summary where current theoretical positions are included in their list of theory appraisal criteria: predictive accuracy, empirical adequacy, and scope; internal coherence; external consistency;

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unifying power; fertility; simplicity; and explanatory depth (Ward *et al.* 2006:9). We shall argue that the present article satisfies most of the above. And that some of Ward's 'theory knitting' (*ibid.* pp. 13,14) has been accomplished thereby.

It is simply not possible to study the earliest stages of consciousness empirically, for we cannot directly contact the 'lifeworld' or 'lived experience' of the neonatal. Nevertheless, we insist that it is from this primordial state of being that our theory obtains.

As Scrapec (2001) points out, "Serial murder tends to be analysed as an objective event, not as a subjective experience." The point of this article is not so much an attempt to reconcile divergent theoretical positions, or to convince the reader of the veracity of one viewpoint over others, as *an attempt to stimulate one particular exercise in conceivability.*

Logical positivists extend the empiricist thesis into a more radical one, whereby theories that one cannot verify or falsify by experience are, strictly speaking, meaningless." (Rosenberg, 2015:14). Positivists want to limit meaningful discourse to what can be tested by scientific method and to logical analysis of its discourse, as provided by empirical methods.

But we will counter that our topic belongs to such an early stage of child development that much will remain inaccessible due to memory loss and the pre-linguistic, pre-concept-forming nature of the early phases (Caston, 2015). Furthermore, that this reductive outlook (that certain psychological elucidations can be reduced to ontology) actually satisfies Ward's ideas concerning internal coherence, explanatory depth and simplicity (see conclusion).

In existential phenomenology, any intense experience increases one's sensation of being—one's sense of being an *isness* as a consciousness. With this in mind, the intensity of sadistic experience refers us to issues in ontology that require background in studies in philosophy. We contend the

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conscientious study of ontology will provide the key to understanding some underlying issues unanswered by psychology.

In the present essay, we shall bring this attitude to bear on one variety of sex offending—sexual sadism—but with particular regard to the sadistic killer as a being who attempts to achieve mastery over other beings through causing their extinction. In particular, that sadistic murder becomes more notionally accessible when one has achieved some facility in philosophical thinking—for us, as provided by Sartrean existential phenomenology.

### **Proposing existential phenomenology**

It is arguable that those of us without employing imagination and due regard for a phenomenological focus will not include the primacy of subjective experience or the import of existential thought. For the empirical social scientist, there will always be 'a lack of data', putting at a distance via objectification and quantity-based theory that distances the enquirer too much from the subject of study. An increasingly large canon of criticism towards the objective stance has been provided by feminist scholars in the philosophy of science (Anderson, 1995a, 1995b, 2004a, 2004b; Campbell, 1998; Cole, 1979; Fonow, 1991; Greenwood, 2000; Longino, 1987, 1993, 1994, 1995, 2002).<sup>1</sup>

From positions such as these, we shall present a depiction of the sexual sadist as a person who is existentially committed to *being* a sadist. That is, their sense of self - their ultimate commitment if you like - is towards affirming sadism as an integral part of a core identity; that to be a sadist, and to *be*, are one and the same thing. We shall later argue that the homicidal sadist is involved in a struggle with being itself - that his fascination with the power to produce non-being (as the intentional annihilation of another conscious being) is a deviant expression of our most

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fundamental urge:—the will to *be*. This kind of killer is literally involved in a struggle with life or death, but one where his own existence is reified by means of the annihilation of others. (Thus, all discourse in the phenomenology of being a sexual killer will reduce itself finally to a discourse on ontology.)

Here we can throw partial illumination on the 'inconceivability' of why a person should choose to be a sadist. For non-sadists the search for a cause, or an explanation for being a sadist is a puzzle without end. But, existentially, the answer is simple. "I am a sadist because that is *how I am*." One chooses being, and being a sadist, in one and the same instant, without hindsight, or appeals to reason or causality. This will be further explained later.

An outlook that assumes cultural conditioning as having a determinate primacy over personal choice, will similarly find the ontological commitment of the sadist as difficult to conceive. For most of us, the assumption of a culturally conditioned identity, along with interiorising received norms and values, seems a necessary part of our upbringing, together with the notion that we are not ultimately responsible for adherence to such conditioning, and values (including the rejection of sadistic impulses) and all this exists independently of human choice. But existentialism adopts the radical view that there are no 'values in themselves' awaiting discovery in the world and it is an original free choice that accounts for any personal moral outlook - that we are always radically free to challenge and refute the values inherited inside our situation, as evidenced by the minority that rebel: misfits, criminals, non-conformists, counter-culturists, sexual deviants—and murderous sadists.

### **Sartrean phenomenology**

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In order to better understand the existential component in this account of the sadistic killer, we need to diverge into some purely philosophical conceptions. Sartre's major work, *Being and Nothingness* (1943), explores consciousness as a mainly *subjective* phenomenon. For Sartre, consciousness has a number of necessary characteristics, the comprehension of which requires more than one reading in order to integrate his ideas into our psychodynamic and attachment theory perspective.

Firstly, consciousness is always conscious *of* something. This means consciousness always posits a transcendental object (something other than itself) but there is nothing *in* consciousness (as if it were a container); it is an *ofness*, not an *inness*. Secondly, every consciousness is simultaneously a consciousness of itself. By implication, for the neonatal in the earliest stages of the primal situation, being aware of a tactile sensation, this conscious being-for-itself is simultaneously aware of this awareness (there can be no unconscious awareness). However, in the *prereflective* mode, prior to the ideational grasp of a continuous sense of personal identity, there is likewise not yet any consciousness of a continuous self. Sartre insists that this 'going out to grasp' is no more than the intentionality which is a facet of all consciousness itself.

Within this perspective, there is nothing 'behind' consciousness, nor any 'qualities' attachable to consciousness outside its objects. Sartre likens consciousness to a vacuum floating over the surface of the world. The lack of any continuous self ('standing behind') in prereflective consciousness is furthermore consistent with Mahler's explanation of the neonatal being unable to differentiate between self (body image) and other (mother image) (Mahler, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant*, pp.41 – 48). Sartre's philosophical term 'prereflective consciousness' may correspond to the experience of the infant in the pre-ego state where they are simply aware of *undifferentiated* impressions without any composite notion of self, world or Other; most

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significantly, in Mahler's 'pre-hatching' stage, without any discursive cognition or schematic knowledge concerning the body and the world.

However, for Mahler, the infant soon makes distinctions through 'hatching' as an entity conscious both of himself through a set of integrated impressions distinct from those of the mother and the world (see Mahler's explanation below). Though we make no claims about cognition, this event is comparable to Kant's transcendental deduction which insists that connectedness and unity in experience is necessary in order to *constitute* an objective world. But not only this: The *concept* of an objective is necessary for the unity of consciousness *as a self-consciousness* (Kant, 1781/2006 ; Strawson, 1966/2005, p. 9).<sup>3</sup>

### **The existential component within psychoanalysis**

In her *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant* (1975) Margaret Mahler, and her colleagues, explain the dynamics of ego formation within the context of libidinal development, in four substages, beginning from a half-sleeping, half-waking state in "an omnipotent, autistic orbit" (Mahler, 1975:41-51). Existentially, the mother and neonate comprise a 'dual unity' with one common boundary. The infant's need for the mother is absolute (the mother's need is relative). For the neonate, inside and outside are only gradually becoming to be sensed as different. After four or five months separation-individuation occurs at the second stage with 'hatching'.<sup>4</sup> Via the instincts of self-preservation, the newly born infant begins to create a sense of self (N.B. *after* physical birth) through a sensory drama of differentiation which eventually achieves notional separateness from the mother and the beginnings of a cognitive understanding of the external world. In the third stage, of twelve to fifteen months, the infant undertakes 'rapprochement'; a darting to and fro, away from the mother and back, as he begins to experiment with tiny voyages

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out into the world, soon rushing back to assuage anxiety (*ibid.* p. 76 - 108). In the fourth subphase, up to the age of three, the infant becomes a walking toddler and develops emotional object constancy; trust and confidence in the mother whose temporary absences now provoke little anxiety (*ibid.* pp. 109 – 120). Existentially, through the intrinsic intentionality of consciousness, individuation is an *accomplishment* (not simply innate) and must go through various stages of separation-individuation, reality testing, sometimes failing to manage a new step by regressing to the security of an earlier stage of attainment (*ibid.* p. 133). If the relationship with the mother is disturbed, problems abound in the emotion-based features of ego development, as we shall see.

Contemporary writers corroborate and expand upon Mahler's position concerning emotion. Fonagy *et al.*, describe disorganisation in terms of a disrupted perception of self and others. For Fonagy, the negligent and abusive mother seems not to regard her child as a mental agent who has thoughts, emotions and volitions of his own. The developing infant who, from her example, *internalises* the manners of the aggressive mother, fails to develop a general representation of persons who can be understood and cared for. This, in turn, and in agreement with our existential perspective, forestalls the development of *a sense of self* as a secure and cohesive being (Fonagy *et al.*, 2004). The child's emerging self is hampered and constrained by pain and conflicting emotions surrounding needs and their satisfaction that cannot establish 'sanctuary', together with conflicting cognitive processes---disorientation and dissociation---resulting in confusion and anti-social tendencies in later childhood (see also Kim, 2010:155).

In Mahler's first subphase, the infant dwells in a twilight state of union with the mother. Intramurally, this is where the infant and the mother *are one* and the consciousness of the infant, when it arises out of sleep, has no distinction-making capacities. Immediately after birth and during the symbiotic months of pre-ego life, the young infant, through internal perceptions, becomes

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familiar with a dim form of his own 'core' body-awareness; a resilience with boundary formation, texture, smell, the handling of transitional objects, marking a change from intramural to extramural life.

From a philosophical point of view, and in accordance with Sartre's existential conception of the structure of human consciousness, what may seem lacking about consciousness in the early stages of this development is, "in its very absence still profoundly present in the heart of being" (*BN* 88). No matter how fleeting, remember, a consciousness is either a conscious consciousness, or it is not what we might *call* a consciousness. (In other words a consciousness that is not conscious of itself would not be a consciousness at all --- there are no half-way steps between consciousness and unconsciousness, the latter being synonymous with nothingness and a state of non-being.) For the neonate, experience will be disorganised and episodic. There will be *holes* in experience which weigh against the notional construction of body image and self.

"Human reality is its own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being which it would be if it were what it is. Human reality is not something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that; it exists first as lack and in immediate, synthetic connection with what it lacks. Thus the pure event by which human reality rises as a presence in the world is apprehended by itself *as its own lack*. In its coming into existence human reality grasps itself as an incomplete being ... Human reality is a perpetual surpassing towards a coincidence with itself which is never given." (*BN* p. 89).<sup>5</sup>

From this quotation we can better elaborate on the state of the newborn. Where it is not "something which exists first in order afterwards to lack this or that", we can glimpse the ontological structure of an early being that is a being composed of 'holes'—parts that are missing in terms of a sense of a unifying self where it is requisite for us not to ascribe qualities to that which *does not yet exist*.

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The infant cannot detect or know what is currently missing as a notional set of attributes.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, it is the ordinary 'filling' of these holes, with perceived actualities in affective bond formation with the primary carer, that normally makes for a successful development and the accomplishment of the self/world distinction.<sup>7</sup> However, we are arguing that the abused child is deprived of the means by which an untroubled construction of self can occur without failure and abasement.

This again can be illustrated by considering the role of emotion. For the fortunate child, the mother's ministrations bring the positive emotions of love, caring, encouragement, and the 'being together' that provide the substance for a co-creation of self.<sup>8</sup> But with the abused child there is constant deprivation in the form of long absences, jolts, shocks, shoves instead of embraces, clumps instead of hugs, slaps as 'anti-caresses'; exclusions instead of invitations, denials instead of acceptances---constitutive of corrosive *absences of love* that impoverish, debilitate and deplete, rather than assist in development. And, worse still in later life, as a juvenile, "lack of a secure home space, maladaptive relationships, internalization of inappropriate behaviour, and a lack of significant family development" (Garrett, 2010:679).

It is important to realise that absences are treated as *real presences* in existential phenomenology; that what is not is as real and significant as that which is and that what is not is experienced as a real presence—the presence of an absence “as its own lack”. Unfortunately, our abused infant's development of self will be wrought through suffering and continual abandonments—contrasted by the positive components evolving within the fortunate child, replaced by presences that are characterised by negations and absences. The abused child not only suffers, by these '*négatités*', but becomes existentially 'half made up' via an accumulation of these lacks.

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'*Négativités*' are "inhabited by negation as a necessary condition of their existence" (*BN* 21) where negation is not only a conceptual but also the *ontological* condition for positivity. Notions involving change, absence, otherness, desire, regret, fear, anguish—all involve negation as the intuition that something is missing.

So, the neediness of the abused child is a consciousness of lack, in the form of *being-a-lack*, a state of energy-depleted wanness that floats over the surface of the world, as a limbo in a penurious, half made-up condition—a being that, as yet, cannot completely *be*.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, this early being-for-itself (as a human consciousness) has the most fundamental desire *to be*; to *fully* exist (see *BN* p. xxvi). (Sartre always insists the cardinal aim, and the fundamental project, of the *for-itself* is *to be*.)

To repeat: Since consciousness is always a consciousness *of* something, there is nothing that rests 'behind' consciousness. Consciousness is always 'filled' by its objects. Sartre describes the case of possession as an attempted ontological fusion of *being-for-itself* with *being-in-itself*—a fusion of the intention-loaded 'nothing part' of our being with *things*. Being in a state of need, as a state of desiring, is to be aware of oneself *as a lack*, and as a non-fusion with the ever-elusive objects of desire. For the fortunate infant, it is the mother who provides for such a lack. It is she who allows him to appropriate her as 'his possession'; she 'infuses being' upon the child through bestowing her generous *presence* redolent with affections;— her body as the giver of warmth, her breast as the giving of sustenance, her voice as the sonorous provider of human fondness. The infant 'becomes these things' through an affective appropriation of that provided by the mother; that is, he integrates them into *a secure sensation of self* whereby his 'consciousness of' is replete with a benefic, positive experience of being.<sup>10</sup> It is important for us to remember that, previously, in the undifferentiated state, the infant had *no* impression of self to assume symbiotically. He did not

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"exist first in order to lack something," for this awareness of lack itself was his original mode of existing.

### **The experience of lack for the future sadistic killer**

A comprehensive appreciation of these kinds of lack will eventually provide an explanation—on an existential phenomenological basis—for the adult sadistic killer.

But the delimitations of self and non-self are still unsteady and precarious. Mahler insists that the mother's continued emotional availability is essential for the child's autonomous ego to attain optimal functional capacity; as effected by smiling (mirroring), babytalk, playfulness, sharing in the infant's curiosity and adventures into the world, all towards facilitating a greater independence (*ibid.* p. 79). A now constant emotional involvement with the mother consolidates ego-development via these accomplishments, towards what will soon become self-support and self-sufficiency. And yet, for us, it is throughout Mahler's developmental stages that things can go badly wrong.

"It has been reported that the securely attached individuals tend to internalise significant others as benevolent, whereas the insecurely attached individuals tend to internalise self and others as ambivalent." (Blatt *et al.*, 1996 in Kim p. 156)

The condition of an infant attachment with the mother informs subsequent psychopathology and any observed dissociations. Procedural and reciprocal face-to-face interaction, up to around twelve months, usually establishes a positive emotional relationship. Secure infants are emotionally positive and are able to coherently express distress when necessary (Mahler, p.255). Positive affect is the *necessary* condition for congruence and attachment, involving internal representations, or 'working models', of self and others (*ibid*, p.261) which, in turn, lay the foundations for later social

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expectancies and interactive efficacy including empathy and a moral consciousness regarding others (Mahler, p. 262; Seifer & Schiller 1995; Beebe *et al* 2012). By the time the infant has become absorbed in his own autonomous functioning, to the virtual exclusion of the mother in later subphases, a pattern of affective relations between the two has been well established. Yet, looking from the developmental psychoanalytic perspective, where the subphases have been existentially fragmented or unsuccessful, specific adult characteristics may result, involving sexual-affective dysfunctions resulting in unhealthy fixations (for example, oral and anal sadism). In an early experience of trauma, the infant has been subject to galling upheavals that shape libido and the consciousness of his own being.

Existentially, the cold violence of trauma is both terrifying and life-threatening. The evolving psyche of the infant cannot adjust to this tumult, whilst simultaneously attempting to negotiate Mahler's subphases, and arbitrate a constant preservation of a sense of self. As already said, in terms of existential phenomenology, the being of this infant is plagued with holes; there is an experience of lack dispersed within any emerging totality. These holes have no predicative, positive qualities and remain strictly non-notional. They are characterised by their emptiness as unfulfilled desire and a blind yet directed rage, with nothetic consciousness of what is happening. In other words, at this very early stage of life the infant has been exposed to the vertiginous possibility of extinction or non-existence via 'unsupportive non-existences' in the form of non-caring, un-warmth, a continual non-affirmation of his presence in the world by the would-be supportive mother. He has been face-to-face with absences *as the prelude to an imminent existential extinction* (what we would call death),<sup>11</sup> as repeatedly precipitated by the behaviour of the careless child-bearer who, perhaps intergenerationally, lacks her own adequate "implicit personality theory" (IPT) (see especially Gara *et al*, 1992). Where rage and aggression become

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mutualised, the neglectful mother becomes a part of the *psychodynamic co-constitution of a violent subject*. This is because, existentially, the infant and the mother were in the earliest instances only one, prior to the emergence of consciousness and any individuation on the part of the infant. Since the mother may have wilfully split herself off from this binary fusion (perhaps even starting with an unwanted conception), the infant will be an orphan before he is physically born. Ontologically, he is now a wholly embodied psychic half-being who is constantly thwarted in becoming a human psychic whole.

More recent research has reported a link between disorganised attachments in infants with later behaviour problems at school where difficulties with maternal attachment have been linked to inappropriate impulse-driven strategies (aggression) that are used for coping with stress with their peers (Lyons-Ruth & Jacobvitz, 1999; Sroufe, 2003; Kim, 2010:154). And it is well accepted that older sex offenders have difficulty in forming mature attachments with others and have suffered loneliness, since whatever they can remember of their childhood, as the discrepancy between initially desired and later achieved levels of intimacy. Many such individuals have no friends in prison and shun the company of others. They even frequently voice negative self-evaluation as a kind of alienation from themselves (McCormack & Hudson, 2002; Marshall, 2010).

So what is to be his own 'remedy'? In a nutshell, and above all existentially, *murder* could well become a convenient and very apt form of *appropriating* the being of another through the use of his now adult power to annihilate—vengefully taking away the being of the primeval one who never fully gave it. Especially where most females are now symbolic of that first female who denied him. The act of murderous destruction will therefore depict an attempted *reclaiming* of being through the extinction of another. (But we shall see below that this reclaiming is futile.)

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How can this be so? Where a Freudian conception of psycho-sexual development accompanies our existential account, it is not difficult to see how the features of violent sexual assault are informed by Freudian ideas concerning fixation—the biting and maiming of breasts as fixation on the oral-sadistic phase, the forced insertion of sharp objects into rectums to act out anal sadism. Significantly for us, many sex killers are fixated on the anal phase (Hurst II p. 308-311). At the end of an ordinary healthy continuum lies mature love with equality and reciprocity; but at the unhealthy end lies sadism, the requirement of power or dominance for sexual arousal and pleasures originally stemming from interiorising the abusive control and coercion by a powerful parent during early psychosexual development. The need for such dominance is most likely to occur during the anal phase (Freud, 1905/1977; 64-72; Silverstein, 1994). Later, the relish of, say, some forced decapitation may silence all possibility of *the voice* and symbolically destroy the thoughts (as in the head) of one who can think and speak rejectingly. Nor is it difficult to appreciate, here, that *power* has a greater significance than sexuality: for us, power is the force that governs ontology—to be, or not to be—sexual overpowering is merely one of its expressions (Scrapec, 2001:51; Marshall & Hucker, 2006). Perpetrators of sexual homicide extendedly enjoy power, control and domination as part of their murderous repertoire and, existentially, can now experience ‘a celebration of non-being against being’ (*cf.* Ressler *et al* 1996; Greenall, 2012:9).<sup>12</sup>

Episodic disempowerment, in the form of neglect, denial and abuse, can therefore act as a very early form of socialisation process whereby an instinctual, aggressive 'self-promotion' becomes more dominant, the less that the mother provides for a decent caring. Of cardinal significance, a positive means of survival requires the *cooperation* of this primary carer and when this does not happen the infant reacts with desperation and enragement, repeated occurrences thus setting an

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adverse pattern for all future encounters with later females. At such an early stage, the infant has no choice but to opt for any action that would guarantee his continued existence in the world.

Consistent with classical developmental psychoanalysis, this pattern evolves as occasioned by the pre-eminence of a *caring* mother who, during Mahler's fourth subphase, initiates a moral consciousness in the infant when he interiorises her depictions of right and wrong. For the fortunate infant, anxious not to lose the love of the mother, rapidly adopts *her* codes of behaviour to ensure continued bestowals of affection (this affection being absent when the average infant incurs brief punishments). The capacity for moral action, and the discerning of right from wrong (classically) constitutes the formation of the superego (Freud, 1957; Mahler, p. 109). However, in the case of the adult sadistic killer, these developments have never taken place with efficacy because he has had no proper *contrastive* experiences of love and its abstention.<sup>13</sup> In psychoanalysis, compulsions arising into awareness come from an unconscious self that has been split off from the conscious self. The precise memories of an original abuse have been erased from awareness and its traces suppressed. In such a situation, our killer cannot be said to have full autonomy for his actions because of a gap in conscious knowledge and the split that exists between conscious and unconscious which *could* mould "an informed opinion" (*cf.* Hurst 1, 2003 p. 298). Being bereft of a full development of rational and affective faculties, the killer *must be less than a person as we normally conceive one*. Once again, ontologically, he has parts missing.

### **The sadistic killer as an abused child**

To complicate matters further, it is well documented that most adult perpetrators of child abuse were once themselves abused as children and this syndrome may emerge as intergenerational (Kaufmann & Zigler, 1987; Main & Goldwyn 198; Herzog et al, 1992). Young mothers with a

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personal history of abuse have difficulty with integration of what counts as acceptable and unacceptable in their past experience. The intergenerationally abused infant therefore once more starts off with confronting a lack---the ability of the previously abused mother to have an adequate conception of her own maternal provenance (see Herzog p , 94). Whereas, mothers who have integrated perceptions of themselves as children have less likelihood of abusing their own (*ibid* p. 96), abusive mothers have distorted, negative perceptions of their child; ignoring them, initiating less play and less verbal contact, being also critical, punitive and demanding. Significantly, this kind of mother is likely to find it difficult to remember her own pain and humiliation as a child. A lack of empathy combined with inflexibility and an underinformed knowledge of the ordinary problems of child rearing compounds intergenerational child abuse (Hanson, 2003).

And yet, philosophically, we take an 'I' to be present within, say, the psychological composition of emotion. It is an 'I' who loves or hates, an 'I' who intends the object of his anger when directed, in its individuated state, to a specific source—as the neglectful mother. Yet, contrary to the popular belief that posits a pre-existing 'solid ego', the existentially cumulative ego is more like a synthetic unity gradually constituted, unifying impressions over time. Common sense would say it is via consciousness of the ego that we come to know our emotional states and qualities. But Sartre reverses this process: it is my love and hate that, in reflection, make me become conscious of a 'me' (Sartre, 1957:59 - 61). Under this depiction, any enraged infant victim of maternal abuse creates a much debilitated sense of self within this fervent maelstrom. The ego is born via such emotion-laden experience, 'the one who suffers'. The visceral quality of enduring emotion (embodiment, increased heart rate, distress, etc.) further compounds the experience of a troubled self-consciousness in its very earliest appearances.

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But since there is no continuously pre-existing transcendental ego for the infant to 'lean upon', there is likewise no previously established base to act as an anchor for this infant to cling to. This is an *existential* condition (the comprehension of which requires our best efforts of imagination), being on occasions simply 'a pure suffering' without sense or locus. In these 'enforced regressions', the developing self continuously re-fragments and the infant becomes precipitously aware of an imminent annihilation from which his proto-sense of self first emerged - in Sartrean terms '*un anéantissement*'—a made-nothingness. Reflective thought then becomes impossible because there is no reflecting-reflected on, no 'I' to cognise a *that* which is happening to a *someone*. Such a consciousness once more implodes into the singular prereflective awareness of 'pure suffering'. In this enforced prereflective awareness there is still consciousness which is conscious of itself—but it is not a 'reflecting-reflected on' constituting a person.

Within this matrix of conflicting impressions, the continually abused infant has been torpedoed during his attempts to accomplish selfhood and a state of affective equilibrium. But, most significantly, he has been emotionally damaged and only the most enduring negative emotions provide the basis for him the mode of his *being-in-the-world*. To be, and to be miserable, are one and the same. Moreover, emotion is a force-like state for him suffered passively and as an apprehension of that which exists in the world itself (not simply within his own experiential orbit). Anger becomes directed. Aggression is 'a towards'. It forms what later becomes an intrinsic "commitment" which, in childhood, becomes loaded with cognitions, in the form of established beliefs about others once the infant has conceived of the mother as *a consciousness* like his own (*cf.* Sartre, 1940/1972: 75 – 81). Hatred, as an enduring state, consolidates this original anger now evolved into a thetic consciousness aimed at other conscious beings. Purposive experience, in emotion, is directional (Gardner, p. 20). For the abused infant, it is the mother herself, who, over

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time, becomes intentionally transfigured into 'a hated one': as the one who imposed on him an original detachment and placed him as subject to her obdurate freedom (*cf. BN* p. 411). Thus the abused infant forms one of his first attributions of the Other—of woman—as the object of his anger and hatred; all this within the aforesaid precariousness of an original formation of self and others. Since this experience is unique and inceptive, most subsequent affective encounters with women will be based on this archetype (see Scrapec, 2001:58).<sup>14</sup>

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At the earliest of stages, the infant is confronted with a most fundamental existential experience (but only as a concept for us)—that of being or non-being. In his earliest experiences of being, through the obdurate neglect of the primary carer, the infant is confronted with that of non-being where his imminent future may be no more than a vertiginous descent into oblivion—developmentally, the contrary of what he has already achieved through Mahler's stages of individuation. We have seen from Mahler that the consciousness of a self is fragile, episodic, and subject to repeated failures of attempt, even when things go well.

Yet, around the time of the fourth substage (emotional independence) of a walking toddler, some time in the second year of life (once the infant is well aware of the mother as a separate embodied and conscious being with her own intentions) he will likewise be better *cognitively* aware of any withholding behaviours on her part. The infant is now aware of the mother as a being with her own intentions – as a separate mind. It is at this stage that the infant experiences his desperation and an intentional rage now *reflectively directed at another*. He now has a thetic understanding of the actions of others being directed by their own intentionality (it no longer “just happens”). But the desperation of his condition can still only be assuaged *by* the mother---the being from whom he

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originally owed his presence in the world. The grasping of this situation *as a concept* will be the forerunner of more complex dispositions involving misogyny—eventually manifest as the hatred of all females.

### **The aims of sadistic murder**

We are now approaching a more complete existential account of the sadistic killer. The adult murderer as a once-abused-child has a pre-conscious horror of his early infant state which spectrally reminds him of his continuing lifelong humiliations of having no meaningful relations with the opposite sex (Greenall, p. 347). His emotions, as grievance-driven and other-directed, have taken on the aspect of a commitment – but not quite an ideology - as a set of precipitous demands on how the world should be altered for him, to provide his life with *a meaning* (*cf.* Sartre, 1940/1972:75-81; Soloman, 1997:224). His attempts are now to clutch at these tantalising forms and *make use of the female* as both the present object and a representative of the transcendent consciousness that once abused him. His desire is to appropriate and control the consciousness of this other (much as he was once non-optionally controlled by an abusing mother). He seeks to use her body as the tool by which she will now realise her own incarnate existence - but in a misery and humiliation that once (and still) parallels his own. He wants to appropriate and possess the flesh of the victim, but not within the reciprocity of ordinary lovers. Rather, in his consciousness of *her* now forced consciousness of her own being, as miserable and tormented, and, by his own imposition, *similarly losing command and her sense of identity*.<sup>15</sup> He wants to be a 'transcendence-transcending' towards the being of another (*cf.* BN p. 408).

It is written that sadistic killers lack empathy (Hanson, 2003; Covell *et al.* 2002). However, under the existential account, this is not really true because it is precisely his capacity to empathise with

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suffering that inspires certain actions. In his forced entries and throttling grasp, the sadistic killer is highly attuned to the consciousness of his victim and wants to 'accompany her' in her sufferings. (This why many sadistic killings are not done in haste - the killer wants his victim to *know* all that is happening.)<sup>16, 17</sup> During the act of murderous destruction, he wants to 'incarnate her' through his own agency and through her own acknowledged pain. This is very empathic. The sadistic killer wants to capture 'the grace and ease' of his victim and transform it, in her own eyes, into an unrefined atrocity via compulsion and violent abruptness. For him, natural grace and beauty have furnished this woman with a reason for existing—she is self-sufficient and free. Unlike her killer, she has a better ontological foundation for her existence; secure, caring, sharing, taken for granted, 'God given' (see *BN* on sadism, pp. 399 – 407). But this apparent wellbeing of her existence enrages him. He wantonly destroys her grace and independence by enforcing an unhappy self-knowledge of herself, now bereft of this capricious freedom—to force her to recognise herself as identical with tortured flesh and an expiring consciousness of selfhood. But this experience of possession is short lived; the conscious possession of her body is revealed, only in flashes, as the quality of finally being *his*. So, ontologically, he is symbolically reclaiming the being of one who denied him *his* being. His mission is aimed at *femininity itself*. But it is revealed to him only through a transient action effected, for the most part, in prereflective consciousness. As soon as he can withdraw to contemplate his deed reflectively, the impression of possessing her vanishes amidst her lifelessness. His victory is short-lived and she becomes a thing again (*cf. BN* p.595). His project of reclaiming his own being is once more thwarted.

But the aim of the sex killer is, especially, more than this: He wants to destroy her entire existence. So here we arrive at the crux of an existential elucidation of the sadistic killer;—*he wants to assume and enjoy the power of life or death over his victim. He wants to become a master of being and*

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*non-being*. Paralleling the primordial existential terror that once threatened him with extinction, he wants to hurl the victim into oblivion and eradicate any trace of the being that once commanded his. She will, thereby, no longer show herself as impenetrable and untouchable, no longer transcend his wishes to become a whole. In destroying the woman he also *absorbs* her into his being in the form of an ultimate appropriation, as a "possessor-possessing" (cf. *BN* p. 588). In her soon-to-be non-existence she now appears as an imminent 'pure transparency'--a transcendence transcended in the form of the imminent non-being decreed by himself (cf. *BN* p. 593). *He wants to exercise a godlike power over being and non-being* experienced in moments of ecstatic intensity. He wants to *reify* his own being, above, through and over hers, to finally become *himself* through the extinction of this perpetually despised Other.

Moreover, in killing her, he becomes her unique end; he is now her destiny (cf. *BN* p. 589). Moreover, this disposition typifies the Sartrean macro-level "wish of the *for-itself* to be God"—to 'possess the whole world', even, by claiming an omnipotence over being. For Sartre, this vain aspiration is,

"To be in the world is to form the project of possessing the world; that is, to apprehend the total world as that which is lacking to the *for-itself* in order that it may become *in-itself-for-itself*." (*BN* p.597)

An *in-itself-for-itself* would be a state of completion, a final purging of insatiable desires, a state of rest; an existential apotheosis, if you will.

However this ambition is permeated by illusion. The sadistic killer's apotheosis is short-lived and he quickly falls back into the state of ordinary being-for-itself, yet again in search of completion. His brief moments of ecstasy – his projected *being-for-itself-in-itself* – flounders in the realisation

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that a 'desire to become' is but an aim, and not a constitution. Desire is aim in transition. As a *néгатité*, it is a lack of being that is pre-reflectively its own lack---the hole which seeks to be filled but cannot be filled. This is why sadistic killers often become serial killers. Within the shortcomings of his vision, his aimed at desires seem plainly a failure. He will have to try again.

### **The search of the in-itself to become a for-itself**

According to the current literature, the adult sadistic killer, like most of us, generally has no recollection of his primal situation. He is thus remains chronically underinformed concerning the genesis of his condition. Freudian commentators will assume his motivations are largely unconscious, but existential thinkers will say he may already have a 'good enough' knowledge of his condition to appreciate his situation (see Wilson, 2010). Thereby, *knowledge* becomes the key to his enlightenment and a freeing from previous 'deterministic' characteristics. The seeing of his own 'unconsciousness' - the making conscious of that which is hidden in his own plutonic past – can become his own potential liberation. It is *possible* for such things to be realised in therapy but this is outside the scope of our current enquiry (see Grof, 1988).

### **conclusion**

In this article we have given a persuasive account for understanding the ontology of the offender, his existential condition, his precarious *sense of being*, and perhaps to some extent, how it feels for the reader to *become* a nascent sadistic killer via efforts of the imagination. Most of this account does not refer to empirical studies, qualitative research and so on. Though we have mentioned empathy deficits and impaired social functioning, the foregoing does not sufficiently cover cognitive distortions, deviant sexual arousal, or risk factors as covered by other contemporary

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authors. Nor have we covered ethical implications and the problem of effectively attributing responsibility and guilt within our model of intentionality.

Notably, many of Ward's criteria have been satisfied (see introduction) concerning coherence (a Sartrean depiction can be explained and is imaginable), external consistency (the condition relates specifically to abusive mothers), unifying power (the condition is not subject to influences outside the mother/infant aggregation), is philosophically fertile (introducing ontology into a psychodynamic equation) and provides much explanatory depth (as a unique variation on 20<sup>th</sup> century depth psychology).

The main failure of this account is that it is vulnerable to the verificationist critiques applied by empiricists. How would such an account ever be testable? Although many sadistic killers have a history that conforms to such a model, there are those who do not. How might we distinguish the one from the other?

Amongst other specific questions that have not been answered we might ask at what point does our damaged infant arrive at concepts governing intersubjectivity (i.e. TOM – theory of mind) and of ascribing the mother as the conscious agent responsible for his misery? Assuming Mahler's account to be defensible, at what stage does the infant *ascribe* a causal connection between his experience and her behaviour?<sup>19</sup> Is there anything hidden, inside the cycle of intergenerationally abusive family systems, that may crystallise certain conceptions? And what of similar offenders who exceptionally evince "happy childhoods"?

Furthermore, we need to revise how we are to employ words such as Mahler's 'hatch' and Sartre's 'holes' outside their common contexts. We are forced to use terms, many with merely metaphorical allusions, comparable to adult experience which, at best, function as intimations to stimulate the

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conceivable rather than objectively display. For the early stages of infantile development it is implausible—and deceiving—to think these words could be applied with the same sense and denotation that we use in everyday descriptions of mature life—or even much of state-of-the-art psychology. Moreover, we cannot “go back” to our own dawnings of consciousness, equipped with our later acquired thetic skills to explain it. In this project of elucidation, we are attempting to construct meanings referring to consciousness at its *earliest* stages of development and we have few available means of refinement, comparison or referral through a language independent of its common usage. Advanced cognition arrives late in the day. Our notional access to the situation is therefore, confined to pioneering, innovative and *imaginative* constructs—perhaps themselves suffering from cavities—and what we, with an eye on the credible, regard as the possible.

Finally, in therapy, where the above account is regarded not only as credible but likely, the problem would then be how to assist the adult offender in making conscious any fragmentary remnants that might arise into consciousness. Do they exist as memories buried deeply in the unconscious? Many psychoanalysts believe they do (e.g. Grof, 1988). Are there therapists willing to accompany the client on such a dangerous mission? The full impact of "I did that" when one knows why and yet can be contemporaneously empowered to revise or rebuild a concept of self? But explanations of this sort must be the subject of research and experience in therapy best set aside for later essays. ■

*BN = Being and Nothingness*

### NOTES

1. For example, the idea that we are all imbued with subjectivity, due to being non-optionally situated, and even that the objective viewpoint is “the view from nowhere.”
2. Since most sadistic killers are male, I use the pronoun ‘he’ throughout.
3. It is this deduction that permits a developing cognitive awareness in the abused child’s early individuating situation. In later reflective awareness, the neonatal begins to have a thetic awareness, a

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*judgmental* form; a consciousness *that* the world is configured in a certain way and that his (embodied) consciousness is also a part of it through the modality of disturbing affective experiences.

4. Like much of our vocabulary, “hatching” is metaphorical.

5. Compare “its own lack” with, "Man is the being by which nothingness comes into the world. But this question immediately provokes another: What must man be in his being in order that through him nothingness may come into being?" *BN* p. 24.

6. By analogy, one may compare this idea with partial blindness: the partially blind individual cannot *see* what is missing in his visual field, even as ‘a hole’.

7. Infants that do not manage the transition remain in the pre-individuated state and are regarded as psychotic, as in the case of autism. See Mahler pp. 41-43.

8. As a primordial Heideggerian ‘*mitsein*’.

9. "The existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack." *BN* p. 87.

10. Concerning breast feeding, Sartre would say that the infant satisfying hunger makes the act of 'a towards', that is involving consciousness of its own lack, with the imminent possibility of 'thirst repletion'. (*cf. BN* p. 203.)

11. Even so, before 2 years, the child has no *cognitive* understanding of death. see Himebauch, A., Arnold, R., May, C., (2008) 'Grief in Children and Developmental Concepts of Death', *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Vol 11, No 2, p. 242.

12. "a brutal and failed attempt at intimacy" "killing unrequited love" "power-assertive", Greenall, 2012:9, 'Understanding Sexual Homicide', *JSA*, Vol. 18, No 3.

13. "These men had become silent about their lived spaces and victimizations because they perceived themselves as deserving nothing better. They survived; that was it." (Garrett, 2010:761).

14. "Violence is displaced onto victims who represent something or someone of importance in the killer's experience." Scrapec, 2001, 'Phenomenology and Serial Murder', *Homicide Studies*, Vol 5 No 1.

15. This project is mostly successful. Many rape victims report fragmentation and loss of self, detachment from their bodies, a loss of totality, lack of motivation and a sense of direction in life (see Mui, 2005).

16. Few sex killers want to murder a victim in her sleep.

17. In examining the motives behind necrophile practices, it was noted that 68% of the individuals engaged in necrophilia in order to have an *unresisting and unrejecting partner* [my italics]. Or, we might say, to have a partner who is not conscious and can never return the threat as a 'transcending-transcendence' (see Rosman & Resnick, 1989:159).

18. “The existence of desire as a human fact is sufficient to prove that human reality is a lack.” *BN* p.87.

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19. I would argue that none of this could take place without some rudimentary concept of intersubjectivity. That is, the infant is aware of himself as a conscious entity independent of the mother, but also of the mother as a conscious entity independent of him. In other words, separation-individuation is advanced enough to incorporate cognitions concerning reciprocal personhood.

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