

THE IMPACT OF THE
INTERNET ON OUR
MORAL LIVES

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Dedicated to

Preston K. Covey

a mentor to many of us,

a visionary for all of us

16. See James H. Moor, What Is Computer Ethics?, online at http://www.southernct.edu/organizations/rccs/resources/teaching/teaching_mono/moor/moor_definition.html.

17. Some of these ideas were developed in a much shorter version and without the emphasis on virtues, Aristotle, and many of the policy recommendations in Academic Integrity and the World Wide Web, *Computers and Society* Vol. 31, No. 1 (March 2002): 33–42, and The Impact of the Internet on Our Moral Lives in Academia, *Ethics and Information Technology* Vol. 4 No. 1 (February 2002): 31–35.

FOUR

Enter Here—At Your Own Risk

The Moral Dangers of Cyberporn

SUSAN DWYER

“LUST MOTIVATES TECHNOLOGY.” Pornographers are always among the first to recognize and exploit the potential of each new wave of communication technology, from the printing press and early photography to film and video, and now the Internet.² So-called adult entertainment businesses led the way in the development of secure online credit-card transactions, and they have been at the forefront of database management. *Playboy* was one of the first companies to use digital watermarking; Virtual Dreams, a company that provides online striptease shows, pioneered the use of videoconferencing.³

Cyberpornography is one of the few reliably profitable online businesses. In 1997, there were 10,000 sex industry sites, the biggest of them generating about \$1 million a month. By 1998, there were at least three sites returning more than \$100 million a year. In 2000, one or more of 60,000 sex sites was visited by one in four Internet users at least once a month.⁴

None of this should come as a surprise: sex sells. However, we must not be misled into thinking that the Internet is awash with smut or saturated with pornography, as some panicky critics would have us believe. Cyberpornography accounts for only one-fifth of the total annual pornography business in the United States, variously put between \$10 and \$14 billion.⁵ Hence, it might be doubted that there is anything to say about cyberpornography that has not already been said about more traditional types of pornography. What, if any, new moral questions does cyberpornography raise?

Bracketing off the fact that many children can access cyberpornography more easily than they can access video and print pornography, cyberporn presents us with fundamentally the same sorts of moral issues as its technologically less sophisticated cousins. Nevertheless, in a somewhat surprising twist, the experience of consuming pornography on the Internet helps to illuminate a moral critique of pornography that is yet to receive the attention it deserves. The twist is surprising because the moral critique I have in mind appears rather old-fashioned. Indeed, the critique has ancient precedent in Aristotle's account of the virtuous agent.

Put bluntly, the idea is that some pornography is morally problematic because it provides the raw material for and helps to nurture a class of morally bad actions—namely, sexual fantasizing about a variety of harms to oneself and/or to others. And, because of the unique phenomenology of consuming pornography online, certain kinds of cyberpornography are particularly effective in this regard. As I will argue, sexual fantasizing is something we deliberately and consciously *do*. We construct fantasies that please us and return to them over the course of our lives. Sexual fantasies are remarkably persistent; indeed, the empirical evidence suggests that they are among the most enduring elements of our respective psychologies. However, it is morally dangerous persistently and deliberately to engage in an activity that yokes sexual pleasure and satisfaction to conscious thoughts of degradation, humiliation, and violence.⁶ To do so is to run a serious risk of compromising one's moral character. If I am right about the unique experience of consuming cyberpornography, then cyberpornography might be quite risky indeed.

This controversial thesis is apt to meet with significance resistance from a number of sources, most of which I will attempt to address later in this chapter. However, one such source can be dealt with quickly. My concern here is with the *moral evaluation* of pornography (more precisely, with the moral evaluation of consuming pornography). I make no claims about what, if anything, the state should do about pornography, its producers and distributors, or its consumers. Nor are any particular policy recommendations implied by the critique I offer.⁷ Debates about the moral status of pornography need not and should not be construed exclusively as debates about free speech and censorship. Of course, moral analysis may play a legitimate role in the formulation of public policy, but there is a *point* to engaging in such analysis that is quite independent of that use. Morality concerns how we live our public *and* private lives; at the very least, it pertains to what kinds of people we aspire to be. To abjure moral analysis and evaluation that are not strictly in the service of making policy is, perversely, to divorce moral thinking from our everyday lives, where it has its natural home—another Aristotelian theme.

THE MORAL STATUS OF PORNOGRAPHY: SOME EARLIER ACCOUNTS

Few of us are wholly indifferent to pornography, unless perhaps we have never seen any. Many people clearly like it a lot, while others hate it all. However, I suspect that any reasonably reflective and honest person will concede that there is *something* problematic about Web sites devoted to representations of sexual torture, or, to cite a more prosaic example, about the fact that a non-trivial number of our fellow citizens invest considerable resources to return over and over to images of women being ejaculated on. But what is the source of this unease, and is it justified?

Since pornography became an object of systematic study, three main lines of criticism have emerged. In historical order, theorists have argued for the moral problematicity of pornography on the grounds of (1) its sexual content, (2) its alleged harmful effects on women, and (3) its role in the social construction of sexuality and gender. Each new critique was prompted by the revealed inadequacies of the one(s) that preceded it. I think all three approaches are flawed. However, for current purposes I will discuss only the first two.

Employing the most value-neutral characterization of pornography—namely, explicit pictorial or verbal representations of human sexual activity designed to produce sexual arousal—some people have condemned pornography just on the basis of its sexual content. In particular, they believe that the sort of sexual behavior portrayed in pornography perverts some 'true' purpose of sex, claiming, for example, that sex ought always aim at procreation or that it should always involve a profound connection between two persons.

There is no denying that pornographic sex is, literally, sterile. While some women may have conceived as a result of intercourse had in front of the cameras, making babies is not what pornography is about. Moreover, a good deal of pornographic sex happens between persons of the same sex, penetrations are oral and anal as well as vaginal, and, more often than not, a typical heterosexual pornographic scene ends with the ejaculation of semen onto a woman's face or body. Neither can we deny that pornographic sex is largely impersonal. Some pornography has narrative structure, but for the most part it cuts straight to the sex, focusing intensively on genitalia. And while actors obviously interact in quite intimate ways, their pleasure (real or simulated) seems quite solipsistic: any penis, any vagina, any mouth, any anus will do.

Still, it is hard to see what is *morally* wrong about sex without procreative intent or with sex that is not at the same time an instance of profound interpersonal communication. Indeed, it was surely one result of the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s that these sorts of worries about pornography began to seem quaint. Nevertheless, as feminists started to think about

pornography, a new critique emerged. The focus of feminist concerns turned to the alleged connection between pornography, especially violent pornography, and violence against women. Robin Morgan's remark "Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice" captured a feminist perspective on pornography that was extremely influential for over a decade.⁸ This perspective had a powerful strategic advantage. If pornography does cause demonstrable harm to women, then it is obviously morally bad. More important, the substantiated harms of pornography would justify its censorship. For the Supreme Court has long conceded that speech that constitutes a clear and present danger can be restricted consistent with the First Amendment.⁹

There are two main reasons why this approach fails. First, the empirical claim that pornography causes harm to women, say, by making men rape and commit sexual assault, has not been established. A vast amount of social science research has produced conflicting results, and the research itself is plagued by familiar problems of bias and selective interpretation.¹⁰ The second reason we should abandon this particular critique of pornography is deeper. As Laura Kipnis puts it, "The argument that pornography causes violent behavior in male consumers relies on a theory of the pornography consumer as devoid of rationality, contemplation, or intelligence, prone instead to witless brainwashing, to monkey see/monkey do re-enactment of the pornographic scene."¹¹

Since this idea will figure in what comes later, it is worth closer examination. The central point is this: humans are not simple stimulus-response machines. Merely seeing some representation cannot by itself cause action. Viewing or reading pornography usually does cause sexual arousal, even in people who find pornography morally troubling. But an erection is not an action.

ACTIONS

Actions are distinct from happenings. Contrast my shrugging to indicate that I don't know the answer to your question (an action) with the same movement, my shoulders going up and down, when I hiccup (a happening). Or, consider the comedian Chevy Chase and his hilarious pratfalls. His intentional and deliberate behavior is quite different from that of the person who is tripped up on the street or falls over during an epileptic fit. Chevy Chase's falling is funny precisely because he *means* to fall. A person's *actions* are explained in terms of that person's beliefs, desires, and intentions, whereas *happenings*—for example, the person's mere bodily motions—are fully explicable in terms of physiological goings-on. To complicate matters, we might also want to specify a middling range of movements that are neither quite actions nor merely happenings; for example, unthinkingly drumming one's fingers during a tedious meeting or bobbing one's foot while listening to music. Typically, we don't *decide* to move our

bodies in these ways, but once we become aware that we are doing so, we can stop. Now, many of our physical responses to pornography are passive—they just happen to us—and perhaps some of our psychological ones are too. But *acting* on the basis of these responses is not something that just happens to a person; one has to choose or try to do certain things. Unless one is pathological, the consumer of pornography is not *compelled* to act in any particular way in light of what he sees.

Having said that, there are two types of action, which, while optional, are typically associated with the consumption of pornography: masturbation and sexual fantasizing. My main topic is the latter.

To reiterate: the proposition I want to consider is that some pornography is morally problematic insofar as it plays a role (perhaps a pivotal one) in morally dangerous sexual fantasizing. I suspect that the default position of many Americans is that a moral critique of sexual fantasizing is simply a non-starter. But precisely because this is the prevailing view, the assumptions on which it rests need to be scrutinized.

FANTASIZING AS INNER

A common view is that fantasizing is essentially 'inner.' Killing a rival is morally wrong; merely fantasizing about killing her is not. There is little reason to think that fantasizing about X-ing makes actual X-ing more likely. And, one might think that if fantasizing does 'spill over' into overt behavior, then the fantasizing can be criticized, but only derivatively, in terms of the badness of the behavior to which it led.

Fantasizing is inner, in some sense of that term that also describes thinking in general. It is one among many ways in which we exercise our imaginations. And we engage in it in the privacy of our consciousness. Recalling the distinctions made earlier, fantasizing is not something that merely *happens* to us. It may be distinguished from having fleeting thoughts, daydreaming, or being subject to unbidden or intrusive images (the analogues in imagination of finger drumming). Rather, fantasizing is typically something we deliberately and consciously *do*. Undoubtedly, there are cases of compulsive fantasizing, just as there are cases of compulsive hand washing. However, in the usual case, a person fantasizes for a reason: in order to distract, please, or motivate herself. Hence, despite its location inside our heads, fantasizing is properly described as a type of action and is therefore open to moral scrutiny. Of course, the grounds on which a person may be praised or blamed for fantasizing remain to be articulated.

As I noted, it might be conceded that some fantasizing can be morally criticized, but only if that fantasizing leads to harmful overt behavior. About a man with sadistic sexual fantasies we might say "They're all in his head. He is not hurting anyone. And maybe his fantasizing in this way is what keeps

him from actually doing such things." But this is just beside the point, once we recognize that fantasizing is a type of action. For the purpose of moral evaluation, it does not matter whether a particular instance of fantasizing is associated with *another* action. My stabbing you is morally wrong irrespective of whether, having enjoyed it so much, I go on to stab someone else, or whether, filled with new sense of your own mortality, you go on to be a great philanthropist. Similarly, we can make sense of the idea that you act wrongly when you break your promise to take me to a baseball game, even though our not going makes it possible for me to do more work on my book. Hence, an instance of fantasizing need not lead to some other bad action in order to be morally bad itself.

It will be clear at this point that I reject a thoroughgoing consequentialism that holds that the moral status of an action is determined exclusively and exhaustively by its actual consequences. Some actions, like those previously described, may be judged on the basis of their intrinsic features alone. The consequences of our actions are not morally irrelevant. However, they are not *all* that is morally relevant. If we focus exclusively on the consequences of our actions, we ignore a large part of what constitutes our moral lives. We respond not only to the results of one another's overt behavior but also to one another's beliefs, desires, intentions, and characters—in short, to each other's moral *agency*. If this is right, then it is at least arguable that a person's fantasizing can be morally bad whether or not the person acts out the fantasy.

SEXUAL FANTASIZING IS DIFFERENT

An objector might grant that, insofar as fantasizing is a type of action, it is open to moral evaluation, and yet balk at the idea that *sexual* fantasizing is ever morally wrong, or that a person can ever be blameworthy for engaging in sexual fantasizing. (Indeed, consider the apparent oddity of *praising* someone for sexual fantasizing.) I believe this reluctance stems from the understandable worry that the moral evaluation of sexual fantasizing puts us at the beginning of an unpleasant slippery slope. When it comes to making judgments about people's sexual lives, the track record is not good. For example, the erroneous judgment that homosexual sexual desire is morally perverse continues to play a significant role in the unjust treatment of homosexuals. Put this way, the objection is not that sexually fantasizing is always morally neutral or morally good, but rather that it would be better if we did not engage in the evaluation of sexual fantasies or desires, period.

I take this concern seriously.¹² However, it bears repeating that moral evaluation does not by itself warrant any particular state action. If we assume otherwise, if we forswear the moral evaluation of some human practices simply because we worry about what use might be made of those evaluations, then we effectively hold ourselves hostage to the irrationality and ill will of

others. More important, as I will try to make clearer, when an agent engages in moral evaluation and moral judgment, he need not limit himself to evaluation of and judgment about the actions of *others*. Being a moral agent essentially involves turning those critical faculties on *oneself*, at least every now and then. This chapter, then, should not be read as invitation to point fingers at others whose sexual fantasizing one may find distasteful, but as an attempt to make space in the complex discussion of pornography for genuine first-personal—that is, self-assessment.

Nonetheless, there are deeper sources of resistance to the idea that sexual fantasizing can sometimes be morally bad, which are not always made explicit, in part, I think, because they are quite difficult to articulate. Since the thesis under consideration is so controversial, these assumptions are worth unpacking.

It will help to begin by considering some of the reasons a person might fantasize. First, fantasizing about an event can help us prepare for that event. Think of the teenager who fantasizes about losing both his parents, not because he wants them to die, but rather because doing so helps prepare him for loss. Second, fantasizing can motivate us. Think of the athlete who fantasizes about running in the Olympics. Third, we fantasize to entertain, please, or gratify ourselves. Quite often these reasons operate together; for example, the athlete might derive considerable pleasure by fantasizing about her Olympic performance. But, for present purposes, let us focus on the self-gratifying nature of fantasizing.

The gratification a person achieves by fantasizing may have several different explanations. First and most obviously, a person may simply have a desire to fantasize, which is then trivially satisfied when he does. Second, there are the familiar instances of fantasizing about something because one cannot, for practical reasons, bring it about; for example, I may fantasize about killing my noisy neighbor and derive a certain degree of satisfaction from doing so. And, within this class of cases we might draw a further distinction: I may actually have the full-blown desire that my neighbor die, such that I would kill her if I could dispense with the practical obstacles; or, I might have some merely *prima facie* desire that she die, such that even without any obstacles, I would never kill her. In the former, the satisfaction I achieve by fantasizing is the best I can get, given the circumstances. In the latter, the satisfaction I achieve by fantasizing is all the satisfaction I need. Lastly, there seem to be cases of fantasizing that are themselves about having certain desires that are satisfied in the fantasy. Examples here might involve desires that are radically at odds with desires the fantasist has in either the full-blown or *prima facie* senses previously described, and which she positively doesn't want satisfied in any other way.¹³ To be sure, even in these kinds of cases, the fantasist derives some pleasure from her fantasizing, but it is a pleasure she can experience *only* in the realm of fantasy.

An objector might use these distinctions to argue that sexual fantasizing, while a type of action, can never be negatively morally evaluated, and indeed might sometimes be morally praiseworthy. Consider, for example, a man who has sadistic sexual fantasies. He may fantasize in this way because he has a full-blown desire to sexually torture women, where, recall, this means that he would sexually torture women in the absence of certain obstacles. In such a case, the man's fantasizing plays a role in his *refraining* from actually torturing women; for we imagine he can achieve some measure of satisfaction just through fantasizing. So, it seems this sort of fantasizing, which goes proxy or is a surrogate for harmful overt behavior, is praiseworthy since it has the positively good effect of making the actual commission of harm less likely.¹⁴

Alternatively, a man's desire to sexually torture women may only be *prima facie*; that is, even absent practical obstacles he would never actually harm anyone. Or, finally, his sexual fantasizing might be simultaneously the source and satisfaction of sexual desires that are odds with many of his full-blown desires: he doesn't want to have or satisfy these desires in any way other than by fantasizing. In each of the last two cases, the man's fantasizing and the gratification he achieves by it do not substitute for overt behavior. His fantasizing is idle and, it might be thought, for that reason morally neutral.

Of course, there is a difference between surrogate fantasizing and idle fantasizing.¹⁵ However, this distinction does not support the claim that sexual fantasizing is always either morally good (because it goes proxy for overt harmful behavior) or else morally neutral (because it is idle). For this argument rests on an assumption that has already been rejected—namely, that the moral status of fantasizing is always a function of the connection between the fantasizing and overt behavior. But, as I have argued, fantasizing is a type of action, evaluable by itself and independently of any other actions to which it may be related.

Still, one might argue that sexual fantasizing must be distinguished from nonsexual fantasizing in the following way. We engage in sexual fantasizing as a way to satisfy our sexual desires, many of which are opaque to us. I am aware of my desire to kill my neighbor, and I know its origins—her having noisy parties three nights a week. This is a desire I can rid myself of. But many sexual desires don't seem to be so clear and they are not acquired in the same way; I just seem to *find* myself with them. Hence, it appears that I exercise far less control over my sexual desires than I do over my nonsexual desires. All this may be true. But it is irrelevant to the claim that sexual fantasizing may be morally evaluated. For even if we are not responsible for our sexual desires, which I doubt,¹⁶ it is implausible to think of fantasizing as unavoidable. Fantasizing is a deliberate and intentional action. It is, therefore, generally an optional response to desire.¹⁷

This is borne out by the empirical evidence. Sexual fantasizing appears to be almost universal across the species. And psychologists suggest that it is

the most common sort of fantasizing in which humans engage. Sexual fantasies are a type of a 'repeating' fantasy, meaning that individuals return to the same sexual fantasies over and over. Although there is considerable variation between people's sexual fantasies, all appear to be highly scripted and durable. Ethel Person likens a decision to fantasize to a decision to take down a favorite book from an inner and familiar library, and writes,

Once a fantasy is invoked, the fantasizer savors, lingers on, or revises the most exciting, pleasing, or soothing part of his or her mental creation, whirling it around in the mind until arriving at the 'version' that is most gratifying, often slowing the fantasy down at the most stimulating point, and speeding it up at moments that have begun to seem boring, improving on the dialogue, adding new touches to glamorize the setting.¹⁸

We cannot assume that sexual fantasizing is inexorably driven by desires. We choose to fantasize: fantasizing is action. And when our fantasizing is in the service of desire satisfaction, we can be held responsible for it whether or not we are responsible for the relevant desires. It is crucial not to mistake the apparent helplessness of arousal and orgasm that accompanies sexual fantasizing for a lack of control over the fantasizing itself.

Whatever else it may be, fantasizing cannot be said to be off limits to moral evaluation just by dint of its being inner, private, or about sex.¹⁹ Neither is it the case that the moral status of fantasizing (sexual and nonsexual) depends on the probability of its issuing in overt behavior. Still, to argue that sexual fantasizing is morally evaluable is not yet to give an account of what makes sexual fantasizing morally bad when it is. It is to that issue that I now turn.

MORALLY PROBLEMATIC SEXUAL FANTASIZING: AN EXAMPLE

Dennis fantasizes about the following: he moves to a foreign city where he takes up residence in an abandoned building. He meets a young man in a club and brings him back to his place. For a sum of money, the young man agrees to allow Dennis to perform a sex act on him. After a while, Dennis kills him. This is just the first of several killings, some of which Dennis participates in with two other men. The killings all occur in a sexual context; Dennis and his collaborators either have sex with their victims or masturbate while one or the other of them beat or torture their victim.²⁰ Dennis becomes aroused when he engages in this fantasy and he deliberately calls it to mind when he masturbates. Sometimes he focuses on it when he has sex with a partner.

Now imagine two worlds, World A and World B, in all respects like the actual world, except that in World A, many people sexually fantasize about the sorts of things Dennis does, and in World B no one does. Take it as given

that the Dennis's of World A never act out what they fantasize about.²¹ Which is the morally preferable world?

Many people would *like* to be able to say "Neither." Given the option of living in World A or World B, many would *like* to be able to say that it wouldn't matter. But if we are reflective and honest, I don't think we will find it is a matter of indifference that people around us engage in such fantasizing. Now, arguably, World A is the actual world, and so we do not have the option of living apart from such fantasizers. If the fantasies and their authors bother us, then the best we can do is not think about them. This is another piece of the explanation for the reluctance to entertain the possibility that sexual fantasizing is open to moral evaluation: evaluation requires paying attention to its objects—to fantasizers and the content of their fantasies.

The previous thought experiment does not establish very much. However, it helps bring to awareness an intuitive unease many people feel about certain types of fantasizing.

Here is a different thought experiment. Art, Bob, and Chris each fantasizes about anal sex with young children and none of them acts out his fantasies. However, whereas Art is indifferent to his fantasizing, and Bob is distressed by his, Chris positively relishes his fantasizing. How do we judge these men and their actions? Without more information it would be precipitous to think they are all three reprehensible. But there is a sense in which we can distinguish between them: being horrified or being delighted that one fantasizes in this way is arguably morally salient.

Taken together, the thought experiments suggest that two features of fantasizing are relevant to its moral evaluation. First, there is the content of the fantasy, what it is about. Second, there is the attitude of the fantasist toward his fantasies. I will discuss each in turn.

Many people are skeptical about evaluating sexual fantasizing on the basis of the content of the relevant fantasies because they doubt that the content of a fantasy, especially a sexual fantasy, is determinate.

In his paper, "A Child Is Being Beaten," Freud notes that the fantasist herself can and does assume different roles in her fantasy. In the case he discusses, sometimes she is a third-party spectator of a beating, sometimes she is the child, and sometimes she is doing the beating.²² From Freud we also inherit the idea that our dreams are saturated with symbolism; they cannot be read literally and are always open to interpretation. Many people are inclined to believe that our sexual fantasies are like dreams in this respect.

It is telling, I think, that the (alleged) indeterminacy of fantasies is invariably invoked when the fantasies in question concern events that are, in some quite straightforward way, problematic. When someone fantasizes about puppies and fresh apple pie, or about living a successful and happy life, the urge to interpret diminishes to zero. This indicates that our first instinct is to read fantasies literally. It is only when we don't like what we see that we wel-

come and come to find plausible our therapist's complicated story about 'narcissistic wounds' and the like.²³ When the content of our fantasizing disturbs us, it is natural to seek reassurances that neutralize the elements of those fantasies we do not like. However, there is little evidence to suggest that a cigar is not just a cigar most of the time.

We are unquestionably the authors of our fantasies: we consciously choose the scenario we imagine, we embellish it, edit it, and so on. It would be seriously disingenuous of me to say that I had no control over the elements of my fantasy, or that when I conjure up a particular scene its 'real' meaning is utterly opaque to me. After all, fantasizing is essentially self-gratifying: I fantasize about things that please me.

And Dennis fantasizes about what pleases him. He consciously and deliberately conjures up his favorite scenario of sexual debasement and torture, and he concentrates on it to have an orgasm. To say that the content of a fantasy pleases the fantasist is to say that the fantasist takes a pro-attitude toward that content. Sexual arousal on the basis of fantasizing would hardly be possible if we did not adopt such an attitude, if only for the duration of the fantasizing episode itself. The particular pro-attitude that a person takes to the content of his sexual fantasies can be usefully described by the term "eroticization," where, as John Corvino suggests, to eroticize an activity is to "actively regard . . . the activity with sexual desire."²⁴ Hence, whether the fantasist delights in his fantasizing (as Chris does) or is horrified by it (like Bob), by eroticizing what he does, the fantasist does adopt a pro-attitude toward the activity he fantasizes about.²⁵

It is easy to be repelled by the content of Dennis's fantasy. But that repulsion by itself is not sufficient to warrant moral judgments about Dennis's fantasizing. Rather, it is the fact that Dennis's sexual fantasizing—an activity he deliberately engages in to experience intense pleasure—has that content that grounds the judgment that what Dennis does is morally problematic.

But why? This critique appears to be little more than a thinly veiled, nose-wrinkling disgust at the thought of what turns other people on—especially since the idea that fantasizing is morally bad (when it is) just in case either the fantasizing goes proxy for a harmful overt action or significantly raises the probability that the fantasist will 'act out' his imaginings have been rejected. The view under consideration, recall, holds that some fantasizing is morally bad even if the fantasist does not, in some sense of 'want,' want to do what he fantasizes doing, and even if his fantasizing does not make him more likely to carry out his fantasies. But how else can the moral badness of fantasizing be cashed out if not in terms of its causal or probabilistic consequences?

ACTIONS AND CHARACTER

As I mentioned earlier, at least on reflection, few of us believe that consequences are *all* that matter morally. We judge lying and the breaking of

promises morally wrong, whether or not those actions have had consequences. But an appeal to the violation of moral principles or duties of the sort that underpin our judgments about lying and promise-breaking will not help here. For it is not really plausible to say that I transgress a specific moral principle or that I violate a particular duty when I engage in certain kinds of fantasizing. But, more to the point, it is hard to see how one could specify the relevant principles or obligations in a nonquestion-begging way. We cannot explain the moral badness of certain sorts of fantasizing by saying that those activities violate the principle, "It is morally wrong to fantasize about harming others." For the truth of such a principle is precisely what is in question.

A more promising approach emerges if we think about the relations between action, character, and moral agency. Moral agency refers to set of abilities or capacities: the ability to deliberate between options for action, taking into account not only one's own well-being, but the well-being of others; the capacity to recognize when a situation demands a moral response of some kind, for example, rendering assistance to strangers, not serving prime rib at a dinner for vegetarian friends; a sensitivity to the moods, emotions, and commitments of others; the ability to persevere when the going gets tough and resist distractions to important projects; the disposition to seek coherence among one's commitments, expectations, and efforts (integrity).

Moral beings possess these abilities in varying degrees, and while some seem naturally well endowed, others must labor to acquire and develop them. Variability also exists in the ways in which the capacities and abilities that constitute moral agency are exercised: there are moral virtuosi and moral journeymen. Talk of a person's character is usefully construed as shorthand for whatever grounds and enables these practical competencies, where we can think of these grounds as the maxims—the regulative ideals—to which she holds herself and to which she believes she ought to hold herself. It is crucial to recognize that a person's character is not simply a laundry list of beliefs. First, because it is not only the *content* of a person's moral beliefs that matter but also her *attitudes* toward those beliefs. Central to the notion of character is the idea that a person endorses—at the very least, accepts—certain principles of right action. Second, in order to ground moral competencies across a life, the regulative ideals to which a person is committed (i.e., which she endorses) must be ordered in some way; they might, for example, be hierarchically ordered from most general to most specific, or lexically ordered according to some other principle. A mere concatenation of practical principles will not deliver the kind of stability over time that is a hallmark of character. Moreover, where there is no ordering of practical principles, inconsistencies are more likely; the kind of stability required for the exercise of moral agency is absent.

But this does not mean that character is static. Indeed, precisely the opposite is true. Although the experience of living a life as a reflective ratio-

nal being will have the effect of reinforcing some elements of our characters, each of us is always a work in progress. New challenges can reveal aspects of our character we had been unaware of; we might embrace these elements, or, finding them to be inconsistent with other more familiar and more important elements, we might seek to eliminate them. Even though human beings (as rational beings) are self-reflective, we are not utterly transparent to ourselves. In part, having a character involves the ongoing activity of self-scrutiny, self-discovery, and self-adjustment.

The dynamic nature of character indicates three ways in which actions and character are related. First and most obviously, a person's overt actions are evidence of the nature of his or her character. It is through observing the actions a person typically performs that we attribute to that individual a certain type of character. Less obviously, perhaps, a person's non-overt actions are evidence at least for *him* about the direction his character is taking. Second, some actions—actions for which the agent has a settled disposition, actions he reliably performs—are not merely evidence of his character; they express, in the sense of being constitutive elements of, that character. Finally, a person can attempt to perform a certain type of action because he wants eventually to acquire a settled disposition to perform that action. He wants, that is, for the maxim or practical principle determining that type of action to be an element of his character. We cannot construct a character out of nothing, and we are committed to some practical principles simply by virtue of being the kinds of creatures we are.²⁶ But, beyond the basics, we have considerable latitude in fine-tuning our characters, making certain traits part of who we are.

An example will help tie these claims about moral agency, character, and action together. Imagine that George, a man who has never paid much attention to the ways in which gender makes a difference in the world, develops a friendship with a feminist theorist whom he respects. She talks to him about the many subtle ways in which gender structures the social world, often to the advantage of men and the disadvantage of women. George believes that men and women are equal and that if women are badly treated just on account of being women, this is a very bad thing. George worries that he has been oblivious to the effects of gender hierarchy; he doesn't want to be a person who discriminates unfairly, offends, and so on. So George decides that he needs to pay more attention to gender, and as a practical exercise to keep gender before his consciousness, he decides always to use the feminine pronoun in his writing, except for instances when to do so would be a blatant absurdity (e.g., he cannot refer to his brother as she.) Over time, the action of using the feminine pronoun makes George more sensitive to gender. He notices things he had not noticed before, and he formulates practical principles that constrain the way he acts in situations in which gender is relevant. Through habitually acting in a certain way, he improves his moral agency. He is now more sensitive to morally significant facts around him.²⁷

George's story is, we might say, a success story. But the interplay between action, character, and moral agency that allows for human flourishing also allows for corruption. Habitually performing bad actions, or actions that desensitize one to morally salient facts, can seriously hinder the project of character development. Endorsing the wrong kinds of practical principles is corrosive of character. Consider again our sexual fantasist Dennis. Here is a man who appears to endorse actions that might seriously undermine his character and thus his moral agency. He takes deep pleasure in fantasizing about harming others and he does so habitually. One ought not be the sort of person who takes sexual pleasure in the debasement of others. And one ought not act in ways that constitute being that sort of person.

These remarks hold outside the domain of sexual fantasizing. Consider other kinds of inner going-on, like emotions. Being overjoyed at and privately gloating about another's misfortune, irrespective of whether one actually laughs in the face of the other, are evil states of mind. Voluntary gloating is morally bad action. One ought not be the kind of person who performs such actions.²⁸

The last sentence bears emphasis, if only to forestall the misunderstanding that, after explicitly rejecting consequentialism, I am now relying on precisely such a moral approach in speaking of the ways in which a person's actions affect his or her character. Of course our actions affect our characters. But to stress the moral significance of this truism is not to commit oneself to consequentialism. For the relation between a person's actions and that person's character is a constitutive relation. In this sense, it might be better to say that a person's actions *effect* part of that person's character.

So far I have been considering the proposal that certain types of sexual fantasizing are morally risky on account of the ways in which they constitute the undermining of moral agency and the corruption of character. But precisely how does this bear on pornography?

PORNOGRAPHY AND SEXUAL FANTASIZING

As enjoyable as sexual excitement is, pornography's popularity would be surprising if all it did was provide the color and sound for our inner black-and-white silent movies. Undoubtedly, pornography supplies its consumers with novel elements for their sexual fantasies as well as new ideas for their flesh-and-blood sexual encounters. More significantly, pornography concretizes existing sexual fantasies, providing enduring and substantive representations of what might otherwise exist 'just' in people's heads.

The implications of the publication and distribution of representations of sexual fantasies must not be underestimated. Like many other cultural discourses, pornography provides us with language and concepts, a framework within which to ground and organize our sexual experience. In this way,

pornography and sexual fantasizing are mutually legitimating. The very existence of an industry devoted to producing sexual arousal—even though some people persist in thinking that pornography is marginal—tells us that it is okay to derive sexual pleasure from fantasizing in certain ways. Moreover, when a person sees the major elements of their favorite sexual fantasy acted out with real people, he can rest assured that he is not deviant; he can infer that others are turned on in similar ways. (Hence the widely used therapeutic strategy of normalization, which involves dealing with a client's distress about her sexual desires and fantasies by suggesting that she is not alone in having them.) Ethel Person sums up the relation between pornography and sexual fantasizing in the following way:

... works like the *Story of O* and the writings of the Marquis de Sade have become part of a cultural debate on the prevalence, meaning, and legitimacy of sadomasochistic fantasies and practices. But these works could never have achieved their popularity if they did not speak to deep-seated fantasies shared by large numbers of people. Probably their popularity helped legitimize such fantasies, which in turn helped to make them even more available to consciousness and therefore more widespread.²⁹

By supplying us with a constant supply of new and old sexual ideas, pornography permits and encourages us to engage in unbounded sexual fantasizing. This is precisely why some theorists defend pornography, seeing it as a tool of liberation. No doubt that it can be. But some pornography—like Dennis Cooper's described earlier—facilitates and helps to legitimize sexual fantasizing that is morally risky.

An objection might be made at this point based on the fact that a good deal of bondage and discipline and sadomasochistic pornography is produced by and for members of the BDSM community—adults who consensually engage in sexual practices like various kinds of sexual torture. Visit a Web site or discussion group for this community and one will typically find—alongside pictures of "slaves"—some statement about "play" etiquette; that is, a list of do's and don't's for sexual scenes that emphasize the importance of mutual consent. The objection would be that since such pornography is about *pretend* or *simulated* degradation, humiliation, and abuse, it is not to be associated with the material that I have claimed is morally risky. For the fantasies that this material stimulates and reinforces are not fantasies about doing real harm to anyone.³⁰

All this might be so, but it is beside the point. No one can say with certainty that *all* members of the BDSM community are "only playing." However, even if this is true, there is still room for concern. For what is it to be sexually aroused by fantasies of simulated degradation and abuse (or, by extension, by the 'actual simulation' of sexual torture)? Responding to Patrick Hopkins's defense of sadomasochism,³¹ Corvino insightfully undermines any confidence

we might have that sadomasochists are turned on only by the simulation of certain practices. He questions the psychological possibility of eroticizing a "simulation qua simulation." He writes,

True, SM participants frequently attend to the pleasure of their partners, and to that extent, they are mindful of features that distinguish their activities from actual violence. But they are also mindful of features that occur in the "real" case: the spanking, the quickened heartbeat, the gasps and groans. When they eroticize these features, SM participants . . . seem to be eroticizing not simulations qua simulations, but domination and its manifestations. The simulation is not the object of arousal; rather, it is the vehicle for the object of arousal.¹²

I have suggested that the moral evaluation of sexual fantasizing depends on two things: the content of the fantasies in question and the attitude that the fantasist takes toward that content. I argued earlier that, regardless of whether a person delights in or is horrified by his fantasizing, if he does indeed fantasize about an activity to achieve sexual arousal, then he ipso facto takes a pro-attitude toward that activity—at least for the duration of the fantasizing episode. If Corvino is right, then, to some extent, even members of consensual BDSM practices take pro-attitudes toward (variously) sexual torture, bondage, submission, and domination. Adopting such attitudes, and, more to the point, actively encouraging them in oneself are not obviously consistent with the maintenance of a sound character.

There is certainly much more to say about sadomasochistic and other fetishistic sexual practices. The moral status of these practices and the pornography that depicts them have been a hotly debated topic for decades. I do not pretend to have settled any of the central questions here. My contingent conclusion, however, in answer to the question I tabled in note 6, is that the moral critique I have offered here probably does extend to the sexual fantasizing associated with consensual BDSM practices.

CYBERPORNOGRAPHY

Cyberpornography may be more effective in facilitating and legitimizing sexual fantasizing than traditional forms of print and video pornography. This is not just because cyberporn is more accessible than other forms of pornography, though that is a factor. Rather, the very form of cyberporn determines a unique experience of consumption. Accessing and enjoying cyberporn implicates the consumer's agency in interesting ways.

Cyberporn is far more accessible than other types of pornography in at least two senses. First, it is easier to get at the material; opening Netscape Navigator takes less time than driving to the local video store or sex shop. Second, cyberporn can be delivered directly and privately to one's home.

Hence, one traditional barrier to getting hold of pornography—embarrassment—is removed. But while these facts might prompt more people to try pornography and others to try more pornography, they do not yet suggest that cyberporn is morally more risky than print and video pornography.

Some critics have argued otherwise, claiming that the ready availability of porn online gives rise to addiction. The research and literature on Internet addiction—of a sexual and nonsexual kind—are highly controversial. But, in any case, it is beside the point for the argument under consideration here. If cyberporn is addictive, that would be unfortunate; but only in the sense that *any* addiction is a bad thing. Addiction compromises a person's agency, and distracts or prevents the person from engaging in a full range of valuable life projects. The present thesis is narrower, having to do with morally risky sexual fantasizing. Moreover, as I have been at pains to point out, the sexual fantasist is *responsible* for his fantasizing and for the actions that support that fantasizing. He is not helpless in the face of an addiction that his 'agential self' cannot penetrate. (I will return to this point briefly.)

It is trivial to note that the Internet has changed and continues to alter the ways in which many people obtain information and communicate with one another. However, what has gone relatively unexplored are the ways in which individual use of the technology changes the *user*.¹⁴ It is, therefore, worth thinking about the phenomenology of computer-mediated communications and other human-Internet interactions. In what remains, I will offer some speculative remarks about two features of consuming cyberporn that, I believe, serve to buttress the claim that cyberporn is more morally dangerous than traditional print and video pornography.

First, consider the experience of browsing the World Wide Web. The ease of browsing (for *anything*) online, the speed at which vast quantities of information can be procured, might lead us to think that the Web is the ultimate desire-satisfaction machine. Want something? Open your favorite search engine or database, and what you desire is only a click or two away. This is certainly true when the desire in question is quite specific, for example, when I want to know the business hours of my local IKEA store or the directions to a restaurant. Such a desire is easily satisfied and, once it is, I have little motivation to continue browsing.

However, typically, we browse the Web precisely because we do not quite know what we want. Either we have no specific question for which we seek an answer, or we do not know what is 'out there' about particular topic. Consider finding out about alternative treatments for some recently diagnosed medical condition. The experience of this type of browsing is quite different. When I don't have a particular question in mind, I have to work harder to get useful information. And, in some cases, what counts as useful information is constructed as I browse, somewhat after the fashion of the game Twenty Questions. When I browse, I am continually offered new links to different

sites. My desire, inchoate to begin with, is tweaked, refined, heightened; each link promises that the next site will be what I am looking for. In this way, my motivation for staying online is continuously energized.

The genius of Web browsing is that it feeds off desires, many of which the activity of browsing itself helps to create and to amplify, and some of which, by design, will never be satisfied. Purveyors of cyberporn exploit this aspect of the technology quite effectively. Go to the Web with a general curiosity about sexually explicit material (search engine keyword: "XXX") or with a specific sexual interest (search engine keyword: "BBW" or "BCT")³⁵ and you will be provided with more sites than you know what to do with. More important, cyberpornographers have deliberately built their sites in ways that make it very difficult for a consumer to leave them. Open a pornography site and try to close the browser window. The chances are that you will be bumped to another (pornography) site. Soon you will have dozens of browser windows open on your desktop. And the escalation of unsatiated desire continues.³⁶

Browsing cyberporn is rarely just like browsing racks of print pornography or watching a lot of videos. To be sure, it has two similar effects—namely, it provides content for many new and different fantasies and, by its very existence, serves to legitimize the fantasies of its consumers. However, cyberporn also has the effect of keeping consumers engaged in the business of sexual fantasizing longer. First, the ways in which cyberporn is delivered to consumers helps to construct desires that are in turn prevented from being satisfied; one is always encouraged to go to another and then another site. Such 'movement' is relatively effortless, and the chain of new sites to which consumers are bumped is often characterized by increasingly 'extreme' content. (The term is the industry's own.) Furthermore, this rapid delivery of images keeps alive fantasies that the consumer might otherwise have ceased having for want of imagination or because they strike him as 'too bizarre.' Because of the unique nature of consuming pornography online, consumers' sexual fantasizing is facilitated in previously unimaginable ways.

A potential objection at this point helps to highlight a second relevant aspect of the experience of consuming cyberporn. Someone might say that consumers of cyberporn can hardly be held responsible for the sexual fantasizing in which they engage while online or as a result of viewing cyberporn. For haven't I just suggested that the medium itself compromises agency? Cyberporn consumers are deliberately manipulated. As a result of being 'trapped' in Web sites, certain fantasies are forced on them. In other words, precisely how is the account I offer here different from an addiction account?

It must be conceded that users of technology are changed in more or less significant ways by their experience. But even cyborgs—those who see their machines as literal sexual prostheses—do not for that reason cease to be responsible agents. Nonetheless, I think that the cyberporn consumer's sense

of his own agency is compromised. The genuine and deliberate activities of opening the first site, consciously following links, downloading images, and repeating the exercise can feel quite passive. The material is delivered to one's desktop. Most of the time, one doesn't have to do anything (except stay online) to find out about new sites. And opening a site requires just a click of the mouse. Moreover, the intense privacy of consuming porn online can make it seem as if one is not actively engaged in any way. Rather it appears that one's fantasizing and online pornography have serendipitously converged. In this way, the consumer is positively discouraged by the medium itself from keeping his own agency and responsibility for fantasizing in focus. It is not as if a consumer of online pornography is rendered helpless with respect to his actions. It is just that the experience itself serves to create the *illusion* that his agency is not engaged. In this way, we can say that the character of the consumer of cyberpornography-with-morally-problematic-content is *doubly* compromised. First, his actions threaten to make him a person of less desirable sort; second, the experience of consuming cyberpornography tends to render the very question of his own complicity otiose to *him*.

To summarize these speculations: consuming cyberporn, by its very nature, facilitates sexual fantasizing, often, of a morally problematic sort (when consumers are bumped to more extreme sites) and it simultaneously masks from the consumer his own agency in the act of consumption. The consumer's character is thus doubly threatened: morally risky sexually fantasizing is facilitated in quite aggressive ways, and the fantasist's agency, his own complicity in such actions, is rendered obscure.

CONCLUSION

The overall agenda of this chapter has been to make room for a particular kind of moral critique of pornography, one that pays close attention to the moral effects pornography can have on its consumers. At the heart of that critique is the idea that it is morally risky to engage in certain kinds of sexual fantasizing on the grounds that to habitually link sexual pleasure and satisfaction with thoughts of degradation, abuse, and humiliation can undermine the development and maintenance of a sound moral character. Any pornography that encourages and facilitates such fantasizing—and it is plausible that cyberpornography is particularly efficacious in this regard—can thus be morally criticized. It bears emphasis yet again that this line of argument does not by itself imply restrictive public policies concerning pornography either on or offline. If anything, this particular moral critique of pornography would seem to make the prospects of state intervention quite poor. For we are and should be skeptical of *state-imposed* limitations on our freedom directed at the goal of making us better moral agents. That said, the present discussion is not without practical relevance. Each of us has a responsibility to make judgments about

our own actions and attitudes. This is the sense in which morality is as much self-regarding as it is other-regarding. For the moral status of any social activity, like the consumption of pornography, may be analyzed in terms of its effects on its practitioners as well as on others.³⁷

NOTES

1. Michael Saenz, "The Carpal Tunnel of Love: Virtual Sex with Mike Saenz" (interview with Jeff Milstead and Jude Milhon), *Mondo 2000* 4 (n.d.), cited in Claudia Springer, *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), p. 80.
2. For a survey of the entangled history of pornography and technology see Peter Johnson, "Pornography Drives Technology: Why Not to Censor the Internet," *Federal Communications Law Journal* 49 (1996): 217–226.
3. See Frederick S. Lane III, *Obscene Profits: The Entrepreneurs of Pornography in the Cyber Age* (New York and London: Routledge, 2000).
4. Timothy Egan, "Technology Sent Wall Street into Market for Pornography," *The New York Times*, Monday, October 2000, A1, A20.
5. Frank Rich, "Naked Capitalists," *The New York Times Magazine*, Sunday, May 20, 2001, pp. 51–54.
6. Does the risk I allude to track only sexual fantasizing about *actual* degradation, humiliation, or violence, or does it attend sexual fantasizing about *simulated* degradation, humiliation, or violence? That is, does the critique I offer here extend to the sexual fantasizing of practitioners of *consensual* bondage/discipline/sadomasochistic practices, say? This is a very difficult question. I suspect that the answer is "Yes"; see the end of the section titled "Pornography and Sexual Fantasizing."
7. For the record, I am somewhat of a free speech absolutist. See my "Free Speech: A Plea to Ignore the Consequences," *Computer-Mediated Communication*, vol. 3, no. 1 (www.december.com/CMC/mag/1996/jan/toc.html), and my "Free Speech" *Sats: The Nordic Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2001): 80–97.
8. Robin Morgan, *Going Too Far: The Personal Chronicle of a Feminist* (New York: Random House, 1977), p. 169.
9. The so-called clear and present danger test as a tool in evaluating First Amendment challenges has its roots in *Schenck v. United States*, 249 U.S. 47 (1919), in which Justice Holmes wrote: "The question in every case is whether the words used are used in such circumstances and are of such a nature that they will bring about the substantive evils that Congress has a right to prevent" (p. 52).
10. See, e.g., Ferrell M. Christensen, "Cultural and Ideological Bias in Pornography Research," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 20 (1990): 351–375; Alison King, "Mystery and Imagination: The Case of Pornography Effect Studies," in *Bad Girls and Dirty Pictures*, eds. Alison Assister and Avedon Carol (London: Pluto Press, 1993), pp. 57–87; and Daniel G. Linz, Edward Donnerstein, and Steven Penrod, "The Findings and Recommendations of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography: Do

the Psychological 'Facts' Fit the Political Fury?" *American Psychologist* 42 (1987): 946–953.

11. Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (New York: Grove Press, 1996), p. 175. For a more detailed treatment of the objection see Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazier, "On the Question of Pornography and Sexual Violence: Moving Beyond Cause and Effect," *Pornography: Women, Violence, and Civil Liberties*. Ed. Catherine Itzin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 359–383.

12. Consider the case of twenty-two-year-old Ohio resident Brian Dalton. Having served a few months for a child pornography conviction in 1998, Dalton was on parole in July 2001 when his parole officer discovered Dalton's journal during a routine search. The journal contained descriptions of Dalton's violent sexual fantasies involving fictional children said to be ten or eleven years of age. A grand jury indicted Dalton of two felony counts under an Ohio law that prohibits the creation of obscene material involving minors. He was sentenced to seven years in prison. See Bob Herbert, "The Thought Police," *The New York Times*, Thursday, July 19, 2001, A25.

13. Arguably, certain masochistic sexual fantasies are like this. See, e.g., Lynne Segal's illuminating discussion, "Sensual Uncertainty," in *Sex and Love: New Thoughts on Old Contradictions*. Eds. Sue Cartledge and Joanna Ryan (London: The Women's Press, 1983), pp. 30–47.

14. This is part of what underlies the so-called catharsis defense of violent pornography: the availability of sadistic pornography permits those men who have violent sexual desires to deal with them safely. See, e.g., G. L. Simons, *Pornography Without Prejudice* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1973), pp. 85–103.

15. The terminology is Christopher Cherry's. For a thorough discussion see his "The Inward and the Outward: Fantasy, Reality and Satisfaction," *New Essays in the Philosophy of Mind*. Eds. D. Copp and J. J. MacIntosh (Calgary, Alberta: University of Calgary Press, 1985), pp. 175–193, and "When Is Fantasizing Morally Bad?" *Philosophical Investigations* 11 (1988): 112–132.

16. It is not at all clear that we have no control over our sexual desires. Given the kinds of creatures we are, our sexuality, like other aspects of our being, is mediated by both biological and cultural factors. There is little reason to think that our sexual desires are any 'purer' than our nonsexual desires, in the sense that they are wholly biologically determined. See, e.g., Martha C. Nussbaum, "Constructing Love, Desire, and Care," in *Sex, Preference, and Family*. Eds. David M. Estlund and Martha C. Nussbaum (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 17–43.

17. Leitenberg and Henning write: "In general . . . most sexual fantasies appear to be *deliberate* patterns of thought designed to stimulate or enhance pleasurable sexual feelings regardless of whether the fantasies involve reminiscing about past sexual experiences, imagining anticipated future sexual activity, engaging in wishful thinking, or having daydreams that are exciting to imagine without any desire to put them into practice" (p. 470, emphasis added).

18. Ethel Person, *By Force of Fantasy: How We Make Our Lives* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 35.

19. For more on the idea that we can be blameworthy for some of our thoughts and fantasies see Ishtiyaque Haji, *Moral Appraisability: Puzzles, Proposals, and Perplexities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. chapter 14.

20. The content of this fantasy is drawn from an excerpt of Dennis Cooper's story "Numb," originally published in his *Frisk* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1991) and reprinted in *Forbidden Passages: Writings Banned in Canada*, introductions by Pat Califia and Janine Fuller (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1995), pp. 151–160. I do not know whether this story describes the content of a sexual fantasy Mr. Cooper himself has. However, the story is intended as a piece of gay erotica, and it might be someone's fantasy.

21. Some readers might find what the narrator of Cooper's story says interesting: "Then I crawled across the room and sat cross-legged, watching him bleed to death. I stayed there all night, worn out, and vaguely wondering why I didn't go phone the police, or feel guilt or sympathy for his friends. I guess I'd fantasized killing a boy for so long that all the truth did was fill in details" (ibid., p. 153). Perhaps this is a just flash of irony.

22. Sigmund Freud, "A Child Is Being Beaten," *Selected Writings*, vol. 10 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). See also the discussion in Jean Grimshaw, "Ethics, Fantasy, and the Self-Transformation," *Ethics* (Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement, 35). Ed. A. Phillips Griffiths (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 145–158.

23. For a summary of what she aptly describes as the "chaos of theories," each purporting to explain women's masochistic sexual fantasies, see Sandra Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 52–54.

24. John Corvino, "Naughty Fantasies," *Southwest Philosophy Review* 18 (2002): 213–220, p. 214. Corvino also advances a nonconsequentialist moral critique of some kinds of sexual fantasies. His central intuition is that "any seriously wrongful activity merits an attitude of disapproval, and eroticization of such an activity is inconsistent with this attitude" (216–217).

25. Notice that this point about the sexual fantast's necessary pro-attitude toward the content of his fantasy serves to reinforce my earlier claim that, for the purposes of moral evaluation, it matters not whether the fantast seeks to satisfy a full blown or 'only' prima facie desire.

26. The idea that humans have some native moral endowment is an ancient though controversial one. For a defense see my "Moral Selves and Moral Parameters," *Becoming Persons*. Ed. Robert N. Fisher (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1995), pp. 471–500, and "Moral Competence," *Philosophy and Linguistics*. Eds. Kumiko Murasugi and Robert Stainton (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 169–190. And see Sissela Bok, "What Basis for Morality? A Minimalist Approach," *The Monist* 76 (1993): 348–359 for a nonnativist account of a universal morality.

27. For a more detailed account of what we can imagine to be George's developmental trajectory and of the relation between character and practical rationality see Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception: An Aristotelian Conception

of Private and Public Rationality." *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 54–105.

28. See, e.g., A. C. Ewing, "The Justification of Emotions," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supp. Vol. 31 (1957): 59–74; S. I. Benn, "Wickedness," *Ethics* 96 (1985): 795–810; and Robert Merihew Adams, "Involuntary Sins," *The Philosophical Review* 94 (1985): 3–31.

29. Ethel Person, *By Force of Fantasy*, p. 94.

30. Members of the BDSM community are quick to condemn those who seek sexual satisfaction from the actual debasement and abuse of others.

31. Patrick Hopkins, "Rethinking Sadomasochism: Feminism, Interpretation, and Simulation," *Hypatia* 9 (1994): 116–141.

32. Corvino, ibid.

33. See Alvin Cooper, Coralie R. Scherer, Sylvain C. Boies, and Bary L. Gordon, "Sexuality on the Internet: From Sexual Exploration to Pathological Expression," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 30 (1999): 154–156; Stephen F. Davis, Brandy G. Smith, Karen Rodrigue, and Kim Pulvers, "An Examination of Internet Usage on Two College Campuses," *College Student Journal* 33 (1999): 257–261; and Jennifer P. Schneider, "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey," *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 7 (2000): 31–58.

34. Some preliminary research indicates that we are likely to say things online that we would never dare say in face-to-face situations. For example, conversations in company chat rooms, where users are anonymous, have come close to being libelous. See Reed Abelson, "By the Water Cooler in Cyberspace, the Talk Turns Ugly," *The New York Times*, Sunday, April 29, 2001, A1. See also Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995).

35. For cyberporn neophytes, these are the standard acronyms for Big Beautiful Women and Ball and Cock Torture.

36. "Porn sites now, some 30% of which are estimated to be content-free are little more than ads for other sites, electronically 'booby-trapped' with blind links and pop-up consoles and windows designed to gain hits and to send the surfer to other sites. This practice, known as 'click-through farming,' marks a relatively new development in advertising strategy, supplanting the old banner system, where one 'click-through,' that is, the act of mouse-clicking on an ad banner, might pay as much as 15 cents for sending a potential customer to a specific site. Now, if you hit a so-called free site, full page ads that look like tables of contents pop up, or new browser windows open spontaneously in dizzying layers, sending you to several other sites. . . . Attempts to close the windows only generates more of them, including JavaScript-launched 'consoles' that linger long after the original site has been left. The race to close windows faster than they pop-up is on. Clicking on thumbnail images or buttons on a slick console page that might offer 'amateur orgy' or 'naughty schoolgirl' images, instead of linking you to any images, will send you to another site, whose URL, normally appearing in the browser's status bar, has been obscured by a JavaScript program. And should you decide that you have had enough, and exit the original page, an exit

console will pop up which usually points surfers back to the first site. Trapped in a loop, surfers return to the original site again and again without realizing it" (Michael Uebel, "Toward a Symptomatology of Cyberporn," *Theory and Event* 3 (2000) at http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v003/3.4uebel.html, para.55).

37. Many thanks to the following for useful discussion and provocative questions: Robert Cavalier, Felmon Davis, Christine Koggel and her students at Bryn Mawr College, Alex London, Patrick McCroskery, Eduardo Mendieta, Paul Pietroski, Mandy Simons, Sarah Stroud, and Carol Voeller.

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FIVE

Trust in Cyberspace

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FROM AN ARISTOTELIAN point of view, an important component of leading a good life, or of human flourishing, is friendship. And trust plays a central role in friendship, although Aristotle himself does not explicitly say much about it. Trust, then, is central in human flourishing, and given that an increasing proportion of our lives is being spent online, trust in that environment is also becoming of more concern. However, online trust presents a somewhat confusing picture. Often there is thought to be too little trust in this environment, and this has produced a variety of methods and suggestions aimed at creating trust, particularly in and for e-commerce. Sometimes, however, there seems to be too much trust, and many people are deceived, hurt, and even harmed. For example, the well-known Kaycee Nicole hoax deceived many (Dunne, 2001), as did that of Joan, the supposed disabled female neuropsychologist (van Gelder, 1991), and too many e-mail users willingly open possibly virus-infected attachments from unknown senders. It is also not clear what the object of online trust is—that is, *what* is trusted. Commonly it is trust of people or companies, but it might be trust of Web sites, systems, terminals, and so on, and perhaps even trust of people by systems and routers by other routers (Camp, 2000). Sometimes, too, trust is seen as just an issue of security (Schneiderman, 1999), but at other times it is rather something that concerns human behavior. In addition, it has been argued that no real online trust is possible because the conditions necessary for trust cannot be found in that environment.

A few of these points can be clarified immediately. First, in this discussion the main concern is with trust between individuals, and not trust of Web sites, and so on, although trust of organizations, both by individuals and by