

Schiller on Aesthetic Education as Radical Ethical-Political Remedy

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This paper examines the iconic conception of aesthetic education in the work of Friedrich Schiller, with the aim of elucidating Schiller's unique innovation of this notion in understanding i) the relationship between aesthetic and ethical value and ii) the transformative possibilities within a collective, social dimension of aesthetic experience. The paper provides an overview of the Kantian origins of Schiller's aesthetic programme (Section 1). It then considers Schiller's critique of the perceived failings of the Kantian and Enlightenment republican models of ethical value and political emancipation (Section 2) before turning to his positive alternative aesthetic programme (Section 3). The paper concludes (Section 4) with some evaluation and reflection on Schiller's original contributions.

Aesthetic experiences have long been recognized as inherently or immediately valuable for observers or participants as well as creators. Accordingly, that aesthetic experiences might also be valuable pedagogically in terms of personal development has likewise been a fairly consistent theme across Western philosophy from at least Plato onwards—albeit not explicitly in terms of the *aesthetic* until it was coined in the eighteenth century (Beardsley, 1975, p. 156).¹ Indeed, it is probably with Friedrich Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (*AEoM*, or *Letter(s)*, for short) that both the idea and phrase reach their most iconic status. Schiller's romantically bold and ambitious attempt to radically invert and harmonize the interplay of aesthetics, ethics and politics has made his programme intriguing yet notoriously elusive to coherent reconstruction—or even adequate framing within any one of its dimensions. Indeed, although not entirely misplaced, the predominant focus on the instrumental possibilities of aesthetic experience for the cultivation of human sensibility and moral consciousness in Schiller's programme has tended to overshadow its fuller and more radical import. As some of the more exceptional commentaries have perceived, aesthetic education is not merely instrumental for Schiller but holds ultimate emancipatory and perfectionist value in aesthetic synthesis of beauty and humanity.

Still, elusive tensions and explanatory gaps persist. In each case, scholarly progress in relation to reconstructing one or more dimensions of Schiller's aesthetic programme

1 While advocating the banishment of certain kinds of (mimetic) arts that imitate falsehoods or appeal to unruly emotions in *Republic*, Book X (Plato, 1968), Plato (himself writing in dialogue form) therein implicitly and elsewhere explicitly recognizes the affective potency of beauty in artistic form with regard to the development of character (1968, 401c, 412a; and also 536d/537a regarding play).

seems to leave explanatory gaps or untraced connections with regard to the others, as shall be seen. Comprehensive clarity remains to be fully attained.

This paper aims to contribute towards this goal by re-examining Schiller's aesthetic programme with a focus on integrating the various instrumental and non-instrumental aspects of his proposal. Although a comprehensive reconstruction cannot be properly achieved within the length of a single paper, I concentrate on three key thematic strands that I believe can elucidate Schiller's unique and innovative contribution to understanding the relationship between aesthetic and ethical value, as well as the transformative political possibilities of aesthetics. Specifically, Schiller's aesthetic programme embarks on a complex struggle to reconcile political emancipation with positive law, deontological and natural values, and transcendental and objective aesthetic judgement of beauty in response primarily to Immanuel Kant but also the Enlightenment republican tradition.

I begin with an overview of the contextual origins of Schiller's aesthetic programme (Section 1). I then consider Schiller's critique of the Kantian and the Enlightenment republican models of ethical value and political emancipation (Section 2), before turning to his positive alternative aesthetic programme (Section 3). The paper concludes (Section 4) with some evaluation and reflection on Schiller's original contributions.

1. Background

Broadly construed, the project of aesthetic education as conceived by Schiller shares many fundamental concerns of his predecessors. Consistent with its etymological roots (*aisthanomai*: to feel, sense, perceive), an aesthetic education implies a directed engagement with the sensory-emotional aspects of human experience, which stands in contrast to—or rather supplements—education in its traditional focus on human rational faculties. The starting point of the project of aesthetic education then, at least implicitly, is that the development of human reason alone misses something critical or independently valuable. Unsurprisingly, then, aesthetics (let alone aesthetic education) finds little application among rationalists such as Descartes or Leibniz, for whom neither art nor other sensory experience could yield clear and distinct ideas or truth claims (Beardsley, 1975, p. 157).² Instead, it gradually flourishes (in various forms) out of empiricism and romanticism. Most pertinent, for present purposes in connection with Schiller, is the intriguing value of aesthetic experience in relation to human reason developed by Kant.

Sticking to what is perhaps the most famous example found in §59 of the *Third Critique* (Kant, 1790/1987), beauty, Kant argues, is a symbol of the morally good. Aesthetic experience (or rather judgement) of the beautiful bears structural similarity to moral

2 The notable exception, of course, is Alexander Baumgarten who coins 'aesthetics' as a 'science of sensory cognition' thus (paradoxically) accommodating sensory-emotional perceptions within a rationalist framework (Beardsley, 1975). Johann Georg Sulzer and Karl Philipp Moritz are also of note here in developing Baumgarten's ideas of beauty as sensuously ascertained perfection but departing from rationalism in inverting the source or object of pleasure and locating it in the effects on the observer's imaginative, representational faculties (see Guyer, 2014, pp. 377–378, 399–401, 414–418). I thank an anonymous referee for alerting me to these important intermediary figures.

judgement. Not only are both directly pleasing (without accompanying sensual gratification or conceptual end), but they are also *disinterested* (without instrumental relation to further ends) and can be at the same time subjective and universal (giving a law unto itself) (Kant, 1790/1987, p. 229). Aesthetic judgement can thus render our subjective relation to morality sensible or meaningful via symbolic hypotyposis by analogous transfer of rule of reflection. That is, just as the free play of imagination with the lawfulness of the understanding harmonizes in aesthetic judgements of beauty, so too the apprehension of the moral law relates to us our autonomy or transcendental freedom to act morally (Guyer, 1997, p. 380). To be sure, both disinterested pleasure in beauty and pure respect for the moral law are grounded in the practical cognition of the subject. Hence, the analogous relation makes no transformation to the subject themselves, but is purely cognitive.

Whether ultimately right or not, Kant's claims here are innovative and fecund as a potential basis for promoting aesthetic education as a valid endeavour. After all, if aesthetic education is not reduced to merely cultivating artistic appreciation or creativity and thus permitted to have centrality—or more than a supererogatory relation to moral life—then, as a basic starting point, aesthetic experiences must have some commensurability to ethical value. It is from these Kantian foundations that Schiller's programme of aesthetic education originates and also almost unrecognizably overturns. To gain perspective, we can briefly glance back at Kant who, despite extolling the above-noted commensurability between the ethical and aesthetic, ends up with a rather modest role for the aesthetic in moral and political life.

By the end of his *Second Critique*, Kant manages to produce a landmark ethical theory upon an entirely rationalist foundation. The logical form of pure practical reason discloses what morality requires of us while the fact of reason implies our freedom to act morally. Moreover, the common transcendental ground for the laws of nature and the moral law makes our moral ends attainable for us while respect for the moral law furnishes our motivation to act morally without falling foul of the moral law's preclusion of acting heteronomously.

In light of this, the subsequent attempts to derive sensible exhibition in relation to each of these moral requisites in aesthetic experience are, strictly speaking, unnecessary. Nevertheless, the capacity for aesthetic experience in human sensible nature reveals the possibilities of the sensible correlations, which Kant goes on to expound.³ As already noted with regard to the analogy, however, aesthetic presentation of moral ideas is restricted to the subject's practical cognition and moral and/or purely rational concepts.⁴ The cognitive mechanics of aesthetic experience, together with Kant's ethical commitments (elaborated further below), limit his ideal of aesthetic education to serving as a kind of propaedeutic for morality by supporting us emotionally to act autonomously (in

3 For a summary, see Guyer (2014, pp. 457–458).

4 At least on the conventional interpretation of Kant's 'aesthetic ideas' (Matherne, 2013, pp. 26–28). Contrary to this, Matherne argues for a more inclusive interpretation whereby empirical concepts and emotions would also be presentable. If correct, this would suggest more capacious possibilities for Kant's aesthetics. Our present focus, of course, remains on Schiller's adaptations of Kant's framework.

accordance with the moral law). Hence, art—and culture more generally, including religion—can educate aesthetically when strengthening our feeling to fulfil moral demands (Moland, 2018, p. 99). Not without irony, Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgement allows for the very sensuous appeal of art to mitigate the senses when they countervail reason (Allison, 1990, p. 212). Importantly, however, aesthetic education cannot supplant or transform our dutiful relation to the moral law. Aesthetic experiences ‘prepare us for successful moral *conduct* without substituting for pure moral *motivation*’ (Guyer, 2014, p. 456, original emphasis).

The foregoing naturally aligns with the self-contained nature and cardinal primacy of morality in Kant’s ethical theory. Rational beings are subject to the moral law, and their fulfilment of moral duty stands as their ultimate existential end. The theoretical demonstration of this being knowable, practicable and attainable jointly suffices to require each of us to ceaselessly strive to always act autonomously (i.e. according to the moral law). In principle, the heteronomous will and corruptible human nature can both be rectified by the moral law alone, without any recourse to aesthetics.

Extrapolating to the political, Kant pursues a parallel stance. Much like the moral law alone defines the contours of our inner freedom (morality), the state is of itself adequate to exhaustively define our external freedom (or ‘right’). As Kant’s famous remark in *Towards Perpetual Peace* makes clear,⁵ the legitimacy and viability of the state do not depend on the virtues of its citizens. Nor is moral reform the proper object of the state’s legal-political institutions given that this would lead to external interference with individual moral autonomy and freedom of choice (Behler, 2013, p. 231). The emphasis on institutional design, right and negative freedom places Kant firmly within the liberal tradition where, alongside its other adherents from Hobbes to Locke and Rawls, civic virtue is not regarded as a precondition to the realization of a just political order.

Ultimately, despite drawing some critical connections towards a distinctive role of aesthetic education, Kant’s cognitive account of aesthetic judgement, rationalistic ethics and liberal political commitments leads to a limited, instrumental, deployment. As the rest of the paper will elaborate, Schiller’s attempt to overcome these limits while retaining the Kantian framework marks out his complex originality.

2. Schiller’s Questions

At the outset, of course, none of the alluded tensions are apparent in the *Letters*, which begin with an avowal of Kant’s philosophy and a surprising determination to change the topic from aesthetics to pressing social and political matters (Schiller, 1795/1967, pp. 87–90). Contrary to appearances, this starting point is significant in not only setting up for an enlarged purview of aesthetic education beyond its instrumental operations, but

5 ‘Establishing a state, as difficult as it may sound, is a problem that can be solved even for a nation of devils (if only they possess understanding)’ (Kant, 1795/2006, p. 90).

also challenging Kant and liberalism in its faith towards the ideal society arising through exclusively constitutional or legal-institutional remedies to human self-interest. Although he does not offer an elaborate argument against such possibilities, Schiller's thought begins from the empirically evident problem he perceives in such visions of cultivating human nature through statecraft alone.

Writing the *Letters* in the midst of the French Revolution, Schiller was able to observe the hope and optimism of man's emancipation through the Enlightenment ideals devolve into the shock and horror of the Reign of Terror. The fatal disillusionment condensed into a single ailing question diffused throughout the *Letters*: why did the Revolution end in the Terror? The answer is largely contained in the Fifth Letter, and it is essentially that the people were not ready for it: 'a moment so prodigal of opportunity finds a generation unprepared to receive it' (Schiller, 1795/1967, p. 96). In a somewhat proto-Hegelian move, Schiller blames not a lack of moral or legal education, but the consciousness—yet unformed and not ready to receive the education—in the depth of which the ideals of freedom and virtue remain merely notional or formal. The ideals are therefore inadequate to create determining dispositions or immanent modes of social practice (Tauber, 2006, p. 31). The deployment of terror is but a political recourse here, toward which lofty ideals of the Revolution devolved, a manifestation of the unpreparedness of the collective consciousness.

Schiller's diagnosis here, as he himself recognizes, nevertheless raises an indispensable philosophical question: why were the people unprepared? Or why did the lofty Revolution degenerate into the brutality of the Terror? The Revolution, after all, arrives in the Age of Enlightenment, a present in which fanaticism and sophistry were being dispelled as philosophers and scientists alike unlocked the fundamental truths of reason. Galileo and Newton, for instance, had discovered the foundational laws of motion, Leibniz and Wolff had furnished proofs of natural theology, and Pufendorf and Grotius had established the principles of natural law (Beiser, 2005, p. 129). 'Our Age is Enlightened', Schiller writes, 'that is to say such knowledge has been discovered and disseminated as would suffice to correct our practical principles' (Schiller, 1795/1967, p. 116). And yet, the unthinkable is occurring: people are rejecting these rational ideals and refusing their own emancipation in the process. In this lament and astonishment, Schiller asks the *fundamental question*: 'Our Age is Enlightened...How is it then, that we still remain barbarians?' (Schiller, 1795/1967).

Taken together, the historical diagnosis and the philosophical question thereafter are dually illuminating. First, it reveals the basis for Schiller's disagreement with the liberal commitment to the remedies of statecraft. This has already been noted, but, to elaborate, the degeneration of the Revolution into Terror is, for Schiller, demonstration of the dangerous inadequacy of governing exclusively through universal reason and positive law. These means are inevitably oppressive and become increasingly brutal with any resistance. If so, liberalism's attempts at coordinating and harmonizing the plurality of individual self-interests seem bound to fail or turn oppressive. The explanation is rather intuitively straightforward: where compliance is only extracted through force, that compliance will be a kind of violence even if for worthy or benevolent ends. Non-violent, non-oppressive compliance can only be that which is willing.

This brings us to the second revelation in Schiller's above reflections. Whereas the first explains Schiller's differences with the liberal tradition, the second moves to his divergence from the republican tradition championed by the likes of Montesquieu, Rousseau, Ferguson and others, stressing virtue as the prerequisite of civil freedom and a healthy politic (Beiser, 2005, p. 125).

The posited divergence is by no means straightforward, however. Schiller's precise political position has been difficult to ascertain not only on account of the insufficient detail from Schiller (Beiser, 2008, p. 64) and his distinctiveness (Behler, 2013, p. 224), but also the trouble with different species of republicanism available: for example, as between the ancient and modern varieties (see Oz-Salzberger, 2002; Moggach, 2007; Schmidt 2009) or the nuances of republican ideas in relation to modern economics and individuality as manifest in the so-called Scottish and German debates (Oz-Salzberger, 2002; Moggach, 2008). Some even find republicanism itself not quite apt to capture Schiller's position leading to novel labels of 'aesthetic republicanism' (Moggach, 2007) or 'aesthetic humanism' (Behler, 2013).

It is not my intention to detail or adjudicate between labels, nor does scope allow it amid the rich landscape of considerations involved. Instead, I proceed from the generally conceded point that Schiller's earlier observations are broadly republican in emphasizing the indispensability of civic virtue to realizing a just regime. My contention, however, is that regardless of the classification or label we ultimately pin on Schiller, his reflections on the French Revolution reveal a significant yet understated point of difference between him and the republican tradition. Distinctively, Schiller does not share the republican belief that virtue can be inculcated by the state through legal or even (non-coercive) pedagogical means. Schiller offers several reasons for this. In the Sixth Letter, for example, he points to the fragmented and antagonized social relations under modernity's economic and rationalizing forces like the division of labour and impersonal bureaucratic administration (Schiller, 1795/1967, pp. 98–103), concluding that the state 'remains forever a stranger to its citizens...while the governed cannot but receive with indifference laws that are scarcely, if at all, directed to them as persons' (1795/1967, p. 101).

This explanation, however, is inconclusive. As some commentators have observed, many republican thinkers from Rousseau to Herder were not naïve about such concerns but nonetheless found them surmountable by reference to the earlier republics of Classical Greece (Schmidt, 2009, pp. 294–296, 299–300). The relevant feature of these ancient polities is their organic unity in shared civic community and bonds of friendship, which many early modern republicans favoured as a model for how virtue can be fostered without laws and sanctions, but through patriotism or something like a civic religion. A fuller explanation for Schiller's divergence must therefore address his difference with these currents of republicanism as well.

Frederick Beiser, who otherwise frames Schiller as a republican, posits Schiller's difference with antiquity-inspired solutions as being both a matter of unfeasibility in post-Enlightenment society and Schiller's residual liberalism that opposes 'the creation of a civil religion, which would inevitably infringe on rights of conscience' (2005, p. 128).

While this is certainly credible, the explanation fails to address Schiller's deeper, theoretical (rather than contingent doxastic) reasons for eschewing republican solutions in favour of aesthetic education. The theoretical explanation begins with the hitherto

unanswered question in these musings: why is it that the people were unprepared for realizing the revolutionary ideals? And, more importantly, why should we dismiss the possibility that they could have been prepared through the gentle means of reason and moral education? The answer to this question is essentially comprised in what Schiller characterizes as the Vicious Circle of theoretical and practical cultures (*Vicious Circle*, for short) (1795/1967, pp. 107–109).

Being an inveterate political frustration—especially for republicans—the Vicious Circle is a well-observed aspect in commentaries on Schiller (Beiser, 2005, pp. 126–129; Dahlstrom, 2008, p. 101; Schmidt, 2009, p. 289; Tauber, 2006, p. 34). What is mostly overlooked, however, is that Schiller’s Vicious Circle is not merely directed to the problem of realizing virtue under countervailing social conditions. On Schiller’s account, the Vicious Circle is linked to the anthropological sketch of man in the preceding *Letters* and therefore relocates the problem away from virtue per se to an aesthetic domain requiring an aesthetic remedy, as will transpire.

Recall, in the fundamental question, Schiller’s reference to us remaining ‘barbarians’ despite our ‘Enlightened Age’. This reference is not purely rhetorical as might first appear. In the Fourth Letter, Schiller explains that man can be at odds with himself in two ways. First, as a ‘savage’ when ‘feeling predominates over principle’ (1795/1967, p. 95). Second, as a ‘barbarian’ when ‘principle destroys feeling’ (1795/1967, p. 95). The technical meanings of these terms and their contrast are informative here. Schiller’s reference to ‘barbarian’ as opposed to ‘savage’ in the fundamental question underscores that the Revolution and Enlightenment have in fact delivered a dynamic effect. Human beings have been reformed from their natural ‘savage’ condition to being rationalized.

Despite the disparaging connotations, Schiller’s reference here elucidates his hesitance to endorse the ancient republican model. For all its own aberrations (to which we shall come), ‘barbarism’ represents a kind of progress in mastering the brute impulses and instinctual drives of the savage. Departing from Rousseau’s idealization of the uncivilized ‘noble savage’, Schiller posits rationalization as indispensable to a more complete kind of freedom (Nilges, 2018, p. 13). Schiller’s problem with the republics of Classical Greece, then, is as follows (1795/1967, pp. 102–103). Although not bereft of the rational dimension, the public life of the polis was nevertheless predominantly removed from it, being instead sustained by the natural feelings of civic piety. These polities were sufficiently compact and culturally homogenized such that one’s civic duties mostly aligned with one’s inclinations. The understated drawback, however, is that by experiencing public life in this way, the citizens of these polities do not develop the rational capacity for social relations in the universal or abstract sense of justice outside the familiar, acculturated forms. In Jeffrey Church’s summation:

though the ‘natural’ Greek polis cultivated wholeness of character, it did not fully achieve the human good, since its ‘naturalness’ suppressed the perfection of our distinctively human trait, our rationality. (Church, 2014, p. 98)

Schiller’s rejection of ancient republicanism is thereby ultimately grounded in his theoretical-anthropological framework, wherein the onset of rationalization is necessary and progressive, even if also problematic. As the long footnote in the Thirteenth Letter explains, once the distinction between sensuous and rational nature obtains, any reversion thereof is no longer viable (both by means and as a desirable end) (1795/1967, p. 121).

And yet, rationalization, as foreshadowed earlier in Schiller's prescient aetiology of modern alienation, is itself problematic and resistant to republican hopes of inculcating virtue through state coercion or state education. Notwithstanding the viability of Schiller's critique here found by later thinkers from Hegel to Marx (and Weber) (Nilges, 2018, p. 16), Schiller also seeks to address the alternate possibility—namely, that moral reform might nevertheless be accomplished, if not by the state, then by citizens themselves either of their own accord or through civil society or culture. This leads to the further problematization of rationalization and the Vicious Circle argument.

Rationalization is not merely the disintegration of organic social relations into reified, instrumental ones that engender the imperviousness of the citizenry to moral reform by the state. Adopted from the earlier Halle tradition thinkers such as Georg Meier, the term 'barbarian' indicates a lack of aesthetic sensibility (Pugh, 2011, p. 166), which reveals that rationalization additionally distorts our self-relation. This is a key point for discerning Schiller's critical stance towards what behind the disparaging connotations of 'barbarian' resembles none other than Kantian moral/rational autonomy (i.e. the determination of the will by pure practical reason—principle, not feeling). Schiller's critique here induces confoundment not only because it appears contrary to his avowed Kantianism, but also since barbarism represents precisely the ideal by which—notwithstanding institutional design nor requiring external intrusion upon conscience as civic religion might entail—the will of every individual in the community could be harmonized as envisioned in Kant's formula of the moral kingdom of ends (see Kant, 1785/1998, p. 41/4:433). The state would then only be required for assurance and determinacy in the collective exercise of internal freedom (Ripstein, 2004, pp. 26–27).

Much ink has been spilled trying to explain this divergence with Kant. Specifications of the disagreement have included whether autonomy or humanity constitutes the highest (supreme and perfect) good (Beiser, 2005, p. 188), whether virtuous character requires harmony (moralized inclination) or autocracy (subordinated inclinations) (Baxley, 2003, p. 510; 2008, p. 9), or whether moral motivation must always convey the idea of duty (Winegar, 2013, p. 285) and others still.⁶ Crucially though, most converge on the disagreement not being about autonomy itself, but rather about its primacy. Indeed, the various characterizations may be mutually reconcilable or even complementary in regard to autonomy not exhausting 'the good', which requires virtue of character, wherein for Schiller (contra Kant) inclinations hold an active, non-secondary role.

This, however, seems a far less drastic ethical divergence than Schiller's derisive label suggests, which should alert us to the deeper problem with rationalization and (Kantian) moral/rational autonomy. That problem, as forecast, is in fact not about virtue as the standard views like those above-sampled suppose. Rather, as shall progressively emerge, it concerns Schiller's divergence from Kant on the aesthetics of beauty and freedom.⁷ In brief, the problem is with oppression and unfreedom. Although becoming barbarians

6 For a more extensive survey, see Baxley (2010).

7 More recent commentaries emphasizing Schiller's idea of freedom and its aesthetic dimensions in proximity to this context include Falduto (2021), Noller (2021) and Roehr (2003). Beauty, more specifically, is emphasized by Guyer (2014) in reading *On Grace and Dignity* as a pre-eminently aesthetic disagreement with Kant.

liberates us from the necessity of Nature, like our physical, animalistic drives, it nonetheless entraps us in a lifeless, sentimentally detached, sacrificial mode of being—narrowly concerned with the instrumentality of a purely rational, moral existence. It is to this unfree, self-alienating condition that aesthetic education is envisioned as antidote, or, in Schiller's famed remark, 'it is only through beauty that man makes his way to *freedom*' (1795/1967, p. 90, emphasis added).

In light of this, the earlier considerations about doubting the realization of republican ideals by means of coercion and/or education (by the state or otherwise), seem superseded or otherwise complicated by the fact that it is precisely by these rationalizing forces that in the present (post-) Enlightenment age, we become and *remain* barbarians. In other words, even upon accomplishment, the result of the republican proposals of such coercion or education is precisely the tragic condition of barbarism.

For now, the simultaneous claims regarding the unfeasibility of rationalization and the tragedy of its attainment need to be clarified via their culmination in the aforementioned Vicious Circle. Abstractly, the problem consists of a means-ends paradox: the 'theoretical culture' which is supposed to engender the appropriate 'practical culture' itself depends on the said practical culture for its efficacy or reception. In short, the interdependence prevents the realization of either (Tauber, 2006, pp. 32–34). More concretely, if the people are ignorant and self-serving there cannot be a free republic. Yet, left to themselves without the free republic, how can the people be anything other than ignorant and self-serving?

Contrary to the earlier-alluded tendencies to construe Schiller's Vicious Circle as a continuity of the above paradigm, Schiller's Vicious Circle seems to have radically shifted the goalposts. Although virtue remains integral to the realization of a just political order, feasibility notwithstanding, neither the return to the natural state of the classical polis nor pressing on with modern rationalization (by whichever means) can be sufficient. The republican problem with the Vicious Circle then appears not only a means-ends one but also a problem with the possible ends themselves.

Schiller's distinctive position becomes evident when examining his divergence with the liberal tradition as to institutional remedies and with the republican tradition about both the feasibility and proposed conception of realizing virtue. Contra liberalism, the state is not the solution, nor, contra republicanism, is it the problem. The analysis of the French Revolution with which we began can usefully illustrate the dynamic. Under the ancien régime or absolute monarchy, the people are unfree because they are subject to the external will of the monarch. The Revolution, however, only delivers their external freedom with hopes to realize the (self)-rule of universal reason. These hopes are dashed by an ensuing anarchy as the masses revert to their material needs as savages. Determined to press on with its (rational) ideals, the Revolution devolves into despotism—the Terror—confirming reason's modal failure. At best, reason will secure a merely fragile hold over Nature by transforming the people into a self-repressed existence as barbarians.

We end up, then, with the political problem of attaining morality and freedom amid two problematic modes of self- (and by extension) social-constitution: savagery and barbarism; and, at the same time, the renunciation of two classical programmes of resolution: statecraft and moral reform by means of law and/or education. Aesthetic education, as the

next section discusses, faces an arduous task of refashioning both ends and means, along with the reconfiguration of ethical and aesthetic values that this involves.

3. Schiller's Aesthetic Education

The duality of the above means-ends problem is reflected in the structure of *AEoM*, which, from the Tenth Letter, alternates between two distinct theses of Schiller's solution.⁸ First, there is the 'causal thesis' addressing the instrumental capabilities of the aesthetic in actualizing freedom and moral ends. Second, there is the 'speculative thesis' dealing with the nature of the ideal practical culture, or, 'the Aesthetic State'. Consistent with Schiller's Vicious Circle, the two are thoroughly entangled, although, of course, conceptually distinct. As Beiser puts it, 'the answer to the first question does not answer the second: for even if beauty *promotes* human perfection, it does not follow that human perfection *consists in* beauty' (2005, p. 136), and vice versa.

While the causal thesis will prove crucial in clarifying why the aesthetic holds its unique role as a politically efficacious programme where other solutions fail, I begin with the speculative thesis that, among other things, is a rich and daring response to the priority of reason and cognition in ethical and aesthetical matters respectively.

The Speculative Thesis

At its core, the speculative thesis asserts that human perfection consists in beauty. Schiller depicts the will as comprised of two fundamental drives: the 'sense drive'⁹ and the 'form drive'. The sense drive has *life* as its object and compels one to physical needs (protecting our sensuous nature and individual physical existence). The form drive has *form* as its object and constrains one to reason (seeking unified personal identity and permanent universal ends and relations) (1795/1967, p. 128). The determination of the will by either drive leads to self-alienation and unfreedom as canvassed with reference to the savage and barbarian and their sociopolitical analogues in the preceding section.

Only in cross-stimulating and -limiting synthesis of these drives can their constraints be cancelled out in what Schiller refers to as our 'play drive', the object of which, reflecting this synthesis, is '*living form*' (1795/1967, pp. 125–128). Play is a complex notion about which more will be said further below, but its object—'living form'—is immediately revealed by Schiller as 'beauty' (1795/1967, p. 128). Harmonized in play, all contingency of life and form is removed from our 'happiness' and 'perfection' (1795/1967, p. 127). The result is none other than beauty.

Unfortunately, Schiller leaves this terse and abstract deduction of beauty as living form without further elaboration. To gain a more comprehensive account requires reference to what is often seen as a parallel tripartite schema in his earlier work, *On Grace and Dignity* (1793/2005, hereafter *OGD*). There, Schiller traces three ways in which

8 Roughly, Letters 11–15 and 17–22 focus on the speculative, whereas Letters 16–17 and 23–27 focus on the causal.

9 Sometimes rendered the 'material drive'.

human sensuo-rational nature can be aesthetically expressed in conduct: Voluptuousness, Dignity and Grace. Voluptuousness represents pure sensuality without (rational) form.¹⁰ Hence, it aesthetically matches the sense-drive-dominated savage in their surrender of rationality to the unrestrained demands of sensual inclinations and nature. This is juxtaposed with Dignity—the expression of ‘control of impulses through moral strength’ or ‘moral freedom’ (1795/1967, pp. 158/NA 294, 160/NA 296), matching the form-drive-determined ‘barbarian’.

It is worth pausing briefly here to recover the earlier observation about Schiller’s ethical alignment but aesthetic misalignment with Kant. The description of Dignity confirms Schiller’s core agreement with Kant that morality fundamentally consists in conforming to duty, irrespective of one’s inclinations and instead solely from respect for the moral law, wherefrom duty is rationally derived. Thus, Dignity’s value as the triumph of reason is firstly ethical and, in virtue of that, elevated in rank over Voluptuousness.

Aesthetically, however, the problematic of beauty and freedom surfaces with Schiller’s subversion of Dignity as being expressive of not beauty, but sublimity. Kant’s association of the sublime with the awe-inspiring splendour both rapturous yet also painful (a mental ‘agitation’) (Kant, 1790/1987, §24 ff.) makes Schiller’s choice here rather telling. Insofar as autonomy is attained through suppression or compulsion of countervailing sensuous inclinations by rational/moral imperatives, Dignity forfeits the savage’s natural freedom, presiding over an internally oppressed or conflicted humanity. Remaining *merely* moral/autonomous beings or barbarians is thereby problematized in a significant departure from Kant.

To be sure, the departure lies not merely in the alignment of moral autonomy or Dignity with the sublime (Kant himself draws such connections, even at the expense of beauty; see 1790/1987, pp. 132–133/5:271),¹¹ but rather in this alignment being exclusive. Indeed, Schiller’s stance will seem odd in at least two ways. First, Kant’s paradigm cases of the sublime concern confrontations with overwhelming magnitudes or natural forces, which does not easily fit with the usual case of resistance to inclinations. But even letting that be, it is, second, no more apparent why there should be a *necessary* connection between moral autonomy and struggle with inclinations. Kant, after all, only required that autonomous actions be mediated by respect for the moral law, not that they be devoid of feeling or inclination.¹² As such, only the particular instances where there is really a struggle with countervailing inclination would the sublime hold relevance as sensuous confirmation of our freedom to nevertheless act autonomously.

10 Voluptuousness is also referred to as ‘lust’ or ‘sensuousness’ (1793/2005, p. 165/NA302; 148/NA282).

11 As such, Kant’s position is more complex than a straightforward association of autonomy/morality with the beautiful as discussed in §59. Still, there is room for reconciling Kant’s differential comparisons by suggesting that the beautiful and sublime emphasize different aspects of morality. Beauty, as previously discussed might be taken to be confirmation of our relation to the moral law while the sublime as emphasizing our capacity for moral freedom or autonomous action in the face of countervailing inclinations (cf. Guyer, 2014, pp. 454–455).

12 In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant even prescribes indirect duties to cultivate virtuous character and supporting dispositions (see Kant, 1797/1991, p. 250/6:457) For a fuller account see Allison (1990, pp. 162–179).

For Schiller, the reason that Dignity/autonomy (and, for that matter, Voluptuousness) cannot align with the beautiful derives from their limitation in conveying freedom in appearance or beauty as defined in the *Kallias Letters* (hereafter, *Kallias*) wherein Schiller offers his most detailed aesthetic reactions to the perceived subjectivism in Kant's *Third Critique* (Sharpe, 2005, p. 116). While the full significance of this will be unfolded in relation to the causal thesis, presently noteworthy is Schiller's deduction of the objective principle as '*freedom in appearance*'.

From a Kantian perspective, as D. C. Schindler highlights, that seems 'oxymoronic' (Schindler, 2012, p. 60). Appearances, after all, occur in the heteronomous phenomenal realm of nature, in conformity with the laws of understanding and beyond the freedom noumenally defined by pure practical reason or autonomy (2012, pp. 60–61).

Wary of this, Schiller responds with an adaptation of Kant's notion of *heautonomy*.¹³ Roughly, whereas for rational beings the *form* of self-determination is pure (practical) reason (i.e. *autonomy*), for purely natural beings, the *form* of self-determination is pure or inner nature (i.e. *heautonomy*) (Schiller, 1793/2003, p. 151). If, for example, a horse is determined only by form (its inner principle or nature of 'horseness'), without external interference, that horse will be beautiful by appearing free or self-determining (heautonomous). Of course, since in nature all things are deterministically law-governed, heautonomy is mere semblance or appearance of self-determination or freedom. Heautonomy is ascribed by practical reason when observation prompts it to find analogy to its own autonomy (Schiller, 1793/2003). This 'judgment of unfree effects according to the form of the free will, is aesthetic'—beauty, Schiller concludes, is 'thus nothing less than freedom in appearance' (1793/2003, p. 152).

From this, we can see that for as long as moral/rational and natural/sensible modes of being remain discordant, there can be no analogy by which heautonomy or appearance of freedom, and thereby beauty, arises. To explain, without form there can be no principle or inner nature grounding heautonomy (no 'self', as it were, for self-determination) and therefore no appearance of freedom or beauty. Conversely, when form (in our case, autonomy) is imposed on unreconciled sensibility externally, as foreign demand, it phenomenally appears heteronomous, precluding the analogy by which beauty as freedom in appearance can be found (Schiller, 1793/2003, pp. 156–157).

Beauty then requires harmony in our sensuo-rational nature so that in acting autonomously (in accordance with reason) we can still (sensibly) *appear* self-determining and thereby free and beautiful from our full human nature. This explains why beauty is exclusively expressed by the third of the aesthetic compartments, Grace. Drawn from Greek mythology, Grace is the species of (moveable) beauty inhering in unintentional actions expressive of inner character or dispositional state (Schiller, 1793/2005, pp. 126, 135–140/NA 254, 266–272). In Grace, sensibility and rationality are harmonized so that inclination becomes moralized and duty naturalized or instinctual (1793/2005, pp. 145–165/

13 See Kant (1790/1987, p. 25). Whereas Kant is referring to the self-determination of teleological judgement (to distinguish it from autonomy (of practical reason)), Schiller adopts this for 'regulative character of aesthetic judgment' (see Roehr, 2003, p. 120, n. 7).

NA 277–302). The result is beauty—or the ‘beautiful soul’, to be precise—who acts effortlessly, with complete freedom, from their undivided humanity (1793/2005, pp. 146–150/NA 279–284).

With the aid of this aesthetic tripartite, we find a general exhibition of the speculative thesis and within it the aesthetic dimension of Schiller’s disagreement with Kant. The beautiful soul, or Grace, as its representation, unveils how synthesis by *harmony* of the sense and form drives corresponds to beauty as heautonomy or freedom in appearance, and how it differs from the merely ethical standard of *unity* achieved by dominance of form over sense in autonomy or Dignity. What remains mysterious, though, is just how it is that beauty or living form results from the harmony of the two diametrically opposed drives, let alone how that harmony is achievable.

The answer, of course, is in the play drive—although play, as noted, is a notoriously inscrutable notion. Lacking a concrete definition, Schiller appeals to (ordinary) ‘linguistic usage’ for ‘play’ (1795/1967, p. 129) supplemented only by highly abstract references to cross-limitation or annulment (e.g. Letters Fourteen and Nineteen). Nevertheless, we can glean here that play is neither necessary (not a need) nor arbitrary (being in conformity with rules) (Beiser, 2005, p. 141). Nor is it a midpoint compromise of each drive. The two drives are combined in their unadulterated fullness, or what Karen E. Davis describes as ‘[combining] the two in their negation, preserving them both in their destruction’ (Davis, 2021, p. 45).

The possibility of this uncompromised harmonization lies in the aesthetic character of play. In that regard, the resonance with Kant’s notion of free play in aesthetic judgement is no coincidence. Kant famously explains aesthetic experience through the free play of our cognitive faculties whereby the imagination seeks to determine an object through the lawfulness of the understanding but finds no finality of determination under a concept to be applied. Stripped of any identifiable purpose, the ground of pleasure in the object is found within the cognitive harmony in apprehending its form, which pleases subjectively yet universally, without concept.

Schiller’s play adopts a similar structure but radically expands it from the cognitive to the volitional. The critical shift is already implicit in the *Kallias*. Recall that heautonomy requires recognition by practical reason through analogy to autonomy, and the application of this analogy must be prompted by the relevant object. Now, since beauty—Schiller agrees with Kant—is not conceptually determined,¹⁴ that appearance must arise from free play in the object. As confirmed by Schiller’s direct reference to play in the example of a beautiful pot (1793/2003, p. 170; Guyer, 2014, p. 473), Schiller’s sensuous objective account relies on ‘a sort of “ontological status for beauty”’ to explain why free play is not exclusively cognitive (Acosta López, 2016, p. 239).

But even if *Kallias* offers a basis for play as constitutively volitional, it does not easily translate into how it is so with respect to us. After all, unlike pots (and horses), our will as practical reason is not simply the natural form (or sense drive) but also the rational form (or form drive). A further specification is therefore needed for how play can harmonize our volitional duality to attain beauty.

14 See Schiller, 1793/2003, p. 148.

As previously mentioned, Schiller does not make himself entirely lucid on these finer points and, unfortunately also, Beiser's influential reading simply equates play with beauty (2005, p. 144). Again, although generally not astray, it leaves the dialectic obscure in the respects just mentioned.

One recent contribution to these and related matters by Matherne and Riggle (2020) offers some assistance here. According to them, beauty as the object of play is also the object of the sense and form drives (play after all is a synthesis and not, properly speaking, a third drive) (2020, p. 385). Beauty then is itself a source of harmonization in play, but to ascertain its harmonizing capacity, beauty must be properly understood in its normative sense as aesthetic value (Matherne and Riggle, 2020, pp. 386–388). Conventionally, beauty is construed descriptively or empirically as whatever objects or impressions are judged as agreeable or pleasing. Aesthetic value, conversely, lies in normative or pure beauty—which combines the sensuously pleasing and formally agreeable (according to rational rules and intellectual capacities), attaining the synthesis of sense and form as captured by Schiller's own label 'living form' (Matherne and Riggle, 2020, pp. 386–388).

The appeal to the descriptive and normative beauty distinction is of itself not novel. Beiser, for example, highlights that normative beauty is critical for Schiller for answering earlier criticisms about the impracticability of aesthetic education, given that receptivity to aesthetic objects such as art is culturally conditioned, meaning that it will fail against the Vicious Circle to instil virtue in an unprepared audience (2005, p. 135). Unlike empirical beauty, normative beauty is unaffected by this problem because it is pure and transcendental (Beiser, 2005, pp. 135–137). The basis of its purity or transcendentality, however, requires clarification if it is not to be problematically circular by definition. This will be revisited further below.

Applied in detailing the connection between beauty and play, however, the distinction proves informative in supplementing the *Kallias* basis for the volitional effects of beauty in play. Understood normatively as aesthetic value, the objective beauty in appearances is not merely cognitively pleasing without concept, but directly induces volitional play by resolving their contradictions in the mutual object of aesthetic value.

Matherne and Riggle are not explicit here, but the effect of play might be as follows. The physical/natural necessities of the sense drive appear necessarily contingent by the rationalizing power of the form drive, while the rational/moral necessities of the form drive appear contingently necessary by the naturalizing power of the sense drive. To put it less technically, reason reveals our freedom to overcome natural constraints while our nature reveals our capacity to overcome rational constraints by internalizing or turning them into inclinations rather than imperatives. The result is the 'aesthetic condition' wherein we are volitionally open or indeterminate (Matherne and Riggle, 2020, pp. 390–392). In the aesthetic condition, we can realize our 'human freedom', becoming released from affective and practical constraints comprising our 'normal sense of self', internally harmonized and 'open to possibilities' (Matherne and Riggle, 2020, pp. 390–392).

Despite its undoubtedly enriching explanation of the mechanics of play and volitional role of beauty as aesthetic value, the account strangely leaves the realization of human freedom independent of securing moral virtue as the prerequisite for political emancipation and central goal of aesthetic education.

The intended answer seems to be that the synthesis of sense and form means that whatever moral requirements reason brings to bear on sensuous nature are incorporated in the reciprocal harmony of play. The problem, however, is that aesthetic value, which is described in terms of normative beauty, does not appear to incorporate moral requirements. Recall that normative beauty was distinguished from the empirical only by the fact that it incorporated the requirements of the form drive necessary for synthesis with the sense drive. The lacuna here is that these requirements will be *moral* requirements, which is not of itself apparent. Establishing this requires something like the necessary identity between reason and morality in the form drive; or (if there is not a necessary identity) an argument that the moral requirements of the form drive are those which are necessarily transposed in play.

To be sure, the spontaneity of play cannot of itself generate this connection because, for Schiller (in contrast with Kant), being formally determined without end is not equivalent to being morally determined. Far from developing these supplementations, Matherne and Riggle's attempts to concretize the way aesthetic value engenders human freedom seem to focus purely on the volitional openness, such as in the 'New Cuisine' example where a person's responsiveness to aesthetic properties prompts a reevaluation of their original limiting inhibitions towards trying a new culinary experience (Matherne and Riggle, 2020, p. 394).

If the speculative thesis is left as such, then human perfection consists in beauty as a perfected freedom of volitional openness unburdened by material and formal constraints, whether sensuous, rational or cultural. Indeed, in this aesthetic condition, the will is no longer *specifically directed* at all. The aesthetic is turned into an end-in-itself and all else is left indeterminately subordinate to it.

This totalizing aestheticization of individual and social life here is both complex and bold. As Georg Lukács perceived it, Schiller expands the aesthetic far beyond aesthetics—seeing it as 'the key solution to the question of the meaning of man's existence in society' (Lukács, 1971, p. 139). Others, like Zvi Tauber, have even labelled it 'one of the most radical notions ever introduced in the history of politology' (2006, p. 23).

Schiller's proposed Aesthetic State breaks the traditional oppositions of social relations between what might be called the 'dynamic' and the 'ethical' (Beiser, 2005, pp. 162–163).¹⁵

Similarly, with the ethical, the opposition between natural and deontological values is rooted in perspectival limitation which the aesthetic can harmonize. And contrary to any impression of superficiality as may arise from the presentation so far, the aesthetic concerns are ultimately holistic—of a philosophical-anthropological character. As the Third

15 Dynamic relations mandate actions through power whereby each individual's acts are limited by those of others according to might. Ethical relations, on the other hand, mediate the will through law whereby intersecting duties impose limitations on individual volitions. In contrast, aesthetic relations are not limited by either power or law, consisting in play governed only by taste (Beiser, 2005, pp. 162–163). Only aesthetic relations can create true interpersonal harmony and social character since each individual reaches harmony with themselves. Whether it must do so, is another matter.

Letter radiantly recounts, the isolation of man as a moral being (whose existence is yet problematic) overlooks the dependence of this ideal on the underlying natural substrate of man as animal or physical being (who in fact exists—and, as it were, exists as the possibility of moral man) (Schiller, 1795/1967, pp. 90–92). The infliction of moral demands without regard for the preparedness of sensibility to endure them jeopardizes the existence of both.

As foreshadowed, though, the bold and totalizing reach of the speculative thesis nevertheless remains incomplete without assurance that we can actually reach the said perfection of beauty. The possibility of aesthetic education thus depends on the causal thesis that is taken up below.

The Causal Thesis

Establishing the above remarkable transformative possibilities turns on two questions flagged earlier. First, specifying the basis for pure or transcendental beauty, which discloses the nature of Schiller's proposal. Second, discerning the relation that this beauty or aesthetic value holds to morality so as to explain how merely reaching volitional indeterminacy in the aesthetic condition can rear virtue rather than amoral or even immoral character? This in turn explains the coherence and efficacy of Schiller's aesthetic education project.

For the first question, recall that the empirical/normative distinction in beauty attempts to transcend the Vicious Circle problem of (empirical) beauty being acculturated and therefore failing to break the practical-theoretical cultural nexus. The solution requires showing that normative or pure beauty can transcend this. Now, as already noted, normative beauty corresponds to the aesthetic value of the volitional sensuo-rational synthesis in play or 'living form'. Yet, how is this aesthetic value triggered or recognized distinctively from empirical beauty? The question here is complicated by the fact that while offering some indication on which forms are inadequate, Schiller leaves virtually no clues as to what forms are envisioned, prompting much scholarly guesswork.

To start with, we can turn to the rejected form of aesthetic education—what might be considered the 'traditional view' espoused in various ways from Plato to Rousseau. In essence, it holds that moral indoctrination is more effective when presented in artistic form. Art is mobilized in the service of ideological convection, effectively becoming *committed art* (Tauber, 2006, p. 35). Twentieth-century aesthetic propaganda is replete with such art, from utopian rhymed slogans to the dramatic films of state cinema.

Schiller's rejection of these pedagogical forms therefore is not because morality is somehow incompatible with aesthetic modes of pedagogical delivery, but rather from scepticism about the potency of aesthetic delivery as a conduit of virtue given the Vicious Circle problem. This is important in showing that crudeness or sophistication of aesthetic medium ultimately makes little difference. If not a proposal to deploy aesthetic forms in the service of moral instruction, what then does Schiller's programme of aesthetic education advance?

Interpretations vary considerably. The programme might be narrowly construed as a revision of the traditional view towards non-didactic aesthetic character forming

through a general amplification of aesthetic exposure, albeit with equally uninspiring assessments. As Church (2014, p. 96) observes, this would be patently impracticable or idealistic: how can mandatory opera classes or subsidizing arts schooling eliminate class struggle or alleviate moral decadence? Church himself proposes a more nuanced interpretation of aesthetic education as a programme of charismatic edification by exemplary leaders (2014, pp. 96–97), whereas, in a more caustic assessment, Gail Hart compares it to the so-called ‘Ludovico Technique’ from Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange* (Hart, 2005, pp. 146–158). Beyond that are other views including more generalized accounts of aesthetic education in terms of sublimation through aesthetic-cultural forms in play (e.g. Schindler, 2012, pp. 95–98; also, Beiser, 2003; Pugh, 2011).

Unfortunately, scope does not permit detailed comparisons of various interpretations, but since Schiller himself does not venture into prescriptions, what actually matters is which, if any, alternatives might Schiller’s conception of normative beauty accommodate. In that regard, based on the aforementioned problem of the Vicious Circle as barrier to traditional forms of aesthetic education, how does the aesthetic value overcome this difficulty?

In reconstructing the speculative thesis, aesthetic value was, following Matherne and Riggle, identified in terms of that which is capable of appealing equally to both our sense and form drives (2020, p. 390). This is a normative conception of beauty since no actual objects will have this balance, or what might be referred to as ‘aesthetic Schein’ or ‘style’ (2020, p. 389). The problem of course is that if this balance or style is what, as living form, induces play, then the distinction between normative and empirical beauty becomes simply about capacity to induce play (Matherne and Riggle, 2020, p. 389). Although not implausible—and even advantageous for clarifying the speculative thesis, as discussed—the purely functional criteria leaves play and aesthetic value thoroughly mysterious and circular in their causal origins. Aesthetic value is whatever induces play, and play is induced by whatever has aesthetic value.

On my assessment, this unfortunate result stems from too abruptly differentiating Schiller’s volitional and Kant’s cognitive play. While they are distinct, Schiller does not treat the difference as exclusive. Indeed, the difference is what accounts for the causal ordering of play. While the *Kallias* departure from Kant’s account of beauty is what allows for the volitionally constitutive nature of play, the recognition of beauty as freedom in appearance still depends on effectively Kantian cognitive play, as the requirement of analogy to practical reason attests. We are yet to finish the examination of the objective nature of beauty in *Kallias*, but the point here is that if something is to be found beautiful for its constitutive play, or freedom in appearance, it requires our reflective judgement. The disinterestedness of play perceived in the form of the object (rather than Kant’s cognitive play in us) is what prompts us to recognize its beauty by analogy to our disinterested autonomous freedom that, reflected back at us, suspends our volitional state in play. There is no argument in *AEM* that contradicts this or suggests that Schiller has replaced the *Kallias* deduction of beauty for a functional one based on ‘style’ with which it is any way compatible (as cause). In fact, Schiller’s objection to Kant’s pleasure as constitutive of beauty is merely about replacing subjective pleasure as the final cause of beauty with objective

properties in the object (see Schiller, 1793/2003, p. 160), not wholesale excluding it as constitutive.

The foregoing offers the completion of the functional analysis of aesthetic value by supplementing it with the compatible deduction of beauty in *Kallias*, which, in connection with (Kantian) cognitive play, can illuminate the capacity of aesthetic value to induce play. Apart from the value of integrating *AEoM* with *Kallias*, it moderates the functional account by aligning what has capacity to induce play with what is beautiful by prompting the analogy to recognize freedom in appearance. The pleasure in that recognition, in turn, accounts for how style attracts our attention and suspends us volitionally, like, some argue, beauty must do (Acosta López, 2016, p. 242).

Most importantly of all, the supplementation is crucial for comprehending how aesthetic value breaks the Vicious Circle. Unlike the acculturated objects of empirical beauty, normative beauty is transcendental. It is ontologically distinct because it stands as image or appearance to reality in relation to us. Accordingly, it is not that the object is actually free of external determination, but rather that it *appears* so to us by our rule of reflection. Being not constitutive of the object itself but rather by the relation discovered to us, aesthetic value arises from *disinterested* presentation (described above) and transcends the actual heteronomy of practical culture. The aesthetic is calibrated not towards real concerns, but to transcendent forms and values that uniquely allow circumvention of constraints and edification of individual consciousness (towards morality and freedom) through play. The remarkable effect, in Schiller's words, is that: 'physical society *in time* must not for a moment cease...while moral society *as idea* is in the process of being formed' (1795/1967, pp. 91–92). Aesthetic education can therefore uniquely make the individual become the ideal without sacrificing the individual in existence and allowing the ideal to also become the existing individual.

These references to moral society and ideal individuals revert us to the second question: the connection between aesthetic and moral value. The synthesis was initially identified with the beautiful soul manifesting Grace, yet, contrary to the tendency by many commentators to directly transfer this to play,¹⁶ such straightforward association proves untenable. The architectonic structure of Grace is morally directed in that sensuous nature lends its material or motivational force in support of rationally determined ends or moral duties, which are consequently not experienced as such. When it comes to play, however, this moral aspect is less apparent for play, which is not the object of harmonization but the process itself. Play, then, might be more accurately construed as what allows for Grace, which would in turn also assist with the puzzle of how Grace might be attained given its being 'antithetical' to effort or directed aiming (Deligiorgi, 2006, p. 13). The point, however, is that a necessary connection seems absent.

The problem is a tension between morality and freedom in the play drive itself. The disinterestedness in the play, or heteronomy of objects that endowed transcendence to pure beauty, does not hold in the same manner for us in play. For the recognition

16 Most explicitly, Beiser (2005, p. 142), but also Sharpe (2005, p. 156) and Dahlstrom (2008, p. 99). For an attempt to resolve the difference by appeal to the sublime, see Acosta López (2011).

of beauty as freedom in appearance in the relevant forms occurs by analogy to our autonomy, whereas, in the case of our play, there is no analogy with autonomy because the volitional indeterminacy is supposed to be actual, free from all constraints, both natural and moral.

It is in response to this that Marxist, among other, critics have frequently denounced play and thereby Schiller's aesthetic education more generally as dangerously unlimited and divorced from tangible political realities and moral concerns.¹⁷ Furthermore, human freedom realized through beauty seems inconsistent with respect for the equivalent play of others, spurring doubts about the communal or political possibilities of aesthetic education (Acosta López, 2011, pp. 189–193; Schindler, 2012, pp. 71–76). Unless rectified, the tension threatens the promise of virtue and emancipation, and so, virtually, the entire programme of aesthetic education.

Now it may be thought that the tension itself is simply a misunderstanding of the play drive. An elaborate and sophisticated argument to this effect has been made by Schindler (2012). Greatly condensed for scope, the argument posits that freedom in Schiller's 'heautonomy' is not 'random spontaneity' or 'non-determination', but rather one's self-limiting form within a metaphysical system of internal and external determination (2012, pp. 73–75, 88–89). Thereupon, Schindler argues that the synthesis in play must preserve the structural dominance of the form drive because that is what both drives inherently seek (the sense drive to be structured, the form drive to structure) (2012, pp. 83, 106–107).

How might heautonomy suggest Schindler's correction about freedom? To discover this, we must return to the *Kallias*' deduction of beauty as objective freedom in appearance and ask what it is that accounts for this objective appearance? That is, what features in the constitution of the object prompt the application of the analogy by which beauty is recognized? Schiller's answer is the quality of 'not-being-determined-from-the-outside' (1793/2003, p. 161). By 'outside', Schiller means all that is external to the object's nature—or what we previously identified as its inner principle or form (see 1793/2003, p. 163). Thus, for example, the form of a vase might appear to be determined from the outside if its broad belly prompts our understanding to see the effects of gravity (1793/2003, p. 163). By contrast, a bird in flight appears to defy external determination because its entire mass is subjected to its own nature or form (1793/2003, p. 164). To be sure, the vase, bird and all else in nature is, of course, actually determined within the causal matrix of sensible forms, but the way something *appears* to our understanding makes a difference. As Schiller puts it: 'a form appears as free as soon as we are *neither able nor inclined* to search for its ground outside it' (1793/2003, p. 155, original emphasis).

Returning to Schindler, the point about freedom as self-limitation starts to take shape. Our volitional indeterminacy in play is not to be interpreted as annihilation of constraints,

17 For example, Benjamin (1930/1979, pp. 120–128); Eagleton (1990, pp. 102–119); Lukács (1979, pp. 128–131). Schiller seems presciently wary of this line of critique, as evidenced by his remarks in the Fourth Letter, although it remains unclear what the defensive argument against the critique actually comprises. For a fuller discussion here see Acosta López (2011).

but rather their reconceptualization as freedom according to our nature (Schindler, 2012, pp. 88–89). This is an indeterminacy by overdetermination, or what Schiller illustrates as a fulcrum scale with maximal load on each side rather than it being equilaterally empty (underdetermination) (1795/1967, p. 145). From this, Schindler advances that, in play, our form drive structures the willing sense drive because this is what expresses our whole (harmonized) inner principle of determination—our nature or humanity (1795/1967, pp. 89–90, 108). Presumably, by securing the form drive’s structuring over the sense drive, moral autonomy is preserved in human freedom achieved through the aesthetic condition in play.

The saliently controversial feature of Schindler’s account is the asymmetry between the form and sense drives in play. The sense drive necessarily conforms to form without any reciprocal limitations on form. Schindler, of course, need not be perturbed by this—indeed, he accepts it as Schiller’s view. However, the trouble is that this asymmetry is justified by reference to Schiller’s above-canvassed account of heautonomy, which concerns our recognition of beauty by analogy to our autonomy. Yet, it is not obvious that this extends to justify the asymmetry detected in our play. When we are in play, we are not objects upon which we reflectively apply analogy. Our rational autonomy along with our physical nature are in active configuration.

That the principles of heautonomy in nature (including observing others as objects) extend to our play might be a fair assumption to make, but it is nonetheless an assumption to be proven. This is exacerbated by the further assumption that the preservation of the sense and form drives in play entails that nothing is added or that the whole is just the sum of its parts. Again, this is not implausible, but may be challenged by Schiller’s references to ‘taste’ as neither the purely sensuous nor the purely rational principle of aesthetic relations in the Aesthetic State (1795/1967, p. 176).

As mentioned, Schindler offers a rich and impressive argument to which scope permits a disproportionately limited response. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the concerns raised can motivate towards a more economical yet accommodating resolution—especially in light of Schiller’s reticence and abstract ambiguity surrounding these matters.

That resolution lies in the very same structure of aesthetic judgement itself by which we already distinguished descriptive and normative beauty. The idea here is essentially that the structure of aesthetic judgement (or, in Schiller’s case, experience of pure beauty or aesthetic value)—namely that it is pleasing, but disinterested—is what incorporates moral content into the resulting aesthetic freedom. In the same fashion as disinterestedness evades the Vicious Circle by purging heteronymous constraints, it also rationalizes the will. At the same time, the pleasure in aesthetic value recruits the sensuous drive in the service of the autonomous rational ends. Yet, since the relations are harmonized, the service of the rational ends is not recognized in these deontic terms of moral duty or requirement. In short, human freedom or volitional indeterminacy is attuned to virtue rather than confined to it. This, we have seen, is precisely what is represented in Schiller’s notion of Grace as beauty that is volitional not accidental, but effortless and undirected.

In the Kantian spirit, but with radically different implications, Schiller draws on aesthetic value as a propaedeutic for morality. It is this interconnection that guarantees that despite being indeterminate in its freedom, the Aesthetic State should not turn tyrannical

or immoral. It renders plausible the transition from a natural, self-interested existence to an interest-neutral moral existence through the aesthetic medium (which is not part of the network of interests that reality comprises). Like Kant, Schiller maintains that art—or any other aesthetic object—exists on a separate ontological level to reality in that it exists as an illusion, appearance or image of reality (Tauber, 2006, p. 33).

The seemingly irresolvable problem—how to establish the ideal society on the basis of a still corrupt and immoral (but existing) one—thus appears to be answered by Schiller's radical solution. If the aesthetic can really have this ontologically causally distinct role while also being capable of integrating the special links between ethical and aesthetic value that Schiller seeks to establish by subverting and developing Kantian notions, then a practical basis for Schiller's political programme appears to be furnished too. The validity of this premise, however, depends on the correct application of Kant's aesthetic theory to the Vicious Circle paradox, and, upon close inspection, this correctness stands in doubt. In the final section below, I turn to an evaluation of this application and conclude with a final reflection on Schiller's unique contribution to conceiving the possibilities of aesthetic education and its relation to ethics and politics.

4. Evaluation and Conclusion

The preceding section revealed Schiller's radical conception of aesthetic education as causally and ontologically distinct from the interactions of theoretical (rational) and practical (sensible) cultures such that individual consciousness might be edified or perfected from within, as it were, thus allowing for freedom and morality to be realized in harmony rather than imposed by force or principle. The uniqueness of this against both liberal and republican traditions of political thought, as well as traditional conceptions of aesthetic education, has also been canvassed. Yet, as foreshadowed throughout, Schiller's richly innovative thesis is also rather unstable. While there are many possible concerns to discuss, I will focus on what seems to be the core argumentative premise for the causal role of the aesthetic, which relies on the application of Kant's account of the analogy between the beautiful and morally good.

While Schiller correctly identifies the analogy in Kant, he extends it beyond what the power of analogy can coherently support. Analogy in Kant's argument operates through a transfer of a subjective rule of reflection from one realm to another (Munzel, 1995, p. 310). The benefit of analogy is not knowledge or inference, but the hypotyposis of a conceptual object with an intuitable one (1995, p. 310). Accordingly, analogy requires the discovery of identity of rules, and the prerequisite of this is knowledge of each realm in itself. If one is not familiar with each, then no similarity can be found. But if this is so, then Schiller's hypothesis is in trouble. Schiller relies on aesthetic experience to prepare practical culture for the acceptance of theoretical culture because, while analogously presenting theoretical ideals, the aesthetic would not be seen as confronting worldly prejudices and physical concerns.

Ironically, this is the very reason that dooms its success. For the aesthetic could only hold analogy to the theoretical ideal if the theoretical ideal is already known, and known thoroughly enough for the identity of rule to be discovered and transferred. Yet, if one has

this requisite knowledge for the analogy to proceed, then one would have already undergone a practical transformation and have oriented themselves toward the theoretical ideal. In other words, the analogy does not work without requisite knowledge of each realm in itself, and where this occurs and the analogy works as intended, it is at the same time also no longer necessary (Tauber, 2006, p. 36). The Vicious Circle has already been escaped.

Nonetheless, it may be countered that all this misconstrues the structure of analogy for Schiller.¹⁸ The analogy need not operate in this pedagogical manner as a transfer of first-order moral norms or theoretical insights. Rather, the disinterested pleasure in aesthetic value might simply convey the possible formal or structural relations one could apply to practical concerns. The analogy, as it were, conveys a practical knowledge of how one might orient oneself in the world, and it is from the disinterested, harmonized comportment that one becomes virtuous without necessarily consciously ascertaining the moral. Indeed, this fits with the constitutively volitional nature of play for Schiller, which is extended from the cognitive play in Kant.

This revision of the analogy towards a formal conception linked with the unconscious processes of volitional play nevertheless leads to a reshaped problem. The basis of volitional play was found in the *Kallias* account of the objective standard of beauty. This was specified with examples of how the form of the object might suggest to the understanding external grounds of determination or their absence ('not-being-determined-from-the-outside'). Fundamentally, as Schiller admits, these judgements are regulative principles of the understanding rather than objective properties of the objects themselves. Yet, if so, volitional play seems to be self-induced in that it is not the objective formal properties of the object that prompt our recognition of beauty, but our own cognitive play between various ways of understanding the form or determining ground of the object. This puts pressure on the externally transformative effects of play and beauty on us given that our subjectivity seems to participate in regulating the volitional play.

Moreover, even if there are possibilities of resisting these pressures by appeal to the phenomenology or transient, pre-cognitive sense perception of the object (Beiser, 2008, pp. 72–74; Houlgate, 2008, pp. 41–45), the problem runs deeper still.

The special ontological status as image that Schiller assigns to the aesthetic further complicates the interaction with morality. Existing as but appearance, the aesthetic object is indifferent to reality. This is what enables the aesthetic to offer us emancipatory possibilities by inducing a state of free play and imaginary realization. As Tauber elegantly summarizes it, our disinterested frame of mind makes it ridiculous to focus on actual existences and interests during aesthetic presentation—as, for instance, speaking of blood and murder in relation to the tomato juice and actor's convulsions on a stage, or the satiating calories concealed in the golden waves of a cornfield (Tauber, 2006, p. 27). This is precisely what disables the capabilities of the aesthetic realm in actual practice. The transfer from aesthetic experience to the realm of real existence relinquishes the unique ontological status of the aesthetic and the freedom promised therein. Morality pertains not to image but to the ontologically real, and so the aesthetic–moral bridge that Schiller attempts can itself only stand in appearance (Tauber, 2006, p. 41).

18 I thank an anonymous referee for pressing me on this point.

Interestingly, Kant's own discussion of the similarities and differences between the beautiful and morally good arrives at a similar illustrative role for the beautiful. Even though our aesthetic experience sensuously confirms that morality may demand of us actions at the very limits of our physical being, it does not endow us with any power to be able to perform them. And this is exactly the point. In actual reality, it is not tomato juice but death-foreboding blood that flows out, suffering is an actual and terrible experience, and the cornfield is not a golden sea wavering in the breeze but a potential for feeding people (Tauber, 2006, p. 39). Strangely, Schiller's advocacy for physical man against the rigorous demands of morality is lost in the inattention or his ambition to overstep the separate ontological planes of aesthetic and moral existences. As Herbert Marcuse suggests about Schiller's strategy here, 'art cannot redeem its promise and reality offers no promises, only chances' (Marcuse (1979) in Tauber, 2006, p. 40).

The foregoing discloses that whatever the merits of Schiller's radical and novel solution to the inveterate problems of political theory, the solution seems impracticable and unrealizable—at least in the form presented and the mechanism it relies upon. The Aesthetic State and its promise of fully realized morality and freedom becomes, in the end, largely utopian.

Where, then, does this leave Schiller's conception of the aesthetic and its role as aesthetic education? From the above critique, it would certainly appear that Schiller's programme of aesthetic education is unfulfillable or even incoherent. Still, even if the causal thesis breaks down, there are valuable insights that remain. In the first instance, Schiller's reasoned departure from Kantian moral purity and liberalism reveals a rather unexpected insight about what might otherwise appear as an unproblematic ethical ideal. As noted in Schiller's analysis of the Revolution and Terror, the liberal ideals of individual freedom and rational autonomy are problematic in relation to the historically imminent practical culture. Where such a culture is unprepared to transform according to these ideals, their realization by the imposition of principles or reason, let alone political force, is fundamentally oppressive and sacrificial. To paraphrase from Schiller's Third Letter: the existence of moral man is as yet problematic, whereas physical man already in fact exists—and exists as it at were for the possibility of moral man (1795/1967, p. 91).

More importantly still, even if apparently unworkable, Schiller's aesthetic education proposals nevertheless uncover a novel possibility in how one theorizes about politics. Essentially, it is the formation of the ethical subject that is central and prerequisite to the emancipatory possibilities any ethico-political order could deliver. Whereas the relevant order is but an ideal, the ethical subject is always already imminent and changing in the sensible and aesthetically malleable world. Thus, if the aesthetic can play a normative role in the formation of subjectivity, it is not as a conduit of rationalized moral principles or ideological indoctrination, but rather as sensible effect upon the subject and thereby constitutive of subjectivity and its development. If politico-ethical ideals are at all realizable without oppression, it is only through the experience of the aesthetic: purely and transformatively.

A comparison to the dominant paradigms of contemporary political theory such as Rawlsian liberalism or Habermas's deliberative democracy deepens the point. Whereas these paradigms construe political relations as positively constituted by reasonable

disagreement mediated by variously construed norms of public reason, on Schiller's speculative thesis, such political relations are an entrapment and limitation of human freedom by rationalizing forms. The key to the problem of politics is not agreement per se, but the constitution of the political subject, the perfection of whom in play can create free aesthetic relations wherein the value of others is freely recognized from their (freedom-projecting) beauty.

Thus, its various flaws notwithstanding, Schiller's programme of aesthetic education leaves us with unique and innovative insights into how political ideals might be realized through the imminence of individual subjectivity and the special relationship between ethical and aesthetic value. It is by detailing and reconciling these strands against the interpretive difficulties they present that interestingly yields both the most coherent and the most radical account of Schiller's aesthetic education in contrast to other more traditional forms. Appreciating the full import of aesthetic education and Schiller's iconic contributions thereto requires attention to far more than notions of aesthetic education conventionally reveal.¹⁹

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