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Ecological Civilisation and the Will to Art

SAMUEL ALEXANDER

Essays on the Aesthetics of Existence

The Politics of Beauty: Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Education

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‘If we are to solve the political problem in practice, [we must] follow the path of aesthetics, since it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom.’

– ***Friedrich Schiller***

The Politics of Beauty: Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Education

Samuel Alexander

The truth will set us free. This claim originates in religion but culminates in Enlightenment rationalism. The rationalist view assumes that humanity's primary 'lack' is cognitive; that when we acquire a certain knowledge or technological capability, we will be saved. Worry not about the absence of God, for science and reason will lead us to the promised land of liberty and abundance. If this is so, however, we should ask with Fredrich Schiller, who was an early critic of the Enlightenment: why is it that we remain barbarians?[1] Human beings have flown to the moon, mapped the genome, mechanised a great deal of hard labour, created computers and the internet, among a long list of other technological achievements that often seem miraculous. And yet, despite the wonders of science and technology, freedom is not a word that can easily describe the condition of humankind, neither historically nor today. This is clearly the case for the billions around the world who still live in material destitution. Their condition is all the more morally egregious given the unprecedented wealth and technological capacity of the modern world. But what freedom have those of us in the affluent world claimed for ourselves?

As twentieth-century critical theorist Herbert Marcuse would insist: 'a comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress.'[2] Poet Bertolt Brecht was even more scathing: 'What were bad harvests / To the need that ravages us in the midst of plenty?'[3] Today, we live in a world where consumerist cultures have become defined by the cruel emptiness of affluence, and where servitude to capital is disguised as the good life. Ever expanding economies are something to which we should, and must, aspire, consciously or unconsciously. Yet as our 'wealth' increases in proportion to the degradation of Earth's ecosystems, it seems that sometime this century – if we are clever enough to achieve our economic goals – our species might even become so rich we go extinct. What will pass through the minds of the corporate profiteers who, in accordance with economic reason, direct their workers to cut down the last trees, only to find themselves on an uninhabitable planet?

Having more or less solved the economic problem of how to produce enough for everyone on Earth to live well, this was supposed to be the historic moment when material needs were universally met; a time when we could design for ourselves a better, more humane social order, with more leisure, dignified work, and material security. But as a matter of historical record, when the consumerist rewards of advanced technological society did not satisfy or liberate, people and politics tended merely to intensify the pursuit of 'more' rather than reprioritise. Even the richest seem to need to get richer, on the assumption that with even more money and stuff, human life will finally be better. At last, we will be happy and free. Moreover, the material comforts and cultural entertainments provided by modern consumer capitalism seem to have sedated populations, such that resistance and rebellion are quashed or exchanged for 'nice things' (or merely the *promise* of nice things, eternally deferred). Even when we recognise or

experience the spiritual malaise that defines the cultures of the so-called 'developed' world, how easy it is to merely go with the flow, reproducing the status quo out of habit or sheer apathy. We do not produce capitalism; capitalism produces us. Thus Empire marches on.

In this essay I'd like to consider these failures of modernity and the Enlightenment project in relation to Fredrich Schiller's ideas about freedom, aesthetic education, and the politics of beauty. Schiller argued that Europe in the late eighteenth century had fallen into the grasp of excessive reason, and because of this, the French Revolution was failing to fulfil its promises of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He believed that art and aesthetics were the best and perhaps the only means for resolving the social and political imbalances of Europe; the only means of creating harmonious human beings who would be ready and able to produce a harmonious society. It will be seen that his analyses in support of this provocative position were highly nuanced and strikingly original.

Schiller was a German playwright, poet, and philosopher, born in 1759. He is perhaps best known for being the author of the poem 'Ode to Joy', which Ludwig van Beethoven famously put to music in the final movement of his ninth symphony. Schiller would come to develop a close but complicated relationship with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, with whom he collaborated at the Weimar Theatre, establishing it as the leading theatre in Germany. Although Schiller has arguably been most influential through his poems and plays, it is his aesthetic and philosophical writings which are the focus of this essay. Most notably, I will focus on the ideas presented in his *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*,[4] published in 1795 (hereafter '*Aesthetic Letters*'). This text is aptly described by philosopher Frederick Beiser as 'an apology for beauty, a defence of the aesthetic dimensions of life.'[5] Schiller was no naive aesthete, however, but rather a bold and insightful thinker whose aesthetic writings deserve more attention than they receive.

The *Aesthetic Letters* were written as correspondence with his patron, Friedrich Christian. The original versions were destroyed in a fire, but Schiller partially rewrote them, with revisions and additions. No doubt this strange writing process over several years partly explains why, at times, the arguments he presented seem fragmented, obscure, and perhaps reflecting an evolution and refinement of his views over time. In what follows I re-examine this neglected work and explore a reconstructive reading of Schiller's aesthetic theory. I will assess the contemporary relevance of his theses on the importance and role of aesthetic education, including the neglected role that emotions play in ethics and politics. Herbert Read, widely considered the twentieth century's most compelling advocate for the role of art in education, noted it was 'one of curiosities of history'[6] that the idea that art should be the basis of education has been given scant attention – Schiller being a rare exception.

The purpose of reviewing Schiller's rather complex theory is not to conduct an intellectual history but rather to evaluate whether his position illuminates contemporary problems. I will invite readers to consider the extent to which aesthetic education – that is, a deeper cultural engagement with art and the aesthetic dimensions of life – points to an appropriate and coherent response to the crises of our time. To place my conclusion up front: I have come to believe that aesthetic education is our last best hope, and Schiller can help articulate this thesis.

A critique of the culture and politics of Enlightenment rationalism

Any understanding of the *Aesthetics Letters* must begin by acknowledging its social and political context. Written soon after the French Revolution, the early letters in the collection are infused with a mood of lost hope and failed promises, even passionate disappointment, regarding both the revolution in particular and the Enlightenment project more broadly. Schiller viewed the revolution as a societal transformation with vast potential, whereby people 'had awoken from their long lethargy'[7] and through 'an impressive majority… [were] demanding the restitution of their inalienable rights.'[8] There seemed to be a '*physical* possibility of setting Law upon the throne, of honouring Man at last as an end in himself and making true freedom the basis of political association.'[9]

Within a few years, however, it had become clear that this promising political rupture had been contaminated by the violence of the Reign of Terror (circa 1793-4). Contemplating the unfolding of European society, Schiller declared that the 'rotten foundations are yielding',[10] and suggested that 'the *moral* possibility is wanting, and the favourable moment finds an apathetic generation.'[11] The so-called Age of Reason had promised so much, with scientific and intellectual advances suggesting that enlightened society would be able to realise, at last, the dream of ensuring freedom and justice for all. Why then, Schiller asked, 'is it that we still remain barbarians?'[12]

It is a critique that still resonates today, perhaps more so than ever, which suggests that Schiller's call to respond through aesthetic education might be worth considering too. At base, his view was that, as a consequence of the Enlightenment project having gone astray, European society had developed in ways that over-emphasised the role of reason and science and marginalised the place of sensibility and the creative imagination. Whereas Francisco Goya's famous etching of 1799 warned through its title that 'The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters', Schiller turned that concern on its head, suggesting that reason, excessively applied, is itself a form of sleep, which can breed its own monsters and monstrosities. This is clearly a critique steeped in, as it shaped, the romantic tradition, upon which Schiller was to be a great influence both in Germany and England.[13]

At the same time, Schiller cannot be dismissed as a mere romantic in any pejorative sense. The violence of reason which he was reacting against was, in his eyes, a betrayal of the modernist project, not something inherent to it. He would likely have concurred with philosopher Bruno Latour who claimed, two centuries later, that 'we have never been modern.'[14] This position encompasses a critique of reason with reason itself, even if, as we will see, Schiller believed 'the way to the head must lie through the heart.'[15] Contrast this with Immanuel Kant who had announced the sole authority of reason with respect to moral and political duty. Schiller framed this domineering rule of reason as the 'barbarian'[16] in whom 'principles destroy his feeling,'[17] adding that '[t]he intellectual enlightenment of which the refined ranks of society, not without some justification, pride themselves, reveals on the whole an influence upon the disposition so little ennobling that it rather furnishes maxims to confirm depravity.'[18] He saw the governing classes exemplifying manners of 'affected proprietary'[19] in a culture defined by a 'materialistic moral philosophy':[20]

> Selfishness has established its system in the very bosom of our exquisitely refined society, and we experience all the contagions and all the calamities of community without the accompaniment of a communal spirit.[21]

In the self-interested pursuit of material wealth through industrial development, scientific advance, and technological progress, Schiller saw humankind being reduced to cogs in a machine. Among other factors, this was due to an ever-sharpening division of labour: '[B]y confining our activity to a single sphere we have handed ourselves over to a master who is not infrequently inclined to end up suppressing the rest of our capacities.'[22] Those remaining aptitudes of the human character get neglected, for only those skills which bring 'profit'[23] are valued in a market society focussed on acquisitiveness, economic growth, and imperialist expansions of power and territory.

These insights no doubt paved the way for a critique of industrialisation that received sharper and more sustained expression half a century later in the works of Marx and Engels. The cruel and undignified social consequences of industrialisation were also to be highlighted powerfully through literature, most prominently in the novels of Charles Dickens. Without romanticising the life of medieval peasants, living in the dense and polluted centres of early industrial cities was typically a horrid and undignified existence, with so-called economic progress emptying life of its richness, depth, diversity, and meaning.

Schiller saw that most people, both historically and of his own time, were given little or no opportunity to fulfil their innate potentials, which he found dehumanising. Think of the pin makers in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*,[24] who divided up pin making construction into various tasks to increase efficiency; or the factory or office workers today who spend their working lives pushing the same button or shuffling papers in relentless, uncreative monotony.[25] As Schiller stated:

> Eternally chained to only one single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment; with the monotonous noise of the wheel he drives everlastingly in his ears, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation, his science.[26]

Due to this dehumanising process, Schiller lamented that 'we see not merely individual persons but whole classes of human beings developing only part of their capacities, while the rest of them, like a stunted plant, shew only a feeble vestige of their nature.'[27] The consequence was that 'gradually individual concrete life is extinguished, in order that the abstract life of the whole may prolong its sorry existence.'[28] In Schiller's view, the market economy, driven by insatiable materialist desires and avarice, had turned his fellow citizens into mere machines of production and consumption, deadening the creative spirit and the sensuous love of life: 'So far from setting us free, culture only develops a new want with every power that it bestows on us…. and the maxim of passive obedience passes for the supreme wisdom of life.'[29]

This critique anticipated, by half a century, Marx and Engel's writings on alienation. In the twentieth century these ideas were developed further by critical theorists of the Frankfurt school, who bore down upon consumer culture, surveillance capitalism, instrumental reason, and technocracy, with unrestrained ruthlessness[30] – influenced, to be sure, by our

philosopher-poet under examination.[31] Indeed, if Schiller were alive today, he would be the first to highlight that we have gained new freedoms, but also developed new and insidious forms of servitude in a one-dimensional society:

> Terrified of the freedom which always declares its hostility to their first attempts, men will in one place throw themselves into the arms of a comfortable servitude, and in another, driven to despair by a pedantic tutelage, they will break out into wild libertinism of the natural State. Usurpation will plead the weakness of human nature, insurrection its dignity, until at length the great sovereign of all human affairs, blind Force, steps in to decide the sham conflict of principles like a common prize-fight.[32]

Schiller criticised the so-called 'lower classes',[33] wherein 'we find crude, lawless impulses'[34] and which are 'hastening with ungovernable fury to their brutal satisfaction.'[35] But he reserved far more of his venom for the 'civilized classes',[36] who 'present to us the still more repugnant spectacle of indolence, and a depravity of character which is all the more shocking since culture itself is the source of it.'[37] Like 'fugitives from a burning city everyone seeks only to rescue his own miserable property from the devastation.'[38] These are the polemical words of a poet, of course, not the dry, measured assessments of a social or political scientist. But the accusations beneath the rhetoric are not easily dismissed, then or now.

In these conditions, Schiller resigned himself to the conviction that the French Revolution could scarcely have ended in any other way but failure, tightly related to the misapplication of its theoretical foundations.[39] 'We know that the sensibility of the mind depends for its degree upon the liveliness, and for its extent upon the richness, of the imagination. But the predominance of the analytical faculty must necessarily deprive the fancy of its strength and its fire, and a restricted sphere of objects must diminish its wealth.'[40] He continued his critique by arguing that:

> The greater part of humanity is too much harassed and fatigued by the struggle with want, to rally itself for a new and sterner struggle with error. Content if they themselves escape the hard labour of thought, men gladly resign to others the guardianship of their ideas, and if it happens that higher needs are stirred in them, they embrace with eager faith the formulas which state and priesthood hold in readiness for such an occasion.[41]

In sum, Schiller saw European society made up of people who were not yet capable of being good citizens in a free Republic. People were not ready for the freedom that they had received, and yet political society can be no better than the people who constitute it. When this expanded (though still imperfect) freedom was granted through the revolution, it should have come as no surprise, in Schiller's view, that the barbaric excesses of the Reign of Terror would follow. This was because the spirit of the time was 'fluctuating between perverseness and brutality… and it is only the equilibrium of evil that still occasionally sets bounds to it.'[42] Nevertheless, there is an implicit optimism in Schiller's project. By writing the *Aesthetic Letters*, he implied that though the battle he was witnessing had been lost, the war for liberty, equality, and fraternity must be won – even if, he noted, with some prescience, it was a task for 'more than a single century.'[43]

This was the defining social and political context which provides the backdrop to Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*, and the motivation for writing them. Not only was he convinced that this diagnosis accurately described his own society, he insisted that 'it resembles any people at all that is in the process of civilization, since all without distinction must fall away from Nature through over-subtlety of intellect before they can return to her through Reason.'[44] Despite always remaining a champion of reason, he was also, as we have seen, one of its severest critics, and in a decisive and original move which will be examined in more detail below, he argued that 'the way to the head must lie through the heart.'[45] This is not, however, an anti-intellectual point. He was proposing that our intellects might be engaged most effectively if our emotions are engaged first. More directly, he argued that such emotional or even spiritual engagement is best achieved through art and beauty – through the works of poets, painters, musicians, and storytellers. Moreover, he believed that moral, ethical, and political reasoning *must* engage the heart to be effective, for reason and rationality will fail to motivate or transform behaviour without an emotional engagement.

The striking conclusion Schiller drew was that political freedom had been granted to a citizenry that was not yet mature or awakened enough to deal with it properly. Lacking what he called a 'totality'[46] or 'wholeness'[47] of character, human nature was out of balance, in a society out of balance. This was not an argument for constraining that freedom, of course, it was merely a diagnosis of social and political realities. But it also provided insight into what might be the proper response to this reality. How might people become better suited to thrive with the expanded freedoms they had achieved through political struggle? How might people become 'capable and worthy of exchanging the State of need for the State of freedom?'[48] Is more reason and technology needed to solve the problems caused by reason and technology? Schiller answered in the negative, turning instead to explore the potential of aesthetic education.

Here Schiller acknowledged a circular problem with respect to the State: 'All improvement in the political sphere is to proceed from the ennobling of character – but how, under the influence of a barbarous constitution, can the character become ennobled?'[49] He had no faith in the possibility of change originating in or through the apparatus of the state. In any case, he noted, 'we must continue to regard every attempt at reform as inopportune, and every hope based upon it as chimerical, until the division of the inner Man has been done away with.'[50] Consequently, Schiller was prompted to seek out some other instrument. In the Ninth Letter, he was ready to announce to his readers what that instrument had to be: the Fine Arts. Schiller felt humanity's best hopes for individual and social flourishing lay in beauty, which was his general term for aesthetic value more broadly. Aesthetic value includes the pleasurable experience of beauty. But it might also include other forms of aesthetic experience, such as a heightened sense of *meaning* in life that can arise from creative activity or from the contemplation of art or nature, even if this is not always pleasurable.

Schiller acknowledged that readers would be right to doubt his project. Should he not be able to make better use of his own liberty than focus attention on the arena of Fine Arts? 'Is it not at least untimely to be looking around for a code of laws for the aesthetic world, when the affairs of the moral world provide an interest so much more urgent ...?'[51] Schiller hoped to convince his readers that 'this subject is far less alien to the need of the age than to its taste,

that we must indeed, if we are to solve the political problem in practice, follow the path of aesthetics, since it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom.'[52] Not only has this thesis struck many readers as strange, the very possibility of a connection between freedom and aesthetics, both personally and politically, is in need of (and will receive) explanation.

Schiller saw in his society that art was being marginalised: '*Utility* is the great idol of the age, to which all powers must do service and all talents swear allegiance. In these clumsy scales the spiritual service of Art has no weight; deprived of all encouragement, she flees from the noisy mart of our century.'[53] He added: 'The very spirit of philosophical enquiry seizes one province after another from the imagination, and the frontiers of Art are contracted as the boundaries of science are enlarged.'[54]

In a direct affront to the Age of Reason, Schiller summarised his approach by stating that 'the development of man's capacity for feeling is, therefore, the more urgent need of our age.'[55] Thus he exhorted his fellow artists to surround people with 'great and noble forms of genius, and encompass them about with the symbols of perfection, until semblance conquer reality, and art triumph over nature.'[56] In essence, he was proposing that the arts and a renewed aesthetic education were required to bring forth a refined aesthetic sensibility and expanded outlook. Only through this cultural process could human beings resolve the dissonance and imbalance in their natures and become the 'noble souls'[57] that are needed for political society to function harmoniously. A noble soul is 'not content to be itself free; it must also set free everything around it.'[58] In the celebrated line quoted above, Schiller declared that 'it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom.'

This process involved passing through what Schiller called 'the aesthetic condition',[59] whereupon our dual nature as sensuous-rational beings could, at last, find harmonious resolution. In other words, beauty could help us realise our highest potentials as free and creative beings. In this ideal condition, humans would not only *behave* as good citizens, they would *want* to do so, which is essentially what Schiller means by a 'noble soul' or a 'beautiful soul'. It is an ideal, Schiller admits, that may never be achieved. But he presents it as a goal towards which we can move and to which we can make some progress through aesthetic education. It is 'the direction [that] is at once the destination, and the way is completed from the moment it is trodden.'[60]

Schiller's 'sensuo-rational' theory of human nature

Having outlined Schiller's critique of modernity and stated his view that true progress depended on aesthetic education, I will address the complex arguments with which he supported this thesis. Schiller was steeped in Kantian philosophy and often claimed merely to build upon it (consistently) rather than amend it (through revision). Most commentators, however, contend that there are various places in which Schiller misrepresents Kant, or even contradicts him, in order to make room for his own ideas. This is not the place to rehash that technical debate, so in the following review I will try to let Schiller speak for himself rather than in conversation with Kant.

I will, however, attempt to re-present Schiller's views as far as possible without getting too caught up in his sometimes archaic sounding language of the eighteenth century. If this results in something of a 'reconstructive' presentation of Schiller rather than a pure, scholarly or historic review, then that is a charge I am happy to accept. My motivations are not to discover what Schiller 'really thought' but instead to assess how his strikingly original ideas might be of value for us today. It will be seen that beauty relates to freedom both as an *end* and as a *means*, a subtle point that will become clear in due course. After reviewing Schiller's theory of the sense, form, and play drives, I will draw on some contemporary scholarship to unpack Schiller's notion of beauty and aesthetic freedom. In later essays I will develop some of these ideas and apply them to contemporary social and political issues.[61]

Fundamentally, Schiller saw personal, social, and political problems arising from a fundamental tension in human nature – a tension between passion and reason, or sensuality and form. Schiller maintained that only through resolving or reconciling this tension could we fulfil our natures and achieve freedom. On the one hand, Schiller recognised that we clearly have a 'sensuous' aspect to our characters. The bodily organs give us sensory apparatus with which we experience and perceive the material or external world. Through what he calls the 'sensuous drive' (or 'sense drive' or 'material drive'),[62] we are drawn to a wide range of pleasures and we instinctively avoid pains; we experience a range of emotions, passions, feelings, and desires, and we use our imaginations to dream and create. We are drawn, that is, to what Schiller simply calls 'life',[63] and he argued that this drive calls us towards diversity of experience and 'demands that there is change',[64] making us naturally inclined to explore sensuous existence and 'make all [our] potentialities fully manifest.'[65] Since all human beings have different tastes, desires, and skills, this sense drive leads to a wide variety of human capacities and potentials, a human diversity which Schiller, as a true liberal, valued as something to be celebrated.[66]

On the other hand, Schiller highlighted that we humans also have a 'rational' side to our natures. Through the application of reason, we conceptualise and try to theoretically understand the world through reflection and analysis; we try to impose some 'form' on the chaos and flux of the world and to engage in discourse and deliberation; we set goals and pursue them according to a plan. Schiller called this aspect of our nature the 'form drive' (or the 'rational drive').[67] This refers to the human disposition to develop principles, rules, and categories, and to highlight patterns and regularities that bring order and uniformity to the world. As he explained, the form drive 'is intent on giving [us] the freedom to bring harmony into the diversity of [our] manifestations, and to affirm [our] person among all [our] changes of condition.'[68]

Both the sense drive and the form drive exist within us as 'motive force[s] in the sensible world'[69] that are oriented toward the 'realization of their object.'[70] The goal of the sense drive is a diversity of sensuous experience. The form drive seeks uniformity, regularity, and rational understanding, which, among other things, is important for orderly social coexistence in a society of diverse individuals. Schiller saw both these drives as important and valuable aspects of our natures, but he recognised the tension between them. He argued that if either of them dominates, we will be 'at odds'[71] with ourselves, and if governments let one or the other dominate, society as a whole will be out of balance. This antagonistic yet mutually dependent

relationship between reason and sensuality thus manifests at both the personal and political levels.

Schiller proposed that in order to overcome this kind of tension in our natures we need to develop what he calls 'wholeness of character'[72], which he believed was an achievable synthesis, or at least a critical and necessary goal to work toward. The basic idea here is to point to an 'ideal'[73] form of the human being where both drives are in balance, neither dominating the other, but rather acting in harmony and coordination.

Schiller's language of 'drives' might sound a bit antiquated, but his fundamental characterisation of the tension within humanity's sensuo-rational nature is a plausible way to explain and understand the type of creature we are. It is almost commonsensical, and scholar Susan Bentley has done work re-presenting Schiller's theory to show how it fits with contemporary evolutionary biology and the social sciences.[74] Though overly binary and incomplete as an analytical tool, this Schillerian lens has the potential to be revealing. Furthermore, it is a lens that does not contradict the conception of human beings as *homo aestheticus* described in previous essays. Schiller's analysis, I propose, is merely the next layer for understanding our complex human condition, and one that can illuminate the nature of contemporary problems and point toward ways of resolving them.

We could even see Schiller's theory of the drives as being a precursor to Freud, who, in *Civilisation and its Discontents*,[75] explained how neuroses and pathologies emerge in human society when our animal instincts (sex drives and aggression) are rationally repressed in order to make social order possible. One difference is that Freud did not think that such tension could ever be resolved, suggesting that the benefits of civilisation required a repression of instincts but that such repression would inevitably lead to psychological problems. Schiller, on the other hand, held out the possibility of finding some way to reconcile this tension and bring human nature into harmony, both internally and in social relations. That said, Schiller was openly of the view that complete harmonisation of the drives was an 'ideal' that could never be fully achieved. Rather, harmony was a goal towards which we should attempt to move. In the end, then, perhaps Schiller and Freud were not so far apart on this point.

Even if perfect reconciliation is not possible, we might still accept that finding ways to *better* balance those competing drives is a coherent way to live a full and free life. Indeed, there are many philosophical and spiritual traditions, dating from the ancients up to the present, which maintain that the proper balancing of reason and the passions is the key to human flourishing. This implies an approach that enjoys the pleasures and diversity of sensuous experience without, in anti-social ways, acting purely out of animal instinct. And it would be an approach to life that utilises the sophistication of our rational intellects and helps us coexist with other people, without repressing our sensuous natures by focussing too much of our energy and attention to logic, reason, and order. It is about balance.

We see here that each drive needs to limit itself so as not to dominate the other. At the same time each drive is needed to support the other, since each can help the other achieve its distinct objectives. By developing this type of coordination and harmony between the drives, Schiller argued we can achieve 'wholeness of character' and only then do we become free and fully

human. In doing so we would come to represent the 'archetype of a human being'[76] which we all carry within ourselves and which is our 'life's task'[77] to achieve.

This balancing task is not merely of individual significance but also represents a political challenge. Just as the individual must ensure neither drive dominates, so too would an ideal state need to balance and reconcile these competing, yet co-dependent, aspects of existence. As already discussed, however, Schiller saw his society as badly out of balance, grossly excessive in its use of reason to govern life, at the cost of humanity's creative and sensuous experience. Among other things, through the extreme specialisation emerging out of the division of labour, he highlighted how the nature of society diminished the inherent creative capacities and potentialities of each human being, reducing individual workers to a fragment of what they could be. They are 'imprisoned within the unvarying confines of [their] own calling'[78] and 'incapable of extending [themselves] to appreciate other ways of seeing and knowing.'[79] This lack of balance, harmony, and wholeness in life therefore interferes with human freedom and inhibits the full realisation of our whole natures or characters.

Social and political matters will be considered more closely in later essays, but for now I simply note that Schiller's view has clear socio-political implications. Just as a state or society can *interfere and repress* the creative potentialities in each human being, so too could a well-formed social order *support* people achieving 'wholeness of character'. As noted above, however, Schiller did give precedence to the individual and social over the political, in the sense that he did not see the state creating the conditions for individual wholeness of character. Rather, individuals must achieve wholeness of character in order to create well-ordered political rules and functioning institutions. Put otherwise, cultural change will need to usher in political change, more than the other way around, even though the relationship between culture and political economy is dialectical, with each shaping, as it is shaped by, the other. As English author J.G. Ballard noted: 'Many of the great cultural shifts that prepare the way for political change are largely aesthetic.'[80]

The 'play drive' awakens

Having outlined Schiller's conception of human beings, I return to his central but still mysterious thesis that beauty is the only path to freedom. Even if it were accepted that freedom consists in balancing the drives, it remains unclear where beauty fits in his theory. To understand Schiller's reasoning, we need to consider one of his most original and complex (and sometimes confusing) notions: what he calls the 'play drive'.[81]

In the *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller explained the emergence or 'awaken[ing]'[82] of the play drive as part of the development of human nature in history. He believed that prior to the emergence of political society – that is, in the hypothetical 'state of nature' so widely discussed in Schiller's time – human life was shaped solely by the sense drive. Put otherwise, the earliest hominin species that emerged millions of years ago, lived purely in accordance with animal instinct, given that the intellectual apparatus capable of rationality and reflection had yet to develop. As the modern mind developed its capacity to reason, the form drive was established, and the defining dual nature of our species arose for the first time.

Nevertheless, Schiller maintained that the rational side of our nature soon discerned that the form drive was in tension with the sense drive; that reason and passion sometimes pull us in different directions. The form drive, however, being based in reason, seeks the complete fulfilment of our human nature where both drives are in balance: 'Reason must make this demand because it is reason.'[83] Accordingly, Schiller claimed that as rational beings we reflect on our need to limit our own rationality in order to harmonise the drives. This gives rise to the 'play drive', the nature of which is to bring the sense and form drives into a balanced, reciprocal relationship.[84] Given that the play drive emerges out of reason, it is a specifically a human drive, one not shared with other (pre-rational) animals.

Misunderstandings of Schiller arise when 'play' is taken to imply something childish or trivial. Of course, he is not suggesting that, in response to the Reign of Terror, one should joke around and make light of things. While he is not using play in any conventional way, the sense in which he does employ the term is not always obvious or clear. In her analysis of 'play' in Schiller's work, Susan Bentley offers an etymological reading of play and notes that the term is derived from words that mean 'to engage oneself'[85] (which, incidentally, resonates with Foucault's conception of ethics as 'the self engaging the self'). There is an element of wildness about the concept, something without bounds, unknowable, indeterminate, fertile, and creative. As Bentley suggests, 'Schiller's goal of ensuring human freedom required a play that opened up our potentials as human beings.'[86]

At a fundamental level, then, the play drive invites us into a space of experimental self-creation, raising open questions about how best to balance the two fundamental drives (sense and form). Play should be broadly interpreted with these serious overtones implied. In an earlier essay in this collection, *homo aestheticus* was presented as a theory of human nature that was not determinative of our being but expansive and malleable. So too can we see Schiller's theory of human nature as grounded in the aesthetic dimensions of life, inclined toward self-fashioning through play; through the playful exploration of who one might yet become, by practising techniques of the self that seek to balance the sense and form drives.

Importantly, the play drive is *not* a third 'fundamental drive'. Schiller makes clear that the category of fundamental drives is exhausted by the sense and the form drives. Instead, the play drive emerges *from* the reasoning processes of the form drive, in order to reconcile the tension between our competing drives and make human nature complete. Schiller explained:

> Such a reciprocal relation between the two drives is, admittedly, but a task enjoined upon us by reason, a problem which man is only capable of solving completely in the perfect consummation of his existence. It is, in the most precise sense of the word, *the idea of his human nature*, hence something infinite, to which in the course of time he can approximate ever more closely, but without ever being able to reach it.[87]

Just as the two fundamental drives have 'objects' towards which they strive (sensuality and form), so too does the play drive have an object. At this point in the analysis Schiller advises that the object of the play drive is beauty. He states that beauty is 'the object common to both [sense and form] drives'[88] too, since beauty is what is sought when the other two drives exist in a harmonious, reciprocal relationship. At this stage one might fairly ask: why beauty? The

meaning and significance of this central aspect of Schiller's aesthetic theory will become clearer as we come to understand how he defines beauty.

Beauty as an *end* or *object* can be understood, in part, as implying harmonisation or balance. Since reason demands harmonisation of the primary drives, and since the play drive functions to enact that harmonisation, Schiller argued that reason's demand is that there be beauty:

> Reason… makes the following demand: … let there be a play drive, since only the union of reality with form, contingency with necessity, passivity with freedom, makes the concept of human nature complete… Consequently, as soon as reason utters the pronouncement: let humanity exist, it has by that very pronouncement also promulgated the law: let there be beauty.[89]

Let's pause for a moment to examine Schiller's notion of beauty more closely, which he defined at one point as 'living form'[90] and which he argued has the capacity to engage us in play. When contemplating an object or a person, Schiller suggested that, on the one hand, we appreciate the sensuous or material side of what we are considering – which could be described as the 'content' of our life experience. On the other hand, however, we also appreciate the 'form' that is given to this sensuous or material content. For example, when contemplating a painting, we might notice its bright colours or the house that is depicted (the painting's *content*), but we might also notice the *form* given to the painting by its unique brush strokes or the way the elements of the painting are ordered or placed in space, their relations between each other. Similarly, with a piece of music, we will hear the content of the notes but also the form or order in which the notes are played. Schiller advised that '[t]he highest degree of beauty is, therefore, to be sought in the most perfect possible union and equilibrium of reality and form.'[91] Taken together – perceived *holistically* – the form and content of something reflects its 'aesthetic style', such that objects will have varying degrees of beauty depending on how closely they approximate the ideal of beauty.[92]

Schiller's notion of 'living form' therefore invites us to judge the beauty of something according to whether or to what extent its content sits in harmonious relationship to its form. If either content or form is out of balance or dominates, then, to that extent, the beauty of the object under consideration is diminished. A painting might use spectacular colours but be poorly executed or arranged, just as a piano sonata might have an enticing melody but be played too fast or harshly. An object in experience moves closer to the ideal of beauty the better it manifests a harmonious balancing of 'life' and 'form' – hence, Schiller's definition of beauty as 'living form.'

The structure of this aesthetic analysis obviously mirrors the dual aspects of 'life' and 'form' in Schiller's conception of human nature – which is no accident. The same harmonisation between form and content in a work of art is required when considering how to realise the dual aspects of our human nature. We have seen that the object of the play drive is beauty, which is achieved by reconciling the conflict between the sense and the form drives. Indeed, when the sense and form drives have been harmonised or held in proper balance, where neither drive dominates, they also seek beauty as their object, by way of the play drive. Beauty awakens the play drive, just as the play drive seeks beauty. As Bentley explains, play 'engenders a state of harmonious balance, a contemplative position that opens the individual up to internal possibility and chance.'[93] Bentley adds that, according to Schiller, 'humans have a basic design:

the play drive structure gives humans the capacity to be flexible, primed for possibility. The template given in nature and carried by each individual; the fulfilment is the destiny of each person to accomplish.'[94]

Now that Schiller's definition of beauty as 'living form' is outlined – the harmonious balancing of life and form – we have taken a step closer to understanding his thesis that only through beauty can we arrive at freedom. If, as we have seen, humans cannot be free or complete in their nature if one of the primary drives dominates, then the connection between beauty and freedom becomes apparent. A drug-abuser is not free if the sense drive dominates, just as the waiter living in Sartrean 'bad faith' is not free if he dictates for himself rules to live by which are excessively rational and constraining. Human beings will not be free, nor will our natures be complete, until our drives are harmoniously balanced in 'living form', which we have seen is Schiller's definition of beauty. And it is through the play drive that this reconciliation is achieved, for beauty is its object. In a well-known line from the *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller highlighted the fundamental importance of the play drive by asserting that: 'man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and *he is only fully a human being when he plays*.'[95]

The role of beauty

Beauty is the object of the play drive insofar as it consists in achieving harmonisation between the fundamental drives. But how does the play drive actually achieve that goal and what is the role of beauty in this process, not as an *end*, but as a *means*? Moreover, if freedom is about governing oneself rather than being governed, and beauty or aesthetic value is about the affect we feel when perceiving an object's 'living form', how do these issues – freedom and beauty – relate to each other? Schiller, one has to admit, is not as clear as he could have been on these issues, which has led to a range of conflicting scholarly analysis. The interpretation presented below is indebted to a recent analysis by Samantha Matherne and Nick Riggle, whose astute reading of Schiller informs the following account.[96]

According to Matherne and Riggle, Schiller 'endorses a conception of aesthetic value [or beauty] as that which has the capacity to put us in a state of "play."'[97] To be in a state of play is to have 'volitional openness with respect to the ways one has constituted or ruled oneself.'[98] As outlined above, Schiller's ideal person is one who has balanced the sense and form drives by way of the play drive, and this involves escaping or transcending those demands and maintaining a healthy capacity to play. In other words, beauty or aesthetic value can induce a state of play, and through that state human beings can temper the authority of the drives and achieve the harmonisation that is required for freedom and 'wholeness of character.'[99] On this account, 'engagement with aesthetic value, both as appreciators and creators, is necessary for a fully autonomous life.'[100]

This position requires some explaining. In one sense, a human being might be free if they govern their sensuo-rational existence according to their own rules – we could call this 'human freedom'. But Schiller believes that at times the rules one has cultivated for oneself might become counter-productive or oppressive, even if they seem to be freely chosen. For example, we might begin to live habitually, without reflection, or too cautiously, oblivious to the fact

that our lives have become routine and perhaps no longer serving our highest ideals or goals. Our commitments can calcify. We might begin to live in bad faith – in fear of our own freedom to live otherwise – but be oblivious to our self-imposed constraints.

At such times Schiller contended that we need a state of 'aesthetic freedom'[101] in order to achieve a volitional openness that allows us to transcend our ordinary existence and our normal sense of self. In other words, we should maintain a healthy capacity to play in order to achieve the aesthetic freedom or volitional openness that is required to keep an eye on the authenticity of our human freedom. Schiller believed that beauty is the *means* of inducing or activating the necessary state of play or volitional openness. Readers might notice a certain similarity here with Schopenhauer's understanding of aesthetic experience – a state of being in which we are, if only temporarily, able to transcend our egoistic desires, transcend what Schopenhauer called 'the Will'. I surmise that most people, at some point, will have been induced into a profound aesthetic experience where one 'loses oneself' in music, a novel, or a film. This can produce a quasi-manic mood, slightly insane and unstable, but in a way that is somehow liberating, as if freed from one's conventional thoughts and instincts. Although the differences between Schiller and Schopenhauer are profound, they seemed to share a sense that through aesthetic experience we are, to some extent, able to transcend the ego. Schopenhauer focussed on how this aesthetic state could alleviate suffering. Schiller, by contrast, focussed on how it could unshackle us from ourselves and open pathways to becoming someone new through play.

Schiller offered some insight into the 'mood' of aesthetic experience when he wrote: 'This lofty equanimity and freedom of the spirit, combined with power and vigor, is the mood in which a genuine work of art should release us, and there is no more certain touchstone of true aesthetic excellence.'[102] In the aesthetic mood, the grip of our practical and affective dispositions is loosened, as Matherne and Niggle explain: 'Instead of our will being constrained by certain patterns of action, choice, deliberation, or emotion, we are volitionally open.'[103]

At this point it is worth noting that Schiller distinguished between two different categories of beauty, namely, 'melting beauty'[104] and 'energising beauty'.[105] These two categories correspond to particular human needs, depending on how, in any particular individual, the sense and the form drives are balanced or imbalanced. Melting beauty is beneficial to the overly rational person, who needs to be released from excessive reason and ushered into a more relaxed state; to be brought back to one's 'senses'. Energising beauty is for the overly sensuous person, whose emotions are out of balance and who needs to be brought back into equilibrium through exposure to form and the perspective of reason. Although Schiller doesn't provide examples, we can no doubt imagine that different forms of art (say, a soothing sonata compared to a tragic but inspiring film) might respond to our needs at different times, depending on our moods and dispositions, even if his dualistic distinction is rather too simplistic.[106]

At this stage one might think Schiller is about to argue that beauty will offer us some rational insight or perhaps make us more inclined to fulfil our moral duties. However, he maintained that the aesthetic condition, induced by the experience of beauty, 'produces no particular result whatsoever, neither for the understanding or the will. It accomplishes no particular purpose, neither intellectual nor moral; it discovers no individual truth, helps us to perform

no individual duty.'[107] Instead, as Matherne and Riggle explain, aesthetic experience frees us from the strong constraints typically imposed on us via our sense and form drives: 'Aesthetic experience thus releases us from the constraint of what we might call our "normal sense of self" – our normal dispositions to prefer modes of feeling, sensing, imagining, acting, or thinking'.[108] This leaves us volitionally open to prefer other modes. We may not, in fact, choose different modes of living and being, or rethink conventional dispositions or commitments. But in the aesthetic condition – in a state of play – we have the capacity to do so.

Furthermore, should our sensuous experience of the world expand as a result of engaging with beauty, our rational understanding of the world might have to adjust too. Conversely, should our rational frameworks or categories be shaken up by some aesthetic experience, that might lead to an expanded sensuous experience of the world. In this way, play induces the reciprocal relationship between the sense and the form drives and seeks the harmonisation thereof.

It's clear that aesthetic value, or beauty, consists in the capacity of some object or person to induce a state of play. Through the aesthetic freedom which play confers upon us, we are better able to move toward a harmonisation of our drives and the completion of our being, with beauty or 'living form' being the ideal end state. Human freedom, therefore, is achieved through the capacity for play, which is induced by aesthetic value, or beauty. Once again, beauty is presented both as a means and an end, for it is through beauty that beauty is achieved. Not only that, given that harmonisation of human nature is achieved through beauty, Schiller reasoned that art and aesthetic education are the paths to human realisation:

> By means of aesthetic culture… the personal worth of man, or his dignity, inasmuch as this can depend solely on himself, *remains completely indeterminate*; and nothing more is achieved by it than that he is henceforth enabled by the grace of nature to make of himself what he will – that the freedom to be what he ought to be is completely restored to him.
>
> But precisely thereby something infinite is achieved. For as soon as we recall that it was precisely of this freedom that he was deprived by the one-sided constraint of nature in the field of sensation and by the exclusive authority of reason in the realm of thought, then we are bound to consider the power that is restored to him in the aesthetic mode as the highest of all bounties, as the gift of humanity itself.[109]

On these grounds Schiller maintained, '[i]t is, then, not merely poetic license but philosophical truth when we call beauty our second creatress… [for it] offers us the possibility of being human.'[110] Becoming fully human in Schiller's sense, however, is not an event but an ongoing process. That is, a healthy capacity for play is needed not simply to bring our drives *into* harmonisation but also to *maintain* that state of balance. Thus, engaging with aesthetic value must not merely be a pastime but become a way of life – an art of living, an aesthetic condition.

Matherne and Riggle contend that Schiller is committed to 'a more robust conception of a healthy capacity to play, according to which it involves developing an aesthetic sensibility, a style, which disposes us to seek and create beauty, in a way that reflects who we are.'[111] It follows that 'aesthetic value, play, and aesthetic freedom are not just our entry point into becoming human beings; they are the cornerstone to wholeness of character and integral parts of a fully flourishing, full free, and beautiful human life.'[112] Only by exercising and cultivating our aesthetic sensibilities and creative capacities – that is, only through aesthetic education

and engagement – can a culture produce the aesthetic value which is needed to achieve human freedom. And thus, to end this section where we began much earlier, it is only 'through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom.'[113]

The politics of beauty

What is particularly distinctive about Schiller's aesthetic theory is that it isn't simply concerned or directed toward individual freedom. It is explicitly a political project that seeks to establish, and which relies upon, human beings developing a *social character* – a character that recognises, respects, and supports the realisation of freedom in all people. Schiller argued that through aesthetic education and engagement we can become sensitive not merely to 'the claims of humanity… *from within*'[114] but also to the claims 'of humanity *from without*.'[115] This vision culminates in Schiller's notion of an 'aesthetic state',[116] which will be sketched very briefly below and developed in later essays. In what follows I will return to the work of Matherne and Riggle, whose political analysis of Schiller's theory of aesthetic education is as astute as their understanding of its application to individual freedom.[117]

This political basis of Schiller's theory is introduced when, in Letter Five, he argued that the social character required for political freedom must emerge through 'a heart that is truly sociable.'[118] To understand this social ethos we must turn to his theory of the drives again. Schiller's way of describing a lack of social character is when a person lets one of the drives dominate in social relations. We might find ourselves governed by 'compulsion'[119] from either the sensible or rational sides of our natures. For example, by treating people merely as objects of desire we act under the 'compulsion of nature'[120] which he described as an 'egotism of the senses',[121] since action is directed by what *I* want and *I* need. Similarly, by rationally interacting with someone as a means to an end, or even out of (Kantian) moral duty, we act under the 'compulsion of reason.'[122] This is egotism of a different sort – *my* reason, *my* duties, *my* goals.

By contrast, Schiller maintained that a person of social character relates to others in a spirit he variously calls 'compassion', 'sympathy', 'kindness', 'affection' and 'love.'[123] This is not merely respecting other people by virtue of our *common* humanity. Consistent with his own precepts, Schiller insisted that social character also implies a respect for what is *unique* or *individual* in other people. He argued that while the sense drive can move us to coordinate with others and the form drive can give rise to principles or rules that manage social life, it is beauty alone that gives us social character. This is because engaging with aesthetic value is the only path to bringing 'harmony' within the individual in a way that is necessary to transcend our egotism and self-centredness. 'Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it fosters harmony in the individual',[124] adding that 'only the aesthetic mode of communication unites society, because it relates to that which is common to all.'[125]

Again, this position needs some explanation. Schiller's argument seems to be that when our drives are in balance in response to aesthetic value, we can find ourselves in a state of aesthetic freedom or volitional openness. In this state we look upon the world with 'disinterest', in the specific sense that we are not compelled by either of our primary drives and thus free from the 'fetters of ends and purposes'[126] that arise from our 'needs'[127] and 'attachment[s]'.[128] Liberated from our own self-interested desires and goals, we are able to engage with other people on

their own terms. And when, in this disinterested state, we see the humanity within other people, we also see within them (and within ourselves) the 'ideal' of humanity – an ideal which is beautiful. Emotions are aroused in and through this aesthetic experience, and moral and political claims can then influence social character in a way that is diminished if morality and politics are perceived through pure reason. The emotional claim provides a practical reason.

Philosopher Josef Chytry explains that this process might begin through the aesthetic appreciation of natural objects: 'if individuals learn to regard natural objects for their sakes, they will in turn recognise other individuals for their sakes.'[129] He adds that '[i]n broadening the realm of empathy by extending sensibility to cover the uniqueness of things in nature, aesthetic awareness contributes to a more universal framework for the cultivation of awareness of the freedom of other human beings.'[130] I would suggest that this approach might bear fruit both socially and ecologically, given that through this process human beings could learn to become less instrumentalist in their evaluation of others or of nature, such that the value of others or nature arises not because of their usefulness (as a means) but in recognition of their intrinsic worth (as ends in themselves).

Having explained how, by engaging in aesthetic value, we come to see other people as beautiful, Schiller then argued that we will 'concede freedom'[131] and 'independence'[132] to the beautiful individuals we encounter. 'Beauty, or rather taste, regards all things as *ends in themselves* and will not permit one to serve the purpose of another or to be under its control. Everyone is a free citizen and has the same rights…'[133] It hardly needs pointing out that Schiller's conception of 'beauty' here does not imply that we should only concede freedom to those who are cosmetically attractive in the sense of 'good looking in appearance'. Rather, in a disinterested state we see that all people, as ends in themselves, have innate capacities and potentialities of a 'noble soul'. Thus each and all are deserving of the respect and dignity which only freedom can confer. People are beautiful people because they have the capacity for beauty – again, in Schiller's sense of 'living form'.

On this reasoning Schiller formulated his aesthetically derived law: 'to give freedom by means of freedom.'[134] Through this law we determine ourselves when we exercise our aesthetic freedom in play, as Matherne and Riggle explain: 'We "give freedom" by aesthetically recognizing the independence, freedom, and status of [another]… as an end in itself…. And we do this "by means of freedom" in the sense that we do not feel compelled in this recognition, but rather it is one we freely give in the volitional openness of play.'[135]

Importantly, Matherne and Niggle highlight the egalitarian consequences of Schiller's theory – an egalitarianism derived aesthetically rather than from pure reason. As we see other people exercising their aesthetic freedom and giving a unique 'living form' to their lives through their capacity for play, we come to see others as free and equal, such that the 'ideal of equality [is] fulfilled.'[136] Schiller insisted that this induces 'a complete revolution in [one's] way of feeling',[137] as our 'hearts'[138] become attuned towards other people in ways that social character requires.[139] Harmony in society, therefore, depends on harmony in the individual, and harmony within the individual involves both reconciling the primary drives within, as well as becoming attuned to the humanity within all people. Both aspects of internal harmony flow

from engaging with aesthetic value. This is how Schiller arrives at the political framing of his thesis that only through beauty can we arrive at freedom.

Here we can return to Schiller's earlier critique of the French Revolution and his explanation for its degeneration into the Reign of Terror. He argued that the 'moment found an apathetic generation', with society governed by selfishness and crude, lawless impulses. Human capacities were being diminished by a division of labour that, through excessive reason, reduced each person to a fragment of their potential. In short, the social character on which political society depended to flourish and endure was lacking. Only by engaging with aesthetic value could humanity develop that social character, and only by *remaining engaged* with it can that social character endure. Schiller recognised that there are dangers of an unbridled aestheticism, but he interpreted these risks as resulting not from *too much* beauty but from an *insufficient* experience of beauty – dangerous only to those whose natures have not yet been brought into harmony through aesthetic education. Aesthetic education, therefore, is also political training. The paradox is that the dangers of aestheticism are best resolved by and through beauty.

The aesthetic state: preliminary comments

To close this essay I will turn briefly to Schiller's conception of the 'aesthetic state', anticipating the social and political analyses of forthcoming essays. I make no pretence here to present a developed theory of the state, nor did Schiller provide one in the *Aesthetic Letters* or elsewhere. He made comments to the effect that he would develop this concept, but this ambition never came to fruition, and ultimately, he said remarkably little about forming state apparatus or institutions. Nevertheless, the *Aesthetic Letters* should be read for what they are: a political document. As he noted in the Second Letter, 'the most perfect'[140] of all works of art is the 'construction of true political freedom.'[141]

In the most extensive study of the concept of an 'aesthetic state', Josef Chytry offers a preliminary definition of the term as 'a social and political community that accords primacy, although not exclusiveness, to the aesthetic dimension in human consciousness and activity.'[142] This implies that an aesthetic education will permeate the minds and bodies of the individuals who do political decision making. I interpret this claim broadly, applying to all political agents, from those acting at the grassroots level all the way up to those running the institutions of government. The personal is political, and so the aesthetic state has implications for society at large, not merely an enclosed political class. Political institutions themselves ought to be 'graded according to the degree to which they enhance the development of human nature as a harmonious blending of the sensuous and the rational.'[143] And 'no state is to be regarded as supportive of human harmony and the totality of the individual if it hinders or fails to support the cultivation of the play dimension in the human being.'[144] This, of course, is vague, but it is suggestive of a value system based on what I've called the politics of beauty, deserving of further inquiry.

Nevertheless, consistent with Schiller's reservations about politics leading the way, any aesthetic state would presumably need to be preceded by an extended period of self-cultivation of individuals, supported by a robust aesthetic culture and education. If our natures swing

toward imbalance, the aesthetic life will restore us to a sensuo-rational harmonic whole. Chytry goes on to write: 'For Schiller, all authentic political change begins through the poet. He alone knows the individual as a sensuous-rational being and can fashion his or her ideal image through the artwork. Since all immediate political ventures for improving humans are vain in theory and injurious in practice, the only genuine revolution will be one in which the individual becomes truly human through "a total revolution in his entire sensibilities."'[145] I am reminded here of the oft-quoted line from Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* (1840): 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'[146] This provocative statement is an invitation to broaden our conception of poetry to include more than just written or spoken verse, and define it as 'the expression of the imagination'.[147] On those terms, one might get a clearer sense of the relationship of poetry to politics, in so far as the latter is inevitably shaped by the ways in which political actors across society express their imaginations (for better or for worse). Change imaginative landscape, and new political frontiers present themselves.

Returning to Schiller, Chytry argues that 'by promoting empathy and awareness of others, aesthetic sensibility gives rise to the development of a society and state in which the individual becomes, as it were, the state'[148] In Schiller's words: 'If the inner man is at one with himself, he will also retain his uniqueness in the highest universalisation of his conduct, and the state will be merely the expounder of his beautiful instinct, the clearer form of his inner legislation.'[149] Philosopher Philip Kain elaborates on this position: 'The individual will become the state because the individual will no longer be a fragment, restricted in his capacities and outlooks, incapable of dealing with the general, universal, and varied concerns of the whole.'[150] He adds that: '[t[here will be agreement between the individual and the state because the state will be determined by the individual. The state will reflect the individual.'[151] In short, duty and inclination will be in harmony.

These comments no doubt raise more questions than they provide answers, and such a cursory statement risks coming across idealistic, at best. In a forthcoming essay in this collection, I intend to focus in more detail on the nature of an aesthetic state and how aesthetic citizens might conceive of themselves, and conduct themselves, in relation to such an entity. In the previous essay, I began anticipating some of these issues when discussing of Richard Rorty's notion of a 'poeticised culture'. There I considered some challenges regarding how politics is to be managed in a post-metaphysical age where Reason is unable to provide philosophical foundations to political ideologies or theories of state. But before I can delve further into these complex issues, there is more groundwork to lay. After all, Schiller believed, as do I, that an aesthetic state is likely to be the *outcome* of an aestheticised culture and citizenry, not the *driving force* in that great transformation. In short, the aesthetic revolution must precede the paradigm shift in politics, just as a horse must drag the cart.

[1] Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, in Friedrich Shiller, *Essays*, eds. Walter Hinderer and Daniel Dahlstrom (New York: Continuum, 2005), pp. 86-178.
[2] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.4.

[3] Bertolt Brecht, ‘On Judging’ in Bertolt Brecht, *Poems 1913-1956* (London: Methuen, 1987) p. 308.
[4] Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. Reginald Snell (New York: Dover, 2004). I reference two different translations of Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters* (this note and note 1), from which I cite as necessary depending on the suitability of the translation.
[5] Friedrich Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p. 123.
[6] Herbert Read, *Education Through Art* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), p. 1.
[7] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 4, p. 34.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid, p. 35.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid, p. 49.
[13] See Irving Babbitt, ‘Schiller and Romanticism’ (1922) *Modern Language Notes* 37(5): pp. 257-268.
[14] Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993).
[15] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 4, p. 50.
[16] Ibid, p 34.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid, p. 36.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid, p. 39.
[23] Ibid, p. 41.
[24] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Books 1-V) (Copenhagen: Titan Read, 2020).
[25] See David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Penguin, 2019).
[26] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 4, p. 40.
[27] Ibid, p. 38.
[28] Ibid, p. 41.
[29] Ibid, pp. 36-7.
[30] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 2002).
[31] Marcuse, for example, has a chapter that addresses Schiller in Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilisation* (London: Sphere Books, 1969), Ch. 9.
[32] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 4, p. 47.
[33] Ibid, p. 35.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid, p. 36.
[39] Ibid, p. 42.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, p 49.
[42] Ibid, p. 37.
[43] Ibid, p. 47.
[44] Ibid, 37.
[45] Ibid, p 50.
[46] Ibid, p. 34. Italics removed.
[47] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 95. Italics removed.
[48] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 4, p. 34.
[49] Ibid, p. 50.
[50] Ibid, p. 46.
[51] Ibid, p. 25 (translation amended, replacing ‘unseasonable’ with ‘untimely’ and ‘keener’ with ‘urgent’).
[52] Ibid, p. 27.
[53] Ibid, p. 26.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 107.

[56] Ibid, p. 111.
[57] Ibid, p. 155, fn 1.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 4, p. 110, p. 113.
[60] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 110.
[61] In the forthcoming analysis of Schiller's theses in the *Aesthetic Letters*, I am especially indebted to the following two articles. Samantha Matherne and Nick Riggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I' (2020) *British Journal of Aesthetics* 60(4): pp. 375-402; and Samantha Matherne and Nick Riggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part II' (2021) *British Journal of Aesthetics* 61(1): pp. 17-40.
[62] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 118, p. 126, p. 128.
[63] Ibid, p. 128.
[64] Ibid, p. 118.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid, p. 94.
[67] Ibid, p. 126, p. 143,
[68] Ibid, p. 119.
[69] Ibid, p. 106.
[70] Ibid, p. 118.
[71] Ibid, p. 95.
[72] Ibid. Emphasis removed.
[73] Ibid, p. 92.
[74] Susan Bentley, 'Friedrich Schiller's Play: A Theory of Human Nature in the Context of the Eighteenth-Century Study of Life' (2009) *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 101. https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/101, Epilogue.
[75] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2004).
[76] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 93.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid, p. 102.
[79] Ibid.
[80] See Samuel Alexander, *Art Against Empire: Toward an Aesthetics of Degrowth* (Melbourne, Simplicity Institute, 2017), p. 1.
[81] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 128.
[82] Ibid, p. 119.
[83] Ibid, p.128.
[84] For a comprehensive discussion of Schillerian play, see Bentley, 'Friedrich Schiller's Play', above note 74.
[85] Ibid, p. 35, fn 5.
[86] Ibid, p. 37.
[87] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 125.
[88] Ibid, p. 129.
[89] Ibid, p. 128.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid, 132.
[92] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61, p. 389.
[93] Bentley, 'Friedrich Schiller's Play', above note 74, p. 39.
[94] Ibid, p. 40.
[95] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 131.
[96] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61; and Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part II', note 61.
[97] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61, p. 377.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 95. Emphasis removed.
[100] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61, p. 378.
[101] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 147.
[102] Ibid, p. 149.
[103] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61, p. 391.
[104] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 133.
[105] Ibid.

[106] Notably, each of these forms of beauty can be dangerous or regressive if they do not correspond to the needs of the individual – e.g., if an overly rational person is exposed to energising beauty and the overly sensuous person is exposed to melting beauty.
[107] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 147.
[108] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61, pp. 391-2.
[109] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 147.
[110] Ibid, p. 148.
[111] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part I', note 61, p. 401.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 3, p. 27.
[114] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 124, fn 3.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid, p. 147.
[117] See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part II', note 61.
[118] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 97.
[119] Ibid, p. 127. Emphasis removed.
[120] Ibid. Emphasis removed.
[121] Ibid, p. 123, fn 3.
[122] Ibid, p. 127. Emphasis removed.
[123] Ibid, pp. 123-4, p. 127, pp. 175-6.
[124] Ibid, p. 176.
[125] Ibid, p. 177.
[126] Ibid, p. 173.
[127] Ibid, p. 166.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) p. 85.
[130] Ibid, p. 102.
[131] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 175.
[132] Ibid, p. 163.
[133] As quoted in Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part II', note 61, p. 23 (from Schiller's *Kallias Letters*).
[134] I am here following Matherne and Niggle's modified translation. See Matherne and Niggle, 'Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Value: Part II', note 61, p. 23.
[135] Ibid, p. 24.
[136] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 178.
[137] Ibid, p. 171.
[138] Ibid, p. 175.
[139] Note that this solidarity here is an aesthetic achievement not something based on independent philosophical foundations. See Richard Rorty on 'solidarity' in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
[140] Schiller, *Aesthetic Letters*, note 1, p. 88.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Chytry, *The Aesthetic State*, note 129, p. xii.
[143] Ibid, p. 78.
[144] Ibid, p. 102.
[145] Ibid, p. 95.
[146] Percy Bysshe Shelly, *A Defense of Poetry* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1891), p. 46.
[147] Ibid, p. 2.
[148] Chytry, *The Aesthetic State*, note 129, p. 85.
[149] As quoted in Chytry, *The Aesthetic State*, note 129, p. 85.
[150] Philip Kain, 'Labor, the State, and Aesthetic Theory in the Writings of Schiller' (1981) *Interpretation* 9: p. 273.
[151] Ibid.