

ON SCHILLER'S AESTHETIC AND SOCIAL ELEVATION OF MORAL PERCEPTION

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Abstract

Many contemporary philosophical theories of morality operate according to crude logical examples. For instance: 'setting a cat on fire is wrong'. Schiller's robbed man scenarios from his *Kallias* letters tell a subtler tale. In this paper, I claim that with the notion of moral beauty, Schiller substantially transcends contemporary philosophical approaches to moral perception by (i) leading the eye to the 'how', rather than only to the 'what' of an action, (ii) loosening the fixation on the immoral, yet becoming aware of the graceful among the ostensibly dutiful and (iii) realizing that the possibility of moral perception is ultimately interlocked with graceful expressions in social interactions.

I

To the concert of contemporary ethics, theories of direct moral perception contribute a genuine philosophical tune in claiming that one could have direct sensory access to objective values without explicit deliberation or inference (Audi 2013, McGrath 2004, Wright 2008). Through a critical reading of Schiller's moral writings, in this paper I shall question, redirect and enlarge the framework within which such theories are situated. Particularly, I choose a reexamination of Schiller's notions of 'beautiful action' and grace that can be positioned between Kant's rational ethical formalism and Aristotle's emphasis on practical wisdom. Schiller's moral writings try to solve the paradox of freedom in nature. Establishing 'moral beauty' as the highest form of character, and calling for 'gentility' as beauty in social relations (*Kallias*, 174), Schiller's exposition offers an alternative to both Kantian rationalism and Humean emotivism, one that speaks in the spirit of the enlightenment without becoming 'sense-less'.

In *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller formulates a programmatic synthesis of reason and affection in response to the failures of the French Revolution. However, Schiller is by no means an anti-rationalist. In his third letter, one can read that “man is not better treated by nature in his first start than her other works are; so long as he is unable to act for himself as an independent intelligence, she acts for him” (AEM, 37). In order to accommodate the notion of freedom, Schiller’s holistic anthropology subsequently binds moral sensation to graceful *acting*. The claim for a natural bond between feeling and expression, as it is also stipulated in contemporary emotion research (see for an overview Dunn et al. 2006 and Lindquist et al. 2012) ultimately pushes the discussion of moral perception to a socio-political plane, which contemporary moral philosophy tends to disregard.

II

Schiller’s ethical interpretation of beauty as freedom’s appearance is derived from Kantian thought and reminiscent of Aristotle’s differentiation between the *enkrates*, i.e. those who are capable of temperate actions but feel counter-pressure, and the genuinely virtuous capable of ‘*phronesis*’, i.e. practical wisdom (NEVII.1, 1145a18-19). While Schiller’s moral philosophy overlaps with Kantian thought in its adherence to a rational conception of duty (see Beiser 2005, especially chapter 5), Schiller’s inclusive conception of aesthetic existence differs from Kant and his rigid reduction of morality and human life’s essence to dutiful acting. Comparing Schiller’s and Kant’s moral philosophy, Beiser writes that “Kant subordinates humanity to morality whereas Schiller subordinates morality to humanity” (Beiser 2005, 186). Schiller’s moral promotion of ‘play’ also deviates from Aristotle’s appraisal of knowledge and rational endeavor as the highest good (NEI.5, 1095b17-1096a5). What Schiller’s moral philosophy does share with Aristotle’s virtue ethics, and what distinguishes its tone from Kantian thinking, is the explicit acknowledgment of sensibility as an integral part of human morality.

On first glance, Schiller appears to demand simple harmony between moral principles and inclination that is also promoted in contemporary ethical discussions. For instance, departing from Julia Driver’s virtue ethical treatment of Huckleberry Finn (Driver 2001), Michelle Ciburria (2012) discusses three possible ethical constellations with regard

to Huck helping Jim escape from slavery. One expresses what I wish to call a ‘justice-cum-virtue’ equilibrium: when Huck helps Jim on both ‘deontic maxims’ (Cicurria 2012, 246) and his friendship to him. The others constitute the remaining two possibilities in Cicurria’s framework. The ‘real’ fictional Huck believes that slavery is justified yet helps freeing Jim as a friend, illustrating a subjective ‘justice-versus-virtue’ conflict. A second Huck *doppelgänger* is supposed to help Jim based on rational criteria, however, without personal inclination, which comes close to the Kantian ideal of rational duty. In order to demonstrate that Schiller’s aesthetic sublimation of Kantian ethics adds subtle nuances to the analysis of the complex interplay between duty, virtue and emotion, I shall first refer to Schiller’s five cases about a traveler in need for help, a mini-parable of moral sensation that overlaps with, and enriches, Cicurria’s possible-world fiction of ‘Huck-intentions’. I am going to deconstruct three of Schiller’s five scenarios from his *Kallias* letters whose differences seem particularly instructive for a metaethical review of moral sensation (I will not quote the remaining two cases, yet briefly refer to them in my discussion).

III

Schiller introduces a robbed man who got thrown onto the street. Having been stripped of his clothes, he is freezing. Five travelers pass by. The first case plays out as follows:

“I suffer with you”, says the moved traveler, “and I will gladly give you what I have. I only request that you do not ask for any of my services, since your appearance revolts me. Here come some people, give them this purse and they will help you”. – “That is well meant”, said the wounded man, “but one must also be able to see the suffering if duty to humanity...requires it. Reaching for your purse is not worth half as much as doing a little violence to your tender senses. (*Kallias*, 157)

Schiller’s first traveler appears a pure sensual being whose actions are motivated by his natural state. Two divergent moments of the

short scene are paradigmatic. “I suffer with you”, he says and shows empathy that Schiller calls subsequently “kind-hearted out of affect”. Yet the traveler does not want to help the robbed man personally since the latter’s appearance revolts him. Hence, affection and empathy become blurred. In terms of modern psychology, the first traveler in Schiller’s example exhibits emotional ambivalence. This is not uncommon. Based on historical, conceptual and scientific evidence, Colombetti (2005) questions, for instance, whether valence could actually be properly grasped in terms of bipolarity, i.e. by qualifying emotions exclusively as either positive or negative.

However, what Schiller seems to have in mind with his first traveler is a conflict of two unrestrained diverse emotions, compassion and aesthetic repulsion respectively. One does not encounter a single emotion with ambivalent valence in this case, such as in a love-hate relationship. A proper understanding of Schiller’s seemingly trivial example becomes further problematic once one acknowledges that in contemporary emotion research it is disputed whether emotions could, on natural grounds, be individualized. Notably, against the ‘locationist’ view, constructivists argue that emotion categories signify concepts, rather than natural kinds, similar to color distinctions. Constructivism supports the (nominalistic) stance that talk of emotions is a mere reflection of how human beings interpret and conceptualize emotional core affects, i.e. bodily sensations of environment’s motivational salience (see Lindquist et al., 125).

Colombetti recalls that the term ‘valences’ is actually a rough translation of the German ‘Aufforderungscharaktere’ (‘invitation-characters’) as it is used in the work of Kurt Lewin (Colombetti 2005, 104-5). Given this connotation, one can build an interesting connection between emotion valence and Jeremy J. Gibson’s ecological concept of ‘affordance’, i.e. the perceptual evaluation of what an environment offers an organism (Gibson 1979). I believe that the interpretation of perception as the result of the interplay between (external) affordance and (internal) ‘ability’ (see Greeno 1994) provides the most plausible psychological explanation of how a direct grasp of values could be understood. Particularly, the notion of affordance highlights ‘dialectic’ interaction of an organism with its environment that appears crucial for the analysis of value formation in sensation. This, I posit, forms the conceptual framework within which one should decipher Schiller’s scenarios.

Schiller’s first traveler, for instance, is feeling disgust when he encounters the robbed man, as the latter’s appearance affords such a re-

action. A contemporary view would stress that without certain neurobiological ‘modules’, particularly insula and amygdala, it would be impossible to generate disgust. Yet such a naturalistic approach cannot get rid of the fact that perceptions and sensations have intentional content or at least generate from an objective causal source. For an alternative organism that is equally equipped with insula, amygdala and other relevant neural conditions, disgust vis-a-vis a robbed man could be out of question, unless human appearance is treated as a matter of beauty, style and decency. A guide dog, for instance, is supposed to be naturally democratic in her response to the outward appearance of a blind person she should assist. In short: beliefs and inclinations are interwoven. It is this holistic theme that makes Schiller’s robbed man parable a valuable case study of moral philosophy.

That human culture plays variations on ‘raw’ emotions *qua* body states can also be demonstrated with the second moment in the first traveler’s ambivalent reaction, empathy and compassion. Indeed, investigations into the contribution of shared neural networks in third-person perception of pain suggest that especially male subjects make distinctions between in- and out-group members in their empathy reactions. Further, moral perception, in terms of pain empathy, appears to present a suffering fellow human being first and foremost as an in- or out-group member (see Singer and Steinbeis 2009). Thus, while empathy happens to be an immediate reaction to seeing someone in pain, the association of a suffering individual with either an in- or out-group position defines whether empathy augments to compassion, or rather turns into a feeling of revenge. The important detail in this is that in- or out-group classifications, for instance in the evaluation of individuals who either support one’s favorite or rival soccer team in the case of the aforementioned study, determine the course of moral perception. That empathy, as the picking up of the other’s pain sensation, would not be felt in isolation, but rather as compassion or revenge, shows that from a phenomenological point of view, there exists no isolated moral sense that in its entirety could be pre-rationally located.

The subtlety with which Schiller presents the indicated holistic picture of moral perception can be demonstrated with Schiller’s fourth scenario. Here, two former enemies of the robbed man still offer help, but without forgiveness for what the latter has done to them. Their motivation is simply that the robbed man appears ‘wretched’, i.e. it is situational. Although the robbed man should be ‘out-grouped’ from the perspective

of his enemies, momentary moral (or aesthetic?) affordance seems here to overcome a more general and permanent cognitive disqualification. Subsequently, Schiller seems to suggest a model of moral perception where the interplay between *'hic et nunc'* affordances and beliefs principally yields open moral results, i.e. gives room to freedom.

Modern theories of direct moral perception suggest that ethical values are directly accessible, and can be 'seen' independent from what one believes. However, what one morally perceives is here meant to be distinct even from 'secondary' qualities such as colors and shapes, and moral values are supposed to supervene on, or have to be somehow 'naturally' inferred from relevant base qualities (see Audi 2013 for such a position). In light of Schiller's robbed men scenarios, such a position appears questionable as it (i) neglects belief/desire holism, (ii) involves in the philosophically rather hopeless task of saving moral perception from overlapping with intuition and emotion and (iii) posits moral naturalism without a clear conception of objective moral properties.

On the contrary, Gibson's dialectic notion of affordance, which Schiller's robbed man scenarios 'prematurely' exemplify, opens categorical gateways to moral sensation that help escape the aforementioned difficulties. According to Gibson, "an affordance [...] points two ways, to the environment and to the observer [...]. This is only to reemphasize that exteroception is accompanied by proprioception—that to perceive the world is to co-perceive oneself. This is wholly inconsistent with dualism in any form, either mind- matter dualism or mind-body dualism. The awareness of the world and of one's complementary relations to the world are not separable". (Gibson 1979, 129)

Gibson neutralizes here ontological implications of perception and I would like to suggest that within a framework of moral affordances one could philosophically address morality without plunging into the enduring meta-ethical confrontations between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. A proper 'functional' analysis of direct moral perception in terms of valence import that leads to inclinations and desires in reaction to the environment, rests basically on the one important differentiation, between moral disposition and ability respectively. Dispositions materialize necessarily within an appropriate environment, which only becomes suggestive as to certain abilities. It appears perfectly sound to state that autistic people are unable to both 'see emotions of others and show empathy. Yet such a formulation does not mean that ability automatically materializes under particular circumstances. Being unable to do something is a subjective

restriction, while being able to do something is only an opportunity.

In this sense, Schiller's first traveler is picking up moral affordances of the robbed man based on his sensory abilities. Whether the situation presents 'real' values or rather initiates moral sensations, however, is a question that becomes mute in light of anti-dualistic thinking. Further, in accordance with belief/desire holism, his ability to sense moral affordance is not independent from the traveler's cognitive states. Considered a scam, he hardly would get in conflict with aesthetic repulsion and be pressed to offer a solution to the situation Schiller describes.

Gibson's claim that proprioception is a constitutive component of 'reality' is particularly striking in relation to moral sensation when one considers current research into the mirror neuron system (see Shapiro 2009) or, with similar implications, shared neural networks underpinning empathy as discussed above. From the perspective of moral affordances, Schiller's robbed man scenarios exhibit an early intuitive recognition of themes that contemporary social neuroscience imports into the examination of moral behavior. Schiller's proximity to Kant's ethics, however, crucially transcends the neuroscience of moral sensation by asking one of the most important philosophical questions of post-Newtonian philosophy: how the notion of human freedom should be understood.

IV

The third traveler stands silently as the wounded man repeats the story of his misfortune. After the story has been told the man stands there contemplatively and battling with himself. "It will be difficult for me", he says at last, "to separate myself from my coat, which is the only protection for my sick body, and to leave you my horse since my powers are at an end. But duty commands that I serve you. (Kallias, 157-58)

Schiller's third traveler exhibits outright moral rationality. In order to put this feature into a broader context, let me briefly return to the first scenario. Here, the traveler's moral nature produces an immediate conflict in response to the new situation. What is particularly noteworthy in Schiller's first robbed man scenario is its call for a "little violence to one's *tender senses*", which indicates a particular tension between aes-

thetic and moral sensation. In the original German, the critical adjective is “weichlich”, which could be rephrased as ‘overly soft’ and actually carries a more negative connotation, alluding to passivity, than the “tender” in the quoted translation of Schiller’s letters. I believe that Schiller alludes here to a point that is more systematically defined in Kant’s framework of judgment types, particularly concerning its comparison and differentiation of the pleasant and the good. Kant says that:

the pleasant and the good have both a reference to the faculty of desire; and they bring with them the former a satisfaction pathologically conditioned (by impulses, stimuli) the latter a pure practical satisfaction, which is determined not merely by the representation of the object, but also by the represented connexion of the subject with the existence of the object. (CoJ, Para. 5)

In Kant’s framework, there is no place for ethically justifying sensation. If elevated to free imagination, and in emancipation from ‘pathological’ impulses and stimuli, perception becomes aesthetic and thus loses interest in the existence of what is perceived. According to Kant, disinterestedness is a necessary condition of judgments of taste. Ethical judgments, however, need to be both free and interested in the existence of their object, and thus can only generate from (formal) reason, which Schiller’s third traveler exemplifies. Indeed, the traveler’s hesitant yet dutiful action is in accordance with Kant’s rational conception of ethics, yet not virtuous in Aristotle’s sense. Felt counter-pressure (“it will be difficult for me...”) is for both Schiller and Aristotle morally suboptimal. Schiller calls the third traveler’s action “*purely moral*”, yet against “the interests of the senses”, which curiously stands in contrast to the demand for “a little violence to one’s tender senses” in Schiller’s first case.

Schiller alludes in these cases to an important difference in how moral reasoning and moral sensation can interplay. Both the first and third traveler exhibits pathological inclinations that are the result of natural conditions. The third traveler, however, is able to silence his immediate motivation through considerations of duty, while the first can only rationalize and adapt to, yet not overcome his ambivalent emotions. He thus ends up with offering the robbed man his purse. The fifth traveler, finally, exhibits moral sensation without conflict.

As soon as the wanderer sees him, he lays down his load. “I see”, he says of his own accord, “that you are wounded and tired. The next village is far and you will bleed to death ere you arrive there. Climb onto my back and I will take you there”.—“But what will become of your load which you leave here on the open road”.—“That I don’t know, and it concerns me little”, says the carrier. “I do know, however, that you need help and that I am obliged to give it to you. (Kallias, 158)

Duty and desire coincide here, forming the ideal of a virtuous ‘beautiful’ action. Schiller’s second scenario has still remained unmentioned. Exemplifying an economic model of care, here a traveler asks for compensation, which the robbed man rejects for a lack of “readiness to help”. In a final assessment of all five variations of his robbed man case, Schiller says that

all five wanted to help [...] One of them acted out of purest moral purpose. But only the fifth acted without solicitation, without considering the action, and disregarding the cost to himself. Only the fifth...’fulfilled his duty with the ease of someone acting out of mere instinct’. — Thus, a moral action would be a beautiful action only if it appears as an immediate [...] outcome of nature. In a word: a free action is a beautiful action, if the autonomy of the mind and autonomy of appearance coincide. (Kallias, 159)

In line with the quoted passage, one can define virtues as the expression of ‘mindful nature’. Unlike the first, the fifth traveler demonstrates character rather than spontaneous emotion and undirected empathy. Further, in contrast to the third, his senses are in harmony with Kantian duty. Hence, Schiller’s fifth case illustrates what I called above ‘justice-cum-virtue’. The idea of beautiful acting must assume plasticity with regard to human nature’s endowment that allows for motivational approximation to laws of reason, a point it shares with Aristotle’s virtue ethics. Neither judgments of sense, i.e. pure instinctive reactions, nor economic trade-offs qualify as ethical justifications. However, it is important to notice that Schiller’s illustrates an ideal harmony between the autonomy of the mind and the autonomy of nature’s *appearance*. Obviously, for the ‘Kantian’ Schiller nature is fully determined by physical laws. Only man;s

superior subjective faculties, reason and imagination, can generate the impression that nature is free and beautiful. Injected into morality, where human nature is the ‘material’, this can only mean that beautiful acting must *present* nature in free form, i.e. as self-determined. A semiotic mediation between moral sensation and graceful expression in Schiller’s aestheticized moral philosophy differentiates it from both Aristotle’s virtue ethics and rational accounts of moral reasoning. Further, by making the robbed man the subject, rather than the object of moral perception, Schiller turns the table on contemporary approaches to moral sensation.

V

In order to capture Schiller’s implicit view on moral perception, his moral philosophy’s overall signature requires some attention. For a comparison, let me highlight that Aristotle’s virtue ethics demands emotional fine-tuning that only experience and moral practice can teach. Formal rationality is thus considered insufficient as source for the understanding of morality. Schiller equally emphasizes the indispensability of man’s natural conditions in moral formation, but he is nowhere as adamant as Aristotle in pointing at particularizing emotions. Schiller’s program, on the contrary, is characterized by the search for the ultimate harmony between natural diversity and rational unity. Schiller writes that

education will always appear deficient when the moral feeling can only be maintained with the sacrifice of what is natural; and a political administration will always be very imperfect when it is only able to bring about unity by suppressing variety. (AEM, 40-1)

Distancing himself from the enlightenment’s rational monotony, and, like Aristotle, subscribing to a ‘holistic’ anthropology, Schiller famously aims at solving this perpetual moral conflict between reason and inclination in human nature through a generous notion of ‘play’. He states that

when we welcome with effusion some one who deserves our contempt, we feel painfully that nature is constrained. When we have a hostile feeling against a person who com-

mands our esteem, we feel painfully the constraint of reason. But if this person inspires us with interest, and also wins our esteem, the constraint of feeling vanishes together with the constraint of reason, and we begin to love him, that is to say, to play, to take recreation, at once with our inclination and our esteem. (AEM, 75)

Schiller's 'playful' synthesis of ethics and aesthetics could be viewed as overly romantic and idealistic. Further, when Schiller urges to "put morality in the place of manners" (AEM, 81), his notion of moral beauty seems to associate with the aristocratic etiquette in the 18th century that the then emerging European bourgeoisie has been adopting. When Schiller uses the English dance of his time as an allegory for a free society, an aristocratic connotation of his notions of grace and gentility is hard to deny, for instance, when one reads that "the spectator in the gallery sees countless movements which cross each other colourfully and change their direction wilfully but *never* collide" (Kallias, 174, italics are original).

Yet while one could indeed decipher Schiller's moral philosophy as mere intellectual poesy, or deconstruct some of its paragraphs as an elitist promotion of moral etiquette and mannerism, there exists probably no genuine ethical theory that juxtaposes so eloquently the 'what' of acting with its 'how'. Indeed, in formulating his notion of moral beauty, Schiller is much more dialectic than both Aristotle and Kant. Freedom, Schiller writes, stands above both the necessities of reason and nature: "But the will of man is perfectly free between inclination and duty, and no physical necessity ought to enter as a sharer in this magisterial personality". (AEM, 40).

Schiller advocates neither Kantian freedom *from* nature, nor unrestrained emotion, but rather a concept of personality that symbolizes unrestrained free play between duty and inclination vis-a-vis a loved person. The notions of love and play explain here deeds that appear right as much as they are desired. Both 'false empathy' and 'reason's rigidity', as one could phrase it, disappear in beautiful acting. In order to make sense of this condition, however, one has to further address Schiller's semiotic view on movement as a necessary constituent of human action.

In his seminal *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller elaborates through the notion of play the paradigmatic synthesis of reason and sensation as the ultimate foundation of moral education. In

his slightly earlier theoretical reflections in *On Grace and Dignity* and his *Kallias* letters, one can additionally find passages that also offer crucial semiotic substructure. In the former of these two 1793 writings, Schiller contemplates on what could be called ‘physiognomy of sentient expression’, while the latter, in sequences that follow the robbed-man-parable from which I quoted above, particularly discusses the notion of technique as a ‘negative’, yet necessary condition of nature’s free appearance. These subtexts direct our attention to semiotic transformations of nature that indicate a moral dimension. Herein lies, as I shall demonstrate in the final considerations of this paper, Schiller’s genuine contribution to the analysis of moral perception and its role in moral philosophy.

Schiller’s notion of grace is supposed to transcend the mere beautiful of the aesthetic realm. Beauty already associates the two separate worlds of necessities, reason and nature, thus leading the way to freedom and autonomy in appearance. Grace, however, as an attribute of human acting that can be perceived, elevates beauty to the expression of moral character. Schiller defends the concepts of personality and individuality against Kant by arguing that only through the moral sentient condition (in German, “*Empfindung*”), both rational duty and human nature can be done justice (see especially GD, 206-7).

Schiller speaks of grace as the symbol for “inclination to duty”, whereby grace is beauty that stems from the moral sentient condition. Representation of beauty, however, is according to Schiller “technique in freedom” (*Kallias*, 162). Thus, grace must also involve technique, i.e. formal artfulness. It is not easy to decipher Schiller’s multi-faceted discussion at this intersection between *On Grace and Dignity* and his *Kallias* letters, yet a close look reveals an underpinning core notion of movement.

For instance, Schiller exemplifies the appearance of freedom with the trope of overcoming the general and alien force of gravity: “We perceive everything to be beautiful [...] in which mass is completely dominated by form (in the animal and plant kingdom) and by living forces (in the autonomy of the organic)” (*Kallias*, 164).

The primacy of beauty in movement also shines through in examples where Schiller does not address literal movement, such as in the case of a bird in flight or a horse’s light motion. Prototypical for ‘static movement’ is here Schiller’s reference to a curved line, as opposed to one with abrupt changes in direction (*Kallias*, 173). Thus, Schiller seems to base moral beauty on movement even where a genuine temporal param-

eter drops out. Contemporary neuroscience strikingly supports Schiller's reflection at this point (see Freedberg and Gallese, 2007).

However, Schiller demands more from beauty than 'motion empathy'. Beauty only emerges when nature appears as "following its own will" (*Kallias*, 170). This temporal component carries over into Schiller's definition of grace:

Grace can be found only in movement, for a modification which takes place in the soul can only be manifested in the sensuous world as movement. But this does not prevent features fixed and in repose also from possessing grace. There immobility is, in its origin, movement which, from being frequently repeated, at length becomes habitual, leaving durable traces. (*GD*, 188)

Note that Schiller characterizes the human condition through act potentials. Actions are willful manifestations in time, whose modality can give expression to the synthesis of reason and sensibility, the active and the passive, the voluntary and involuntary, and thus accommodate one's personality:

When I extend the arm to seize an object, I execute, in truth, an intention, and the movement I make is determined in general by the end that I have in view; but in what way does my arm approach the object? how far do the other parts of my body follow this impulsion? What will be the degree of slowness or of the rapidity of the movement? What amount of force shall I employ? This is a calculation of which my will, at the instant, takes no account, and in consequence there is a something left to the discretion of nature. (*GD*, 190-1)

Schiller's emphasis on the physiognomy of an action can be put in the context of modern sociology, Goffman's work on symbolic interaction (see Goffman 1959 & 2005) and, particularly, Bourdieu's notion of habitus and social distinction (Bourdieu 1977). Yet, as aforementioned, while a critical deconstruction of Schiller's moral philosophy could find its demand for grace and gentility discriminatory and elitist, one has to read Schiller's appraisal of Kantian duty, i.e. rational freedom, against

such an account. Note that in Schiller's example, as discussed in this article's initial section, the first traveler's reaction to the robbed man's misery is deemed inappropriate because of the traveler's affection preventing him from accepting the required "little violence to his tender senses".

Schiller's allegory of freedom in animals' movements should exemplify that, while the necessities of nature, i.e. gravity, can factually not be overcome, they still can 'disappear' in the expression and perception of motion. Similarly, grace is for Schiller the ethical disposition to display emancipation from nature, rather than a mere matter of distinct and distinguishing social habitus. Schiller addresses here, besides movement, particularly facial mimicry and physiognomy that "speak". He states:

I call speaking...every physical phenomenon which accompanies and expresses a certain state of the soul; thus, in this acceptance, all the sympathetic movements are speaking, including those which accompany the simple affections of the animal sensibility. [...] To take the word in a more restricted sense, the configuration of man alone is speaking, and it is itself so only in those of the phenomena that accompany and express the state of its moral sensibility. (*GD*, 194-5)

Schiller's contemporary Kleist, in his philosophical dialogue *On the Marionette Theater*, counters Schiller's conception of grace. Only blind nature (or god), says the main protagonist in Kleist's literary conversation, are capable of pure grace, which the naturally balanced movements of marionettes symbolize. Consciousness, on the contrary, imports reflection, and thus hesitation, to human performance and expression. Kleist claims that "we can see the degree to which contemplation becomes darker and weaker in the organic world, so that the grace that is there emerges all the more shining and triumphant" (Kleist and Neumiller 1972, 26).

Kleist overlooks that marionettes would neither perceive grace nor form its notion. Schiller insists on sensation as an anthropological necessity that secures subjectivity, i.e. personal identity, through one's actions. Unformed natural expressions are 'dumb'. They can display individuality, but never constitute personality (*GD*, 196-7). On the contrary, grace symbolizes the ideal harmony between moral duty and movements

that, as constituents of actions, stems from acquired sensual conditions

Schiller adapts Kant's dualistic metaphysics in its distinction between laws of nature and laws of freedom. In Schiller's thinking, technique mediates between these separate worlds by bringing freedom into appearance. Technique imports the impression of autonomous rules and regularities into the sensual realm that otherwise would be perceived under the influence of heteronomous physical forces. Yet according to Schiller, one reaches artfulness only when technique promotes freedom, i.e. autonomy in appearance. Such aesthetic transformation of the physical realm happens when one perceives beauty in nature, in artworks and, finally, on a moral plane, in human acting. In the latter case, the beautiful generates from a subjective sensual disposition that enables the necessary metamorphosis, from passive nature to the active embodiment of morality in grace.

VI

Schiller's secondary notion of technique turns moral perception ultimately into a subject of social critique. Only through cooperative techniques graceful behavior and its perception can 'playfully' develop and personality be put in a position where choice between inclination and duty is free. In terms of philosophical anthropology, Schiller's conception of grace reminds us of the constitutive, 'transcendental', conditions of human interaction, and could be read as an 'embodied' supplement to discourse ethics (see Habermas 1991).

Schiller's example of the English dance as a symbolic expression of individual freedom in group-action illustrates a 'social score' that allows for free play and 'beautiful' acting in accordance with duty. In this point, Schiller's thinking is actually closer related to Gadamer's ontological analysis of 'play' in *Truth and Method* (1975) than to, say, Marcuse's Neo-Freudian and subjectivistic re-interpretation of Schiller's ideal of aestheticized ethos (Marcuse 1955). Although Gadamer explicitly seeks distance from Kant's and Schiller's subjective interpretation of 'play' (Gadamer 1975, 102), his definition of play as "transformation into structure" (110) resembles the crucial 'objective' component in aesthetic practice that Schiller also alludes to when he makes 'technique' a condition for freedom in appearance. Certainly, Gadamer's emphasis on pure appearance of what is played, in contrast to the intentional states of the

players, overlaps partially with the impersonal characteristic of Kleist's marionettes. This becomes particularly obvious when Gadamer points at impersonal expressions such as "the play of light" or "the play of the waves" (104). Yet the ontological autonomy of play as structure also defines human play that is interwoven with intentionality:

The playing field on which the game is played is, as it were, set by the nature of the game itself and is defined far more by the structure that determines the movement of the game from within than by what is comes up against [...] it seems to me characteristic of human play that it plays something. That means that the structure of movement to which it submits has a definite quality which the player 'chooses'. (Gadamer 1975, 144)

The example of (physical) queuing might help demonstrate a categorical connection between Gadamer's ontological analysis of play and Schiller's notion of grace and gentility, that, if interpreted as social practices, no framework of moral perception should overlook. Queuing can be seen as a miniature social system that is essentially linked to the social construction of time (see Mann 1969). In light of my discussion hitherto, it is a kind of 'play' that can be performed gracefully, similar to the English dance Schiller uses as an example. Grace would definitely call for subtle dispositions in relation to movements in public space when one joins a group that is waiting for something. Whether one grants exceptions, how someone who jumps the queue is addressed, or which temporary adjustments in the line-up are deemed acceptable when a newcomer sees a friend who is already waiting in line, are all issues that contribute to the overall functioning of this particular social subsystem. There are definitely different cultural forms of (mis)handling queuing, and there is certain room for personal interpretation of the playfield, yet common graceful behavior and interaction would certainly demonstrate a kind of 'objective' social ethos that echoes Gadamer's aesthetic ontology of play. What is now particularly interesting is that 'graceful queuing' rests also on material conditions. If a group grows into a critical mass, or the available public space is too small for a decent line, for instance, the game cannot be played gracefully, independent from the players' ethos.

The structural objectivity of play and social practices, i.e. human (inter)action, contradicts only on the surface with Schiller's demand for

genuine personal sensation and motivation. Rather, the structural autonomy of play appears necessary in order to establish technique and regularity in what Schiller calls 'beautiful acting'. While for Schiller grace reflects the "portion of the intentional movements to which the intention of the subject is unknown" (Schiller *GD*, 190), Gadamer specifies that this unintentional element needs an objective counterpart in order to be comprehensive: "The real subject of the game [...] is not the player but instead the game itself. What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play, and keeps him there is the game itself" (Gadamer 1975, 106).

Gadamer acknowledges the "seriousness" (106) of playing as the enjoyment in framed decision-making and risk taking. Schiller, however, adds an explicit requirement of authenticity that, one could conclude, must naturally occur when someone is "drawn into play". For Schiller, as already underscored with reference to Kleist's marionettes, artful techniques without genuine sensation must remain a parody of grace:

It is true that a man, by dint of art and of study, can at last arrive at this result, to subdue to his will even the concomitant movements; and, like a clever juggler, to shape according to his pleasure such or such a physiognomy upon the mirror from which his soul is reflected through mimic action. But then, with such a man all is dissembling, and art entirely absorbs nature. The true grace, on the contrary, ought always to be pure nature, that is to say, involuntary (or at least appear to be so), to be graceful. The subject even ought not to appear to know that it possesses grace. (*GD*, 192)

Moral affordances of a particular situation create potentially ambiguous and continuously orderable proprioception whose valence and strength are crucial in deciding whether one acts in accordance, or against applicable moral principles. An annihilation of cognitive dissonance in this interplay, i.e. grace, is not only a matter of whether an agent has been able to reshape her natural moral dispositions. Further, she has to become confident that her action's recipient would actually perceive her spontaneous conciliation of inclination and reason as graceful. Such a framework of mutual understanding through acting and perceiving must be embedded in common social practices. Without the structure of 'social play', like in Schiller's paradigmatic example of the English dance, nei-

ther the expression nor the perception of grace would be possible.

Subsequently, grace correlates with socially constituted moral abilities, i.e. the creation and perception of movements and expressions in social space that are dignified and morally beautiful. In this view, direct moral perception is not merely concerned with the epistemic detection of virtue or vice, but with both the *sensation* and the *creation* of moral beauty, freedom and love, which only can be achieved when moral dispositions are brought into harmony with moral and fact related beliefs. Schiller's moral writings serve here as a reminder that ethics must not overlook that without adequate social platforms that facilitate a common moral 'semiotics', this process can hardly be initiated and cultivated.

VII

I have argued that Schiller's moral philosophy promotes both the naturalizing and 'politicizing' of moral perception. Its notion of grace suggests an expansion, if not redirection of the philosophical analysis of direct moral perception as it is presented in contemporary moral philosophy. Particularly, Schiller implicitly abandons both the subject-object and acting-perceiving dichotomy and is thus in line with certain theoretical implications of contemporary psychology and social cognitive neuroscience. Further, my deconstruction of Schiller's moral philosophy could be summarized in the ontological claim that the social and the moral world essentially coincide, since both generate from our actions and perceptions. Schiller's secondary notions of movement and technique stipulate that the physiognomy and expression of actions are essential not only for how they are morally perceived, but also for the determination of what encompasses the moral world, which current theories of moral perception tend to overlook.

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