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Schiller's Interpretation of the 'Critique of the Power of Judgement' — A Proposal

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ABSTRACT. Contrary to standard interpretation, Schiller does not attempt to refute Kant in his early writings of the 1790s, even though his *Kallias-Letters* are based in a critical review of the third critique. His criticism, however, pertains primarily to Kant's neglecting of the analysis of objects that are subject to aesthetic evaluation. While such an analysis appears to be beyond the scope of transcendental aesthetics as presented in the third critique, Schiller consequently seeks to provide something to that affect and furthermore endeavours to develop objective criteria without subordinating the judgement of taste to the concept of objects.

This is made possible on account of Schiller changing the perspective from a transcendental analysis to the application of said analysis to an empirical object.

Rather following than refuting the (subjective) requirements of the free play of the cognitive faculties, Schiller brings forward the essence of beauty as *freedom in the appearance*. Consequently, beauty requires any given object to allow the impression as if it had not been shaped by an artist.

Schiller holds that for this impression to be possible, the object has to display such properties upon which the idea of self-determination or freedom can be transferred. Whereas the subjective capacity of reason is a necessary element, it must additionally be accompanied by an occasion, as it were, in the object.

If Schiller's idea of an objective criterion can reasonably be deduced from Kantian aesthetics, as Schiller appears to suggest, it might be possible to shed some light on two rather interesting elements with regards to aesthetics. Firstly, a criterion which correlates directly with an object that is to be aesthetically arranged offers some guidance as to the actual shaping of the aforementioned object. Secondly, Schiller touches the aspect of realising and by doing so improving one's own taste.

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1. Introduction

Much attention and philosophical scrutiny have been given to Kant's remarks on aesthetics in his third critique. Friedrich Schiller, however, albeit one of the most important poets in German literature and a self-proclaimed Kantian yet fails to gain philosophical interest when it comes to his early writings on Kant and aesthetics. Instead especially the Kallias-Letters have been met with strong scepticism by scholars and have subsequently been dismissed. Schiller's early project of developing an objective criterion of beauty did not seem at all to be compatible with Kant's transcendental idealism.¹

Consequently, many scholars have primarily concerned themselves with analysing the ever so many discrepancies between Schiller and Kant, resulting in a mainly one-sided reception of Schiller's Kallias-Letters, while the great potential that lies in this contribution to aesthetics has been overlooked.²

Contrary to standard interpretation, I shall therefore attempt to show that Schiller did not take it upon himself to refute Kant, but rather to develop his findings further with regards to an art theory.³

As ambitious as this may seem, this paper is necessarily going to remain rather modest. I am going to restrict myself exclusively to the Kallias-Letters⁴ since their proper understanding serves as a prerequisite of the understanding of any following philosophical writings, the aesthetic education for instance. Furthermore instead of proposing an entire interpretation of the Kallias-Letters, I am merely going to point out a change of perspective that systematically connects the Kallias-Letters with the third critique.

¹ Cf. for instance Latzel (1975), Düsing (1967), Rosalewski (1912)

² Robert also considers Schiller to refute Kant, but at least attests the innovative character of his theory. Cf. Robert (2007)

³ Although Schiller's own account of his adoption of critical philosophy is highly ambivalent, I refer to a very clear statement that he makes in a letter to the prince of Augustenburg. Cf. FA VIII, p. 493-494

⁴ In the following all direct citations from the Kallias-Letters will be cited according to the translation by Berstein which is the only one I found to be suitable. I owe the reference to a remark which Frederick Beiser made in the introduction to his work *Schiller as philosopher: A re-examination*

As it will hopefully become clear, Schiller is not concerned with furthering Kant's insights on the transcendental structure of the judgement of taste. In fact, he presupposes those findings and asks—from the perspective of an art critic and an artist—what properties a specific object has to display in order to be at the center of an aesthetic judgement. In other words, what sort of depiction is able to invite an agent to make a judgement of taste?

Although Kant's transcendental perspective does not involve an analysis of the specific objects that can or are to be aesthetically evaluated, the third critique offers some comments as to the products of art.

That is where I shall begin and then proceed to examine Schiller's criterion in view of the aforementioned change of perspective. Finally, I am going to exemplify my findings for which I am going to make use of two descriptive scenarios, both of which are provided by Schiller himself.

2. Products of Art

Reviewing Kant's stand on aesthetic objects it is apparent that the only thing that can be evaluated—or reflected upon, rather—if we are passing a judgement of taste, is the form of the given object or the representation thereof.⁵ To be more precise it is the form of finality that can be encountered as long as the object does not overwhelmingly display any end to which it has been designed. Of course, an object that has been produced as a means to an end, too, can be at the center of a judgement of taste—were the power of judgement not to consider the purpose.⁶ Otherwise, it would be a teleological judgement.

But for the sake of my paper, I am going to exclude each judgement that happened by chance, if you will. Instead, I will only concern myself with objects that are specifically designed to cause aesthetic pleasure. Not only

⁵ In the following the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (denoted as KU) is cited according to the pagination of the first edition from 1790 (denoted as A). I favour this edition to the *Akademieausgabe* which serves as the standard edition to be cited amongst Kantian scholarship on account of Schiller only having read the first edition from 1790.

⁶ There is a remark that seems to indicate that there are objects or forms that are more suitable than others with regards to an aesthetic evaluation. Cf KU A 69-73; moreover Esser (1997), p. 162f

does this condition seem useful regarding the subject of willfully designed objects, or in other words the arts, but it also meets with the criteria that Kant applies in his division of the different kinds of the concept of art itself.

The term of *aesthetic art* contains two different meanings. On the one hand it describes any kind of product that is supposed to entertain an audience and in doing so cause direct sensory pleasure. On the other hand it includes products which are specifically designed to cause aesthetic pleasure.⁷ Thus, such pleasure is the result of the reflection of the power of judgement and correlates directly with a specific harmony of the cognitive faculties.⁸ I will not be able to discuss the free play of the faculties here any further since it is a far too controversial part of Kant's aesthetic theory.⁹

What seems to be far more important in light of Schiller's reading of the critical philosophy is a rather particular observation which Kant makes regarding the arts and their evaluation.

He remarks that each product of art, simply in order to be a product of art, not a mere result of chance, must have an end that it is supposed to fulfill.¹⁰ This seems quite obvious since a product of art is a product of an artist who intends to depict something specific. He has to shape an object and therefore has to have some conception about the form of this object.

What does that entail for the object in relation to the judgement of taste? While a product of art must necessarily have an end, a judgement of taste must not be based upon such end or concept of the object that it is reflecting upon.¹¹ Consequently, the artist is required to shape an object to such an extent that it does not display its end, or as Schiller might say, its logical nature (logical nature here being merely another word for what

⁷ KU A 175

⁸ KU A 27-32

⁹ A systematical interpretation of the free play of the faculties with regards to Schiller's adoption of this key element of Kantian aesthetic remains to be delivered. That Schiller has, in fact, adopted the free play to some extent is highlighted in the fifth Kallias-Letter. "Since the understanding is the faculty which searches out the ground of an effect, the understanding must be put into play. The understanding must be spurred to reflect upon the form of the object: merely about the form, for understanding has only to do with form." Bernstein (2004), p. 161

¹⁰ KU A 178

¹¹ *ibid.*

Schiller understands under concept).¹²

Taking recourse to the beginning of my first point, the product of art is required to display a form of finality without presenting any purpose that has been given to it by an exterior influence, in this instance, the artist.

What does that entail for the concept of art which Schiller finds in the third critique and is going to be the basis of his own thoughts on the matter? It is precisely the point when the aforementioned change of perspective sets in. Moreover, it brings me to my second part.

3. Schiller's Change of Perspective

Let me try and make clear why this change of perspective and Kant's remark on the mechanical requirement of each object that has purposefully been shaped proves to be quite so important with regards to the issue of Schiller's interpretation of Kant.

In the first and very short letter of the Kallias-Letters Schiller intends to compare his own approach on the matter of beauty and aesthetics with Kant's critical philosophy. He reassures the reader, his friend Körner, that a judgement of taste does not and must not require a concept of the object or otherwise. However, he proceeds to remark that each product of art and most of all aesthetically valid objects in nature do have a purpose, an end. Since Kant's transcendental perspective does not allow him to bind aesthetic evaluation to the concept of an object, Schiller indeed appears to refute Kant by stating that each such object is bound naturally to its logical nature which then, however, has to be overcome by the artist through an aesthetically valid design. In the first Kallias-Letter Schiller concludes as follows.

“Kant wanted to cut precisely this knot by assuming a *pulchritudo vaga* [free beauty] and *fixa* [fixed], and by claiming, rather strangely, that every beautiful thing which is subsumed under the concept of a purpose is not a pure beautiful thing at all; that an arabesque or something similar, which is seen as beautiful, is seen as purer in its beauty than the highest beauty of humanity. I think that this observation may have the great advantage of being able to separate the logical

¹² FA VIII, p. 301

from the aesthetic. Ultimately, however, this observation seems to miss the concept of beauty completely. For beauty presents itself in its greatest splendour only once it has overcome the logical nature of its object, and how can this be done if there is no resistance? How can it provide a form for completely formless material?"¹³

If one is to look closely enough, it becomes apparent that the often claimed tension between the two thinkers does not find any foundation in Schiller's claims. He simply argues from a different point of view that does not separate him from Kant at all, but, in contrast, is already incorporated in the third critique.

While Kant argues that a judgement of taste can either be free or adherent, depending on whether the judgement is not at all or partially based upon a concept, Schiller argues that a product is always determined by a purpose. Kant argues as a transcendental philosopher, whereas Schiller argues as an artist.

It is due to this change of perspective that certain difficulties, even in Schiller's own evaluation of his interpretation of Kant's critical philosophy, have been arising.

If my argument is valid so far, Schiller's approach can be characterised as follows. If a judgement of taste indeed has a priori character whose transcendental requirements can be analysed and isolated, what does that entail regarding the artistic process and the evaluation of an object? Schiller's simple thought seems to be: if the judgement of taste has transcendental requirements, an object has to, as it were, match those requirements. It has to reflect those requirements, a form of finality without presenting any purpose for instance, and in this way encourage an agent to pass an aesthetic judgement. In order to shed light on the matter precisely how an object would have to be designed in order to meet these requirements, it is necessary to develop an objective criterion. This is not supposed to determine the judgement of taste which is, as Kant repeatedly stated, simply not possible, but rather to invite someone to pass a judgement of taste. Thus, taste remains a necessary element of the equation, but the artist is not completely left to chance, as one might put it.

¹³ Bernstein (2004), pp. 146-147

In the following I am not going to get into the issue why Schiller identifies beauty with self-determination or freedom; nor will I discuss paragraph 59 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.¹⁴ As with the free play of the faculties, the answer to these questions, albeit interesting and precisely at the core of Schiller's interpretation of Kant's critical aesthetics, would require a far more detailed analysis than I am able to offer at this point.¹⁵

In part following the form of finality Schiller brings forward the essence and definition of beauty as *freedom in the appearance* which determines the display or rather depiction of freedom as the essential element of beauty. Since in accord with transcendental idealism freedom is an idea and as such not a phenomenon of the material world and can therefore not be represented in it, Schiller demands the artist only to shape the object with the result that it purports to be free. Hence, beauty requires any given object to allow the impression as if it had not been shaped by an artist—beauty of art that is. But since Schiller, again in accordance with Kant, holds that beauty of art has to appear as nature and vice versa, his argument still applies.¹⁶

So Schiller makes good on his claim that a product of art, or any given object really that is supposed to be open for a judgement of taste, would have to overcome its logical nature. In order to succeed in doing so it has to appear self-determined, which seems to clarify what Schiller means when he talks about the freedom of an object. His basic thought being that a product that represents its purpose seems to be determined by an exterior influence and ergo does not allow a judgement of taste. Consequently, it has to appear self-determined.

“Of course reason is necessary to make such use of the objective qualities of things as is necessary in the case of beauty. But the subjectiv-

¹⁴ Nevertheless a proper understanding of paragraph 59 and its connection to the Kallias-Letters is a crucial part of any interpretation of Schiller's works altogether.

¹⁵ Cf. footnote 10. Cf. also Esser (1997), p. 163-186

¹⁶ Certainly, this argument requires a more detailed analysis. But since Schiller's concept of technique is beyond the (narrow) scope of this paper, I am not going to get into that. It is, however, interesting to note that according to Schiller his concept of technique derives directly from Kant's claim that a work of art must appear as nature and vice versa. Cf. KU A 177-178

ity of this use does not negate the objectivity of this ground, for even the perfect, the good and the useful are constituted such that their objectivity rests on much the same basis. 'Of course the concept of freedom itself or the positive aspect of reason are only placed into the object by considering the object under the form of the will, but reason does not give the negative aspect of the concept to the object since it finds it already present. The ground of the object's already granted freedom thus does lie in it itself, although freedom lies only in reason.'¹⁷

In other words, the artist is to shape the object to such a degree that it allows an agent to transfer the idea of his own self-determination, his own freedom so to speak, upon the object. Although the transfer of the idea of freedom remains a capacity of an agent's subjective faculties, Schiller holds that for the transfer most likely to happen the object has to display such properties upon which the idea of freedom can be transferred. Whereas the subjective capacity of the power of judgement remains, of course, a necessary element of the process, it must additionally be accompanied by an occasion, as it were, in the object—at least as long as one is arguing from an artist's point of view. Regarding beauty of nature, however, an objective criterion can give aide as to the question why a certain arrangement has pleased an agent.¹⁸

As a result Schiller presents us with a transcendently based criterion which correlates directly with an object that is to be aesthetically arranged and thus offers some guidance as to the shaping of the aforementioned object. Thereby allowing the artist to have recourse to some sort of rules or rather a set of guidelines in the artistic process.

4. Application of this Theory

Schiller's theory does beg the question, what *freedom in the appearance* or self-determination is supposed to mean exactly or how these awfully ab-

¹⁷ Bernstein (2004), p. 167

¹⁸ Schiller's entire project appears to allude to Kant's concept of art criticism which he develops in paragraph 34 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*. There he holds that any given aesthetic object should be evaluated with respect to the transcendental findings.

stract terms could ever be applied to an object of art, let alone entail an entire art theory. This brings me to my third and final point.

Since Schiller's criterion cannot determine, but is supposed to guide an artist as well as an agent passing a judgement, it can only be made quite clear by applying it to a scenario.

A draught horse, for instance, that has been carrying out its purpose year after year will show grave signs of this rather strenuous and exhausting work. The load that it has been pulling will have rendered its movements clumsy and accordingly it is going to show a certain weariness.¹⁹ The strength that it has to summon in order to do its work does not come easily and certainly not by the mere nature of the horse. It has to surpass his usual amount of strength in order to move the load, and therefore its movements are determined by that load or indirectly the will of its owner. That is why such a horse, or the depiction thereof, would not appear to be self-determined since its entire body clearly shows the influence of an exterior force. One can plainly observe its purposiveness as well as its purpose.²⁰

A Spanish palfrey, however, which has never been used to any form of labour, as it were, is not driven by anyone but itself; or at least it does not appear to be in the analogy. Its every move is solely determined by its instinct, its very nature; nothing but its instincts guide its steps. It does not serve any other purpose than its very own. For its nature—which is to be conceived as the totality of its parts and their relation to one another in contrast to everything that is accidental to the object²¹—seems to lie exclusively within itself. As no exterior force can be discovered, as the palfrey remains throughout its depiction very well within its own right, it appears to be self-determined.²²

Accordingly, if a painter were to depict a landscape which is covered by the branches of a large tree, there would be two possibilities at his disposal to reveal the background.²³ He might make the tree drop its branches by an exterior force such as a strong wind or even at the hands of human be-

¹⁹ FA VIII, p. 303

²⁰ FA VIII, p. 302

²¹ FA VIII, p. 301

²² Ibid.

²³ FA VIII, p. 312-313

ings. In this case the tree would have been compelled to move its branches, therefore would not have acted voluntarily. It would have to step out of the restraints of its instinctive, or natural existence. Or to put it as follows: the basic reason why such a depiction does not display any self-determination is due to the fact that the artist endeavours very clumsily to bend its material in order to serve a certain mechanical purpose which destroys all signs of freedom. One does very well notice that the branches have been moved in order to show the background; thereby clearly revealing the influence of the artist rather than the voluntary behaviour, as it were, of the tree itself.²⁴

Alternatively, and this is the course to be taken according to Schiller, the painter could choose an older or wilder tree that drops its branches voluntarily as well as peacefully in order not to carry the entire weight thereof. Its depiction would, then, be that of an object determined by its own nature, by the harmonic interaction of its parts.²⁵

In spite of the fact that all descriptions of objects of art with regards to what renders them beautiful must seemingly remain within the realm of a metaphorical account—thereby even more emphasizing the point that Schiller could not possibly have striven to develop an objective criterion of beauty in terms of a determining objective property—the basic thought which he attempts to express is as follows. Any depiction that is supposed to evoke aesthetic pleasure must not appear to be shaped by an artist, but rather to be a result of self-imposed, as it were, rules or actions.²⁶

As much as it allows an audience to enjoy the landscape, it allows them to see the idea of self-determination. The easily and gracefully moving palfrey as much as the peacefully resting tree allow or encourage—one might even go as far as to say, to a certain degree it demands—the view of freedom, of an idea to which only a human being could ever aspire. Each product of fine art as well as each aesthetic object within nature grants us such an experience and therefore bears witness to our most noble cause.

²⁴ FA VIII, p. 314

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ In this regard it is going to prove useful to take a closer look at the concept of *beautonomy* which Kant considers to be the principle of the power of judgement. Particularly how Schiller incorporates this notion of a self-imposed principle with respect to beautiful objects. Cf. FA VIII, p. 306

5. Conclusion

I am going to end on this note. Perhaps this fragment is able to give an inkling as to the broad horizon of Schiller's rather original thinking. Of course, I have merely hinted at the depth of his aesthetics and subsequent works; a complete systematical interpretation of the Kallias-Letters on the grounds that have been proposed in this paper yet remains to be delivered.

But I do hope that it has become clear why I am advocating for the opinion that the Kallias-Letters ought to be interpreted in the proposed regard. Namely to clarify the requirements of a product of art as well as the evaluation thereof in light of the transcendental structure of a judgement of taste.

It is my strong belief that from this understanding (alone) Schiller's examination of Kantian philosophy ought to be re-evaluated (and could adequately be appreciated).

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