

Humanities 4: Lecture 19

Friedrich Schiller: On the
Aesthetic Education of Man

Biography of Schiller



- 1759-1805
- Studied medicine
- Author, historian, dramatist, & poet
- The Robbers (1781)
- Ode to Joy (1785)
(Beethoven's 9th)
- With G in Weimar
- William Tell (1804)

Historical Background

- French Revolution in Germany
 - Sympathetic to some aspects (esp. freedom), not to others (mob violence).
- Political Goals
 - Liberal political agenda
 - Religious renewal
- Kantian Philosophy
 - Emphasis on reason and autonomy
- Classicism
 - Greeks possessed ideal of unity of reason & passion, wisdom & art, but it was destroyed.

Summary of Lecture

- Statement of Main Thesis and Problem (2-3)
- Conditions for Solution of Problem (4)
- Analysis of Current Situation (5)
- Historical Situation: From Greece to today (6)
- Proposal for Current Situation (7)
- Means for Achieving Solution (8)
- General Description of Solution (9)
- Beauty's Specific Role for Freedom & Morality (21-24)

On the Aesthetic Education of Man: Main Thesis (2-3)

- Main Thesis: Aesthetic experience is necessary for humans to become free & moral.

- Some third thing is needed to effect transition from state of nature to moral community. Can't be physical character, since that is violent, & can't be moral char. since that is precisely what needs to be established.

- Relation to Kant's position.

- S agrees with the content of Kant's practical philosophy.

- S disagrees that Kant has explained fully how human beings can become moral. Unity of feeling and reason (head and heart) rather than contrast. Aesthetics is means.

- Example?

Conditions for Transition (4)

- Man will be properly educated only if unity is achieved with multiplicity.
 - In person: he does not sacrifice his principles for his feelings or his feelings for his principles.
 - In state: The individuals in a state submit to the state only because the state serves the individuals.
- But the state can serve the individuals only if the individuals have a proper conception of the state.

Analysis of Current Situation (5)

- With the French Rev., illegitimate govts have been unmasked.
 - Physical possibility of transition is present.
 - Viewing man as end in himself and freedom as the basis of political association.
- Man, whether crude and lawless or corrupted by culture, is not yet ready for a moral state.
 - Lower classes are coarse, lacking sense of freedom
 - Civilized are either lazy or perverse in their ideas.
- => Situation is dire.

Historical Development (6)

- Historical Thesis: Ancient Greece represents ideal we can learn from.
- Schiller's historical project:
 1. Explain what the ideal is that they represented.
 2. Explain what caused its demise.
 3. Explain how to bring it about.

The Classical Ideal (6)

- The greatest achievement of the Greeks
 - The union of diverse powers: creativity, reason, fantasy, poetic, speculative.
 - “united all the attractions of art and all the dignity of wisdom” (37).
 - Simplicity, union achieved unreflectively.
 - Nature provided man with this union.

The Demise of the Greek Ideal (6)

- What lead to the demise of Greek civilization: the intellect.
 - Specialization in science & new political structures (of ranks and associations) destroyed “the essential bond of human nature”.
 - Intuitive and speculative understanding came into conflict rather than harmonizing.
 - There are advantages to one-sided investigations and to competition between different faculties (e.g., more efficient operation of govt.). However, these cannot be our final end.

The Post-Greek Civilization (6)

- Political structure became “mechanical”.
- Divisions arose between
 - State and Church
 - Law and customs
 - Labor and pleasure
 - Means and ends
 - Effort and reward
- These divisions caused man to be fragmented, and to lack harmony and unity.
- Abstract life of state is alien to its citizens, and force rules, not reason and feeling.

Proposal (7)

- What needs to be done?
 - Restore unity in man (simplicity, truth & fullness), remove divisions that were created.
- How can this be done?
 - Not by the state, since the state is the cause of the division or else, in ideal form, does not yet exist.
 - Must be by man himself.
 - Conflict of blind impulses must be allayed.
 - Independence of character & freedom from despotism.
 - Unity of the ideal can then be introduced. (But how?)

The Means of Improvement in Man (8)

- Reason has discovered the moral law.
- As such, Reason cannot combat nature.
- Reason must find something in nature to battle nature, namely Enlightenment.
 - S seems to accept K's analysis, so what is needed is courage
 - S calls for an openness to have sensibility trained.
 - "The way to the head must lie through the heart".

How art can effect the transition (9)

- Beauty, like Truth, is a necessary, eternal, immutable and independent standard.
 - It contains its own authority, is thus free from conventions, and cannot be corrupted (by humans).
 - It concerns man's inner state (dignity and law), not his changing external circumstances (needs and desires).
- Art, by trying to produce the ideal, will elevate one's thinking
 - to the necessary and the eternal
 - (“gives the world the direction to the good”)
 - away from the finite and ephemeral.
- It is an object of impulse, thus effective on our sensibility, and capable of changing people's orientation.

Beauty, Freedom & Morality (21-3)

- Beauty does not itself produce any moral knowledge, or any particular result or purpose.
- Beauty makes it possible for man “on the part of Nature to make of himself what he chooses”.
 - Beauty gives man “the freedom to be what he ought to be”, which is “something infinite”.
 - What we make of ourselves through our freedom is a separate issue.
 - Beauty is our “second creator”.
 - “[T]he inevitable effect of Beauty is freedom from passions.”
- [Note: Nice summary of S’s general position in 23.]

Summary (I)

- The main problem S identifies is how to effect a transition in man from acting on his passions to acting on rational principles.
- S's solution is to claim that aesthetics is the necessary means.
 - Reason, divorced from the sensible, is ineffectual.
 - The sensible, if not guided by reason, is fallible.
 - Aesthetics engages the free play of man's sensible and intellectual faculties, thereby freeing man from the sensible and opening up the infinite.

Summary (II)

- S is not a proponent of the Enlightenment.
 - While he accepts reason, he stresses its limitations.
 - While he accepts freedom, it is not self-sufficient and the unity of man takes on a greater role.
 - S has a different view of history. Instead of steady progress from bad to good, man has a first period of achievement, followed by a decline, and then recovery.
- S is an early proponent of Romanticism
 - Aesthetics has deep metaphysical & religious import.
 - Unity among difference is a dominant thought.
 - The infinite makes an appearance.