

Humanities 4: Lectures 20-21

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)
- Justification of Solution in Human Nature (10-13)

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 represent 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 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.

Objection and Response (10)

- Why think that art and beauty are really necessary?
 - Historical counter-examples. Art flourishes only after freedom is on the decline.
- One must have the proper conception of art and beauty, one not based on experience.
 - S turns to the rational concept of beauty and is connection with the pure conception of humanity or human nature.

S's basic account of human nature (II-I2)

- Fundamental duality
 - Person vs. condition/state
 - Active vs. passive
 - Rational vs. sensuous
 - Atemporal vs. temporal/changing
 - Laws vs. instances
 - Morality vs. utility
 - Unity vs. plurality
 - Potentiality vs. actuality

Balancing the duality (I3-I4)

- The ideal, in which the two powers are harmonized, incorporates
 - the greatest fullness of existence of world
 - with the greatest freedom and autonomy
 - by drawing the world into himself (subjecting phenomena to the unity of reason).
- Two ways to depart from ideal
 - By letting either one of the two dominate the other.

Beauty and Man as Play (15ff.)

- Parallel structures to Man and Beauty
- Beauty is understood in terms of play
 - Aesthetic experience occurs when there is a free play of our faculties in interacting with the world.
 - Recall Kant's account.
 - Neither pure intellect nor pure desire
 - Beauty as “living shape”, which combines the objects of sense and form impulse.
- Man is wholly man only when playing.
 - The ideal of man requires a balance between our diverse faculties in interacting with the world.
 - The free play of our diverse faculties is Beauty.
 - Therefore, the ideal of man requires Beauty.

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.]

Text to Ode to Joy

Joy, beautiful spark of God,
Daughter of Elysium,
We enter, fire-drunk,
Heavenly one, your shrine.
Your magic reunites

What custom strictly parts.
All people become brothers
Where your gentle wing alights
Whoever has succeeded in the
great attempt

To be a friend to a friend;
Whoever has won a lovely woman
Mix in your joy!

Freude, schöner Götterfunken
Tochter aus Elysium,
Wir betreten feuertrunken,
Himmlische, dein Heiligtum!
Deine Zauber binden wieder

Was die Mode streng geteilt.
Alle Menschen werden Brüder
Wo dein sanfter Flügel weilt.
Wem der große Wurf gelungen,

Eines Freundes Freund zu sein;
Wer ein holdes Weib errungen,
Mische seinen Jubel ein!

Ode to Joy, cont.

Yes, who calls even one soul
His own on the earth's sphere!
And let whoever has never achieved this
Steal away crying from this group!
All beings drink joy

At the breasts of nature;
All the good, all the bad
Follow her trail of roses.
She gave us kisses and vines,

A friend, proven in death;
Great pleasure was given to the worm,
And the cherub stands before God.

Ja, wer auch nur eine Seele
Sein nennt auf dem Erdenrund!
Und wer's nie gekonnt, der stehle
Weinend sich aus diesem Bund!
Freude trinken alle Wesen

An den Brüsten der Natur;
Alle Guten, alle Bösen
Folgen ihrer Rosenspur.
Küsse gab sie uns und Reben,

Einen Freund, geprüft im Tod;
Wollust ward dem Wurm gegeben,
Und der Cherub steht vor Gott.

Ode to Joy, cont.

Glad, like his suns fly
Through heaven's splendid plan,
Run, brothers, your race,
Joyful, like a hero to the victory.
Be embraced, millions!

This kiss to all the world!
Brothers, over the starry firmament
Must live a loving father.
Do you bow down, millions?

Do you sense the Creator, world?
Seek him beyond the starry firmament!
He must dwell beyond the stars.

Froh, wie seine Sonnen fliegen
Durch des Himmels prächt'gen Plan,
Laufet, Brüder, eure Bahn,
Freudig, wie ein Held zum Siegen.
Seid umschlungen, Millionen!

Diesen Kuß der ganzen Welt!
Brüder, über'm Sternenzelt
Muß ein lieber Vater wohnen.
Ihr stürzt nieder, Millionen?

Ahnest du den Schöpfer, Welt?
Such' ihn über'm Sternenzelt!
Über Sternen muß er wohnen.

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.