Freedom in Appearance

Nature, Freedom, and Teleology in Schiller's "Kallias Letters"

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Introduction

The so-called "Kallias Letters" of Friedrich Schiller are a series of correspondences with Christian Gottfried Körner between January and February 1793 in which Schiller attempts to articulate and defend a provocative theory of beauty as 'the appearance of freedom.' In doing this, he sets himself the seemingly impossible task of reconciling this thesis with a self-professed adherence to the Kantian doctrines that (a) freedom is an idea of reason to which no corresponding sense-intuition can possibly be adequate;[1] and (b) all appearances (in the Kantian sense of sensible objects) must be governed by a the universal law of natural causality.

As if this task were not already challenging enough, he further intends to show how his aesthetic theory differs from Kant's by successfully grounding beauty in properties of the object itself and not merely its effect upon the subject. More precisely, he intends to ground such an effect in the objective nature of the objects. In sum, the enormous challenge of Schiller's theory is to somehow articulate a coherent sense in which natural things can objectively appear to be free, while also respecting, indeed insisting, that no appearance can be adequate to the rational idea of freedom.

Few have judged Schiller's project to be entirely successful. Frederick Beiser concludes his erudite analysis of the "Kallias Letters" with a final assessment which is quite representative of many who have worked through the "Letters". He writes, "Even when we evaluate Schiller in his own terms, his aesthetics is no unqualified success, but neither is it a complete failure" (2006, 74). And further on,

> Although Schiller could not supply a criterion of beauty, he still had an interesting and fruitful definition. Despite his failure to demonstrate it, there remains something very suggestive and plausible about Schiller's definition. (2005, 76)

The aim of this essay is to go beyond such half-hearted praise of Schiller's theory – to show, rather, that Schiller's account in fact contains a coherent concept of a kind of 'natural autonomy' exhibited by beautiful objects. Showing this, however, will require a different interpretive approach than Beiser's. The problem with the latter approach is, I will suggest, that it remains, as it were, *too faithful* to Schiller's 'own terms'. That is, it fails to do justice to the form in which the theory is developed by reading Schiller's account as though it were an ordinary philosophical work rather than what it actually is – namely, a series of letters in which Schiller is not only expounding a single theory but obviously straining himself to work out its main conceptual problems as he goes. The serious difficulties of

[1] Cf.Kant's *Groundwork* (Ak 4:452); *Critique of Practical Reason* (Ak 5:68) *Critique of Pure Reason* (A327/B384)

interpreting such a moving target can only be overcome by reckoning with the movement itself. In fact, part of the great and enduring interest of the 'Kallias Letters' consists in this fascinating display of the inner dialectic of Schiller's project – a dialectic in which Schiller is not only the driver but, frankly, sometimes the unwitting passenger.

My goal in this essay, therefore, is not to weave a water-tight theory out of the all the diverse strands of Schiller's account. To do so would be both futile and misguided. My aim, rather, is twofold: first, to bring into relief the *objective* dialectic of Schiller's project – that is, to display the guiding paradoxes which drive his account and to distinguish them from both the apparent and the real contradictions within his letters. Secondly, my aim is to explain Schiller's central notion of natural autonomy on which his theory of beauty is based, and through which many of those paradoxes can be resolved.

Specifically, I will argue that concept of natural autonomy which Schiller develops is essentially the Spinozan concept of *conatus*[2] and that, moreover, such a notion is at the same time Schiller's own innovative appropriation of the Kantian concept of *Naturzweck*.[3] By showing this, I will attempt to demonstrate how such a concept provides a meaningful sense in which a thing *within nature as a whole* can nonetheless act in accordance with a *specific* nature, and that such activity is *free* in the sense that it consists precisely in a thing's distinguishing itself from and, in this way, rising above mere nature in general. It nonetheless remains a mere 'appearance' of freedom, distinct from freedom as idea of reason, insofar as this 'self' of the natural thing remains at base an unconscious, merely objective 'self' and not a true subject. That is, it is ultimately a product of the 'mere nature' from which it distinguishes itself.

Preliminary Note

Before diving into the complexities of Schiller's account, I want to emphasize the very simple and intuitive thought which underlies his theory of beauty as freedom in appearance. This concept is inseparable from the experience of perceiving coercion or constraint in nature. To the extent that we perceive things in nature as constrained, coerced – that is, as (in some sense) heteronomously determined – we must also have some idea of a sort of '*self*' of the object and with it an idea of what it would be for that self not to be coerced, i.e. to exhibit a sort autonomy. Moreover, insofar as the perception of coercion displeases us – is even *painful* – the contrasting pleasure we take in observing nature must be related to the opposite of this perception – i.e. to the appearance of freedom.

Schiller's own project can be viewed as the attempt to conceptually vindicate this naive thought – that is, to show how and to what extent there is a certain truth in it, without entertaining any delusions of panpsychism or ascribing a literal self to natural objects. The first and basic questions to be asked are therefore (a) How are we to understand such a 'natural self'? (b) What is the relation between this 'selfhood' and the external appearance by which we judge it to be free or constrained? And (c) what is the relation between the form of this perception and the form of aesthetic judgment?

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[2] Note: my claim is that Schiller's notion is essentially similar to Spinoza's notion of *conatus*, even though Schiller does not specifically refer to Spinoza or his concept of *conatus* by name. Below I will consider the specific connection to Spinoza himself in more detail.

[3] A continual theme of the following paper will be to show that Schiller's theory of beauty essentially seeks to combat certain theses of Kant's "Critique of Aesthetic Judgment" through resources taken directly from Kant's "Critique of Teleological Judgment"

To examine Schiller's treatment of these questions, I will begin (Part One) by briefly mapping out the trajectory of his whole theory, not lingering too long on any argument but merely flagging (a) the central interpretative questions that must be resolved later; and (b) a number of correlates to Schiller's concepts in Kant's "Critique of Teleological Judgment," which will later show themselves to be central to Schiller's account of beauty. In Part Two, I will closely consider Schiller's discussion of a thing's nature, offering the interpretation of this nature as very closely corresponding to Spinoza's concept of *conatus* and explaining how this is to be understood. In Part Three, I will go back to show how a number of crucial interpretative questions can be unknotted through this understanding of a thing's nature.

Part One: A Brief Roadmap of the Theory

1.1. Deduction of the concept of beauty as freedom in appearance

Schiller introduces the definition of beauty as freedom in appearance through his very interesting, and indeed somewhat puzzling, a priori deduction, in which aesthetic judgment is given its own special role in the complete economy of reason – or as Schiller puts it, in the "family of reason."[4] To explain this role, he begins by outlining a catalog of reason, dividing theoretical and practical reason, and further dividing each of the latter according to their various objects and functions.

He writes, "Reason connects either representation with representation to gain knowledge (theoretical reason) or representation with the will in order to act (practical reason)" (8 Feb, 149). The objects of theoretical reason, he explains, are either intuitions or concepts, and the objects of practical reason are either free or unfree acts. Theoretical reason "applies its form" to *concepts* as practical reason does to *free acts*, for concepts and free acts are the products of their respective forms of reason and therefore must conform to those rational capacities. The two forms of reason likewise apply themselves similarly to *intuitions* and *unfree effects*, respectively. As neither of the latter are produced by reason, their agreement with reason will be contingent. Those cases which contingently agree with reason – though they do not come from reason– he calls "imitations (*analoga*) of reason" (8 Feb., 149). Thus, he writes,

> A willed act cannot be merely analogous to freedom, it must – or at least ought to– be truly free. A mechanical effect (any effect brought about by the laws of nature) on the other hand, can never be truly *free*, but can be judged to be merely analogous to freedom. (ibid)[5]

In accordance with this division, four kinds of judgment can be described. In the realm of theoretical reason there are logical and teleological judgments. The former, a constitutive judgment, is reason's evaluation of a "concept" – or, more precisely, that which has been produced in accordance with a concept (e.g. a clock) – according to the very concept by which it has come about. The latter (a regulative judgment) is reason's evaluation of an intuition – or that which has not been produced

[4] Schiller, Friedrich. "Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner (1793)." In Bernstein, J. M. 2003. *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. From 8 Feb. letter, 152. In subsequent quotations of the text, I will cite the date of the letter and the English translation page.

[5] Here and in all subsequent quotations, the emphasis is the author's.

according to a concept – according to an end which it must lend to the object in order to judge it. In the realm of practical reason, there are again two kinds: moral judgment (constitutive), or the evaluation of a (possible) act according to the form of free will; and aesthetic judgment (regulative), which "lends the object [...] a power to determine itself, a will, and then examines the object under the form of that will (not its [reason's] will, since this would yield a moral judgement)" (8 Feb., 151). Thus, he concludes,

> The *agreement* between a concept and a form of knowledge is in *accordance with the understanding* [*Vernunftmäßig*] (truth, purposiveness, perfection are merely terms for this), the analogy of an intuition with a form of knowledge is similarity to the understanding [*Vernunftfähigkeit*] [...], the agreement of an action with the form of pure will is morality [*Sittlichkeit*]. The analogy of an appearance with the form of pure will or freedom is beauty (in its most general sense). Beauty is nothing less than freedom in appearance. (8 Feb., 152)

This is truly the starting point and foundation of his exposition. The central questions I wish to consider about this deduction are the following: (a) How are we to understand the 'will' that practical reason lends the object? (b) What exactly is meant by 'analogy with the form of pure will'? and (c) In what sense can something even merely appear free? As I noted earlier, these questions cannot, I believe, be adequately answered until later on, but the following initial remarks will be important in that later evaluation.

Regarding (a). An initial similarity ought to be noted between Schiller's notion of lending the object a will and Kant's notion of judging purposiveness without purpose, e.g.:

> On the other hand, we do call objects, states of mind, or acts purposive even if their possibility does not necessarily presuppose the presentation of a purpose; we do this merely because we can explain and grasp them only if we assume that they are based on a causality that operates according to purposes, i.e., on a will that would have so arranged them in accordance with the presentation of a certain rule. Hence there can be purposiveness without a purpose, insofar as we do not posit the causes of this form in a will, and yet can grasp the explanation of its possibility only by deriving it from a will.[6]

It is clear in Schiller's account that Schiller has such a concept of purposiveness in mind, though the precise direction he takes this idea will be unique, particularly in light of the following considerations. In explaining the will or power to determine itself that is lent to an object, he notes that "the self of the rational being is reason, while the self of the natural being is nature" (8 Feb., 151). This notion of nature is precisely what Schiller picks up when he later describes a thing's own nature in more detail. This consideration leads us to the second question.

Regarding (b) – 'analogy of the form of pure will'. As Stephen Houlgate quite rightly points out,[7] the nature of an appearance's 'similarity to freedom' is *not* simply one in which the natural effects of an object (merely) *look as though* they exhibited moral autonomy. Rather, the criterion of

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[6] *Critique of Judgment* §10, 5:200 (Akademie pagination) Kant, Immanuel, and Werner S. Pluhar. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1987. In subsequent quotations I will cite the paragraph number and Akademie page.

[7] Stephen Houlgate (2008) "Schiller and the Dance of Beauty" , *Inquiry*, 51:1, 45. Houlgate cites as evidence the passage quoted above – namely, that practical reason "examines the object under the form of that will [the will that reason lends the object] (not its will, since this would yield moral judgment)"

freedom that it seems to exhibit is not the criterion of moral autonomy – i.e. acting from respect for the moral law, etc. – but rather a different criterion of freedom proper to sensible objects. The interesting relation between a *will* that has to be 'lent' to the object and the *object's nature* will have significant bearing on the question of how it is possible even for something merely to appear free, which is the next topic.

Regarding (c) – the mere appearance of freedom. Schiller acknowledges the potential difficulties of his conception of beauty even before his first articulation of the phrase 'freedom in appearance.' For he writes,

> But since this freedom is merely lent to the object by reason, *since freedom as such can never be given to the senses and nothing can be free other than what is supra-sensible* – in short, it is all that matters here that the object *appears* as free not really that it is so; thus the analogy of the object with the form of practical reason is not freedom indeed but merely *freedom in appearance, autonomy in appearance* (Feb 8., 151)

Both here and elsewhere Schiller makes quite clear that objects in nature are not really free, but may merely appear to be so. But the question that must be asked here, and which will be of utmost importance in interpreting Schiller's theory, is whether the qualification of *merely* appearing free makes the notion of freedom in appearance any more intelligible. That is, if freedom is not the kind of thing that can be given in appearance, then in what way is it possible for something even to merely appear self-determining? A plastic apple can have the mere appearance of a real apple only because a real apple has its own proper appearance (which the plastic apple mimics). But if something does not have any appearance at all (like a Kantian noumenon), then there is nothing to mimic, and the idea of even a false semblance becomes incoherent. Nothing can 'look like' a Kantian thing-in-itself. Schiller himself shows an intimation of this very difficulty, writing:

> I mentioned just recently that *freedom* does not really attach to any object in the sense-world though it may appear to do so. But it may not even appear to be positively free since this is merely an idea of reason to which no intuition can be adequate. But how can we seek an objective ground of this representation in things, insofar as they appear, if they neither possess nor show freedom? (23 Feb., 160)

The solution that Schiller offers for this problem leads me to the next stage on the roadmap of Schiller's theory – a fundamental paradox or antinomy in his account of the role of the understanding in aesthetic experience.

1.2 An antinomy regarding the role of the understanding

THESIS: That the understanding must be involved in aesthetic judgment

(i) Schiller's argument

Schiller's solution to the problem above is that although freedom cannot directly appear, it can nonetheless be represented negatively, as not-being-determined-from–the-outside. In this explanation, Schiller attributes a central role to the activity of the understanding in the representation of freedom – i.e. in aesthetic judgment. He writes that the representation of freedom as being-determined-

from-inside is the same as the negative representation of not-being-determined-from-outside. In explaining how this representation is achieved, Schiller writes:

> This requires that the thing itself, in its objective constitution, invites us, or rather requires us to notice its quality of not-being-determined-from-the-outside; this is because a mere negation can only be recognized if a need for its positive opposite is presupposed. (23 Feb, 161)

But how can the object do this? For Schiller, this requires that the object exhibit a kind of conspicuous absence of external determination. That such an absence be *conspicuous* is crucial -- the object must require us to notice that absence. This requires that the object "show itself as determined" (ibid) in such a way that prompts us to seek (but not discover) a ground of external determination. Accordingly, the object must appear in such a way that compels the understanding to search for the ground of its determinacy:

> 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. (ibid).

However, for Schiller the conspicuous determinacy which elicits the understanding's search for a ground is not merely that of an ordinary effect which induces one to look for a cause -- as smoke prompts us to seek out a fire. Rather, the object must exhibit a conspicuously unified form -- namely, the organization of something unified according to a rule. For Schiller, this means it must exhibit a technical form. In this way, it is clear that what Schiller means by the object's being 'determined according to a rule' is: *not* merely determined by blind mechanical causes.

> A form which points to a rule (which can be treated according to a rule) is art-like or technical. Only the technical form of an object compels the understanding to search out the ground of an effect and the relationship between determining and determined; and insofar as this form awakens a need to ask about the ground for determination, the negation of the being- determined-from-the-outside necessarily leads to the representation of being-determined-from- the-inside or freedom. (23 Feb, 162)

This technical form, however, only pertains to the conspicuous determinacy of the object. The further conspicuous *absence* of external determination requires that the object not appear to conform to some externally imposed technical form, in the manner that a clock has the appearance of something designed (by another, the clockmaker). Schiller expresses this in terms of our recognizing the rule-like unity of the object without recognizing the rule itself -- a version of the Kantian notions of 'purposiveness without purpose' and of the beautiful object's 'pleasing without a concept.'

Accordingly, it is clear that Schiller's account of the object's appearing 'not-determined-from-without' involves a kind of double negation. Through exhibiting a technical form – i.e. determination through a rule, a principle of unity of a manifold – an object distinguishes itself from the general flux of blind mechanism. This is one respect in which the thing makes itself noticed as not-determined-from-outside, and it is a kind of midpoint between pure outer determination and proper inner determination. For the latter, another negation must occur – namely, that the object's not being determined by blind forces of nature in turn not in turn be achieved through determination by an external rational agent.

Of course, that we merely do not recognize this external agency does not imply that we must think the object as not-determined-from-without; for we may just as well (as Kant suggests) think it determined by some unknown divine creator. So the question that must be asked, and to which I will later offer a solution is: Why should the technical form of the object appear *self-determined* and not determined by some unknown will or for some unknown purpose?

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ANTITHESIS: That the understanding must not be involved in aesthetic judgment

(i) Schiller's argument

The foregoing argument of Schiller's is very interesting. Houlgate thinks that it works and that Schiller has thereby indeed provided a ground for aesthetic judgment in the object (cf. 2008, 39-44). Beiser, on the other hand, thinks that the possibility of an object's appearing not-determined-from-the-outside is ruled out by the Kantian empirical realism he takes Schiller to subscribe to, according to which all phenomenal objects must appear determined from without (cf. 2006, 73). The strange thing is that Schiller himself had expressed almost exactly the same concern as Beiser's in his previous letter, writing:

> A form appears free as soon as we are *neither able nor inclined* to search for its ground outside it. For if reason were compelled to look for the object's ground, it would *necessarily* have to find it outside of the thing; it is determined either by a *concept* or by an accidental determination, both of which are heteronomous for the object. It is thus a tenable principle that an object presents itself as free in appearance, if its form does not compel reflective understanding to seek out a ground for it. (18 Feb, 155)

Schiller therefore concludes: "A form is beautiful [...] if it *demands no explanation*, or if it *explains itself without a concep*t" (ibid.).

(ii) Problems with the argument

There is a *direct contradiction* between this argument and the previous one. On the one hand, Schiller says that the reflective understanding must not be in any way involved, for as soon as it is, it is bound to find a cause external to the object. On the other, he says that the reflective understanding plays an indispensable role, for it is only through its activity of searching for a ground that the negative representation of freedom is possible.[8]

Beiser's objection, however, is somewhat flat-footed. For the question of reconciling the appearance of some sort of self-determination with the mechanistic principles of Kantian naturalism was, of course, raised by Kant himself. This is the basic problem of the "Critique of Teleological Judgment." Kant's solution will be that any principle of teleology would have to in some way show a compatibility between teleology and mechanism. But to simply state that Kant's conception of mechanistic causation alone rules out even the *semblance* of some sort of natural quasi-self-determination would be to ignore the whole project of the "Critique of Teleological Judgment." After all, Kant defines natural purpose, though in a special sense, as what is "both cause and effect of itself" (§64; 5: 370). Living

[8] Houlgate, in my opinion quite astoundingly, cites these two accounts not as contradictory but as entirely complimentary (cf. "Schiller and the Dance of Beauty," 43) In the end, I will argue that they can indeed be reconciled, but this will involve acknowledging that Schiller misspoke – that is, that he meant somewhat different things in each argument. But the arguments as Schiller gives them stand in direct conflict.

objects, for Kant, do *seem* to exhibit a certain form of self-causality and thus something analogous (if not identical) to true freedom. The question is whether this natural purposiveness is truly a mere *semblance* or whether a genuine natural purposiveness is at least thinkable (if not knowable to us).

In other words, Schiller's attempt to ground beauty in the object itself requires a concept of internal purposiveness which places his own dialectic into exactly the same conceptual territory as Kant's 'Dialectic of Teleological Judgment.' For the central questions are the same: Can we experience phenomenal objects as *grounded*, determined, without thereby necessarily experiencing them as externally determined? And can we reconcile the mechanism of nature with the appearance of internal teleology, internal purposiveness? In fact, as I will discuss in what follows, Schiller's attempt at an objective theory of beauty leads him to adopt an answer to the latter question which Kant explicitly acknowledges, names, and rejects. In effect, Schiller's complaint against the subjectivism of Kant's theory of beauty leads him likewise to develop an opposing theory to Kant's account of the status of teleological judgment -- judgments of life.

1.3 Nature in artfulness, natural perfection; autonomy and heautonomy

(i) Overview of the account

Following his account of the *negative* representation of freedom, Schiller's theory embarks upon a path to provide objective criteria for the application of his principle of beauty. In so doing, Schiller also introduces a number of concepts of a noticeably Spinozistic flavor which seem to depart from his earlier Kantian framework. In outlining this portion of Schiller's account, I will say very little, as a close examination of precisely this section will soon follow in which I will attempt to consider the relation between the Kantian and Spinozan elements of his account.

As I noted earlier, Schiller claims that the beautiful object must have a determinate form to elicit the understanding's search for a ground. He thus claims that a *technical* form is a necessary condition for the representation of beauty. However, this technical form must not appear to come from without but, in some way, from the inner nature of the object itself. He thus claims that beauty is *nature in artfulness* or *nature in technique* (23 Feb., 162 and 167). This, it seems, is a solution to one of our earlier problems, and we will soon have to consider whether and how it succeeds in resolving it.

He further elaborates this point by discussing a difference between *autonomy* – which he defines as a thing's determining itself through its own nature (23 Feb, 162) – and *heautonomy* – in which the object not only obeys its own rule, but also gives itself that very rule (23 Feb, 167) -- otherwise put, it is both self-determining and self-determined (23 Feb, 166). A technical object, or product of art, may, he claims, exhibit a kind of autonomy insofar as its form dominates its matter, but heautonomy is only possible when this form comes from the very existence of the formed thing, as is the case (or at least appears to be) in organic life.

To further illustrate these points, Schiller points to the difference between beauty and perfection. The difference is that perfection, as total unity of a manifold in accordance with its concept, is not beautiful so long as an idea external to the object's own nature or inner essence is required for this assessment. In the beautiful object, the unity of form must appear to come from the nature of the object itself. He summarizes this distinction neatly as follows:

> One might express what came before simply thus: an object is perfect if everything manifold in it

coincides with the unity of its concept; it is beautiful when its perfection appears as nature. (23 Feb, 169).

(ii) Traces of Kant

Much of Schiller's account bears a striking resemblance to concepts in Kant's "Critique of Teleological Judgment," and briefly pointing out these parallels will help offer some clues into what is going on in Schiller's theory. First, in the "Dialectic of Teleological Judgment," Kant mentions several metaphysical principles with which to possibly reconcile judgments of natural purpose with mechanistic causation in nature. He first divides those principles into two species: (1) those according to which the technical form of natural purposes is the manifestation of an actual intention -- what he calls "*technica intentionalis*" -- and (2) those according to which this technical form is not the product of an intention -- what he calls *technica naturalis* (§72; 5: 391).

That precisely this kind of theory is the one Schiller espouses (thus in opposition to Kant) is suggested not only through the obvious connection to his theory of *nature in technique* but also in its relation to something Kant says in his discussion of one such theory – namely, the Spinozan theory. Kant suggests one possible way of reconciling natural purpose with mechanism is the following:

> Of course we could use the expression, purposiveness of nature, for what the schoolmen call the transcendental perfection of things (relative to their own essence), which means [merely] that all things have in them everything that is required for being a thing of that kind rather than being a thing of some other kind. (§73; 5: 394)

Kant, however, immediately dismisses this idea, as "a childish game with words in the place of concepts" (ibid).

But this is precisely the move Schiller makes when speaking of determination of a thing through its own nature or inner essence. This remark is of utmost importance and must be noted and recalled in what is to follow. But before getting further into this, a few more preliminary remarks will be useful to note.

Another important connection to Kant is that Schiller's discussion of the difference between perfection and beauty is virtually identical to Kant's explanation of intrinsic natural perfection, in which more than one parallel between Schiller's account and Kant's can be made out:

> Strictly speaking, therefore, the organization of nature has nothing analogous to any causality known to us. Beauty in nature may rightly be called an analogue of art, since we attribute it to objects only in relation to our reflection on our external intuition of them, and hence only on account of the form of their surface. But *intrinsic natural perfection*, as possessed by those things that are possible only as natural purposes and that are hence called organized beings, is not conceivable or explicable on any analogy to any known physical ability, i.e., ability of nature, not even -- since we too belong to nature in the broadest sense -- on a precisely fitting analogy to human art. (*Critique of Judgment*, §65; 5: 375)

The relation here explained between the external intuition of the form of beautiful objects in nature and the difference between this and intrinsic natural perfection is a spitting image of Schiller's discussion of nature and technique, perfection and beauty. The other relation that must be noted is the intimate connection between Kant's notion of *natural purpose* and Schiller's notion of heautonomy, which will be of central importance in what follows.

Part Two: Nature and Conatus

2.1 Nature and autonomy

I hope to have made clear the extent to which Schiller's aesthetic theory is engaged with Kant's critique of teleological judgment. Of particular note is Schiller's apparent espousal (contra Kant) of a non-theistic principle of unintentional purposiveness of nature (*technica naturalis*) and his taking up of the idea of transcendental perfection in the form of determination through a thing's own nature – a topic which I will now consider.

Schiller defines the *nature of a thing* in the quite traditional way as what is essential to a thing, not merely accidental or coincidental to it. In other words, a thing's nature is what defines it. "Only that which makes the determinate object become what it is, is designated by the term nature" (23 Feb, 163). Thus he says that "It is as it were the person of a thing through which it is distinguished from other things which are not of its kind" (ibid).

Here it seems we finally meet again with the locus of an object's "power to determine itself, a will" that reason "lends the object" in making an aesthetic judgment (8 Feb, 151). Even there he referred to nature as the "self" of a natural object, writing:

> When a rational being acts, it must act on the basis of *pure reason* if it is to show self-determination. If a mere natural being acts it must act from pure nature if it is to show self-determination; for the self of the rational being is reason, while the self of the natural being is nature (ibid.)

So by acting "from pure nature" Schiller here means "determining itself through its [own] nature" (23 Feb., 163) – that is, determination by that which defines it, distinguishes it, its "inner essence" (23 Feb., 167).

How are we to understand this nature or inner essence? As a first go, a natural interpretation would be that in an animal or plant, it is the genus or species, i.e. general type; in an technical product – i.e. an instrument – it is its function; in a pure mathematical object, it is its form or perhaps the function which defines it, e.g. $f(x) = x^3$. But even when speaking of the autonomy of a technical thing, Schiller does not speak of its *use*, but rather, its technical form as such. Thus when he speaks of autonomy of a musical instrument, he makes no mention of playing the instrument, nor does he speak of the instrument itself – as technical form – as the ground of its autonomy, but merely says

> One might also say that this instrument has autonomy; one could say this as soon as one places the *auton* into thought, which is completely and purely law-giving and which has dominated matter. (23 Feb., 166)

Moreover he is very quick to qualify this sense of autonomy, for he writes:

> But if one places the instrument's *auton* into what is its nature and that through which it exists, the judgement shifts. Its technique is recognized as something foreign, something independent of its existence, coincidental, and is thus regarded as outside violence. (ibid)

This kind of autonomy, then, does not fully fit the bill, since it necessarily involves a violence on its constitutive matter, or, as Schiller puts it "what is its nature and that through which it exists."

On this basis, Schiller clarifies his concept of a thing's nature, writing,

> What would nature be in this sense? The inner principle of the existence of a thing, which can be at the same time seen as the ground of its form: the inner necessity of form. (ibid.)

The meaning of this definition will both be illustrated by and also help clarify the initial example Schiller gave of determination through a thing's own nature. Immediately after he introduced the concept, he gave the following example:

> All objects are heavy, but we count only that heaviness to an object's nature which brings about the specificity of the object. As soon as gravity acts on an object in itself and independently of any specific constitution of the object, functioning rather as a general force of nature, gravity is seen as a foreign power and its effects are seen as heteronomous to the nature of a thing (23 Feb., 163).

He illustrates this with the example of a vase, saying that a vase which ends in a broad belly reveals the dominance of general gravity over the specific form of the vase, and not that of form over gravity (ibid). Of course, if a thing's nature is, in the first instance, to be understood as the kind of thing something is, we would have expected Schiller to say that, for instance, a vase is determined by its own nature by, say, holding flowers rather than being empty. But in the definition he gives a different conception of a thing's nature jumps out – namely, not simply that which distinguishes one thing from other kinds of things, but rather *that which distinguishes it from nature in general* – that is, that which constitutes its particularity as such, or its *existence* as individual thing.

What would that kind of nature involve? First of all, it must presumably involve a fundamental negative relation toward nature in general whereby it *distinguishes* and maintains itself as something particular and in some way independent of the general flux of blind mechanism. Here the Spinozan principle that *all determination is negation* is useful. Part of the vase's basic distinction from mere clay matter is simply its ability to stand up, to hold its weight stably above the earth, and resist gravity's pull. It is fitting that Schiller use dominance over gravity as his first example of the meaning of a thing's own nature, as this basic ability not to be pinned down to the earth is fundamental to nearly all formed things. The great ignominy implied in the devil's curse to slither for eternity on his belly is a testament to this. Thus among the most basic forms of a thing's acting in accordance with its nature is its resisting the pull of gravity in some way.

Now with this understanding of a thing's nature, an interesting concept of a thing's autonomy presents itself – namely, that determination through a thing's own nature can be understood as *performing the very distinction whereby a thing sets itself apart from the rest of nature*. Insofar as a natural thing can only continue to exist insofar as it so distinguishes itself, this also has the meaning of a thing's *performing the way in which it exists at all, or performing the principle of its existence* – i.e. preserving its existence.

With this interpretation, a new light can be shed on the definition of nature we recently looked at – namely the relation between that definition – i.e. "The inner principle of the existence of a thing, which can be at the same time seen as the ground of its form: the inner necessity of form" and Spinoza's concept of conatus: "The conatus with which each thing endeavors to persist in its own

being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing itself."[9]

It is important to note that, for Spinoza, conatus is not to be understood as some kind of raw life force buried within an individual thing, but rather the particular form of causal power whereby a thing exists as a determinate mode of God at all (cf. *Ethics*, proof of Pr. 6, III). It is for this reason that a thing's *conatus* and *actual essence* are one and the same.

The intention of drawing this comparison, however, is not, in the first instance, to claim that Schiller's concept of a thing's nature is taken explicitly from Spinoza, nor is it by any means to import all of the conceptual commitments that come along with this concept in Spinoza's own work. My purpose is but rather to note the similarity to the concept of conatus in order to bring out a couple essential features within Schiller's own concept: namely (1) that the nature of a thing is not an occult quality over and above its form or its existence, but it is merely the very form by which it has existence at all – the activity of the preservation of its integrity vis-à-vis the rest of nature, and (2) the idea that the identity of the individual thing does not consist in something like a material substrate, but rather a unity of action, or simply activity – its *actual* essence.[10]

Moreover, the interpretation of a thing's nature as conatus clarifies an element of Schiller's account that would otherwise seem inexplicable – namely, the fact that nature, in Schiller's sense, appears not only as something particular to things (an individual essence) but also as individuality as such. Thus, he writes that "We perceive everything to be beautiful, however, in which mass is completely dominated by form (in the animal and plant kingdom) and by living forces (in the autonomy of the organic)" (23 Feb., 164). This is what allows him to say that a horse is more beautiful than a crab, and a bird more beautiful than all. If autonomy just meant, say, perfection in one's own kind, then this would be absurd: a crab is a crab just as much as a bear is a bear, a horse is a horse, or a bird is a bird. But if heautonomy/autonomy is to be understood, as I mentioned earlier, as a thing's *performing the act in virtue of which it exists as individual*, then to this extent overcoming of gravity as such will a measure of freedom for all massive things. In other words, a particular creature, in virtue of being a bird, is more capable of exhibiting its individual independence from nature.

2.2 Autonomy and Heautonomy

It is clear on this concept of a thing's nature that heautonomy is not something added to autonomy, but rather as the meaning of autonomy itself in the case that the nature of a thing (unlike a technical object) is itself the principle of the thing's existence. Such a concept avoids two difficulties: (a) the idea

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[9] *Ethics* Pr. 7, I. Spinoza, Benedictus de., Michael L. Morgan, and Samuel Shirley. *The Essential Spinoza: Ethics and Related Writings*. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2006. 67

[10] The question of the actual influence of Spinoza on Schiller's thought has been long debated. Rodney Taylor writes that "there is, to my knowledge, no direct documentary evidence to support the claim that Schiller ever read Spinoza" (1995: 5). Commonly cited evidence in support of a Spinoza connection are Schiller's highly pantheistic "Theosophy of Julius" and his 1782 poem "Spinoza". However, Ueberweg, for instance, writes these off as completely inconclusive (cf. Leipzig: 1884, pp. 34-39). Other arguments in support of a Spinozan influence have attempted to show strong affinities between concepts in the two thinkers (e.g. Taylor's essay; Schmid, 1905). Beiser himself mentions Schiller's Spinozan definition of freedom, but does not discuss the connection any further (2006, 223). It is highly likely that Schiller had some exposure to Spinoza (especially by means of Jacobi and the Spinoza controversy he initiated), and it seems to me that it is entirely plausible that Schiller may have been significantly influenced by some of Spinoza's ideas without having studied him thoroughly or even first-hand.

of a hidden will behind the phenomena; (b) any kind of, as it were, existentialist conception of heautonomy – i.e. that existence precedes and determines essence, or that a thing exists before being the kind of thing it is, and then somehow causes itself to be that kind of thing.

Even Beiser seems to tend toward a kind of existentialist reading of heautonomy, for he writes:

> Schiller's talk of heautonomy makes perfect sense once we realize that there are two very distinct kinds of questions we can ask about the essence or nature of a thing. There are the purely *taxonomic* questions: 'What does the object consist of?',or 'How do we distinguish it from other objects?' There are also the more *historical* questions: 'How did the object acquire its nature?','What made the object become what it is?'. The concept of heautonomy arises in answer to the second rather than first kind of question. It tells us that to be beautiful an object must appear to acquire its nature from within rather than from without, from its spontaneous energies and organic growth rather than as the result of external causes. (68)

Where Beiser's explanation goes wrong is in the answer he provides to how an object acquired its nature. For he says that a thing "acquires its nature from within," but what is this 'within' if not itself the inner essence or person of the thing – that is, its nature? This explanation seems to only say that a thing acquires its nature from its nature. Or else, that it acquires its nature from pure chaotic inner force, but if this is the case, it would only acquire its distinctiveness *later* as the result of some unrelated arbitrariness. But this would again be an existentialist reading of heautonomy – the thing's existence precedes and determines its essence.

This error, however, is inevitable so long as the relation between the form of the thing and its existence is articulated as a relation between *taxonomy* and *history*. If, on the other hand, a thing's nature is understood as a kind of conatus, then the relation becomes much different. This can be seen by the contrast to, for example, the concept which defines a particular instrument – i.e. its function. With an instrument, that *by which* the object was created is not the same as that *for which* it was created. A harp is built by the cutting and shaping of wood, by the stretching of strings, and it is maintained by the preservation of these qualities; but it is built *for* producing music. But the very form of the relation to the rest of nature by which an organism exists – that is, lives – is precisely that *for which* it exists – namely, preservation of this very form, in the individual and in the species.

Organic life is the inseparability of final cause and efficient cause,[11] ends and means, and thus, species and individual. Heautonomy therefore cannot be something *added* to this nature, either preceding or following it; it is the very form of its being, and thus can only be taken away from without[12]. With this interpretation of the meaning of a thing's nature, I now want to address the interpretative questions I posed in the initial outline of Schiller's theory.

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[11] Kant, of course, makes a similar comment regarding natural purposes in *Critique of the Power of Judgment* §65; 373.

[12] There is an analogy here between this claim (which is essentially about life) and Spinoza's claim that "No thing can be destroyed except by an external cause" (*Ethics* Pr. 4, II).

Part Three: *Technica Intentionalis* and *Technica Naturalis*:

Heautonomy, natural purpose, and the antinomy of the role of the understanding

3.1 Heautonomy and Natural Purpose

I mentioned before that Schiller's omission of Kant's concept of natural cause should not be assumed to have been accidental. But the significance of that omission can be seen through the difference between the concepts of heautonomy and natural purpose. In attempting to provide a possible metaphysical principle to reconcile natural purpose with mechanistic causation, Kant concludes that the most consistent and plausible (though of course unknowable) way of reconciling these two is by reference to the *supersensible*, of which, however "we cannot, from a theoretical point of view, form the slightest determinate and positive concept" (*Critique of Judgment* §78; 5:412). Moreover, the only way of preserving both the idea of teleology and mechanism is to subordinate the latter under the former, in such a way that, the mechanistic causes (like those of a man-made machine) are so aligned as to serve as the means for the purposeful end of a will (cf. §78; 415). Thus the principle that Kant proposes is one of *technica intentionalis* – that is, some sort of divine creator.

As I have noted, Schiller instead opts for a theory of *technica naturalis*, and specifically grounds the idea of freedom in an idea of heautonomy somewhat akin to what Kant calls transcendental perfection. In doing this, he does not assume a kind of supersensible will. Indeed what seemed to be such a supersensible will in his initial account – 'practical reason lends the object a will' – did not turn out to be an undetermined volition beyond the phenomena; instead it was something determinate – a thing's nature. But to what extent is this determinate, and moreover, is it something phenomenal? Houlgate, for instance, suggests that Schiller's account requires reading a Spinozist (regulative) idea of autonomy into the object (2008, 45). But this misses the whole distinction between such a nature and a kind of pure will.[13]

For in Kant's conception of a divine supersensible will, the agent is ontologically separated from the phenomena, which are merely its means. By thus isolating this will in the manner of an external relation of will-means-end, there is nothing in the phenomena that tells us how this will is determined, because this will itself is posited as something fundamentally simple and indeterminate – that is, as totally independent from the determinate phenomena it is thought to bring about. This is precisely the reason why freedom in the sense of moral autonomy cannot show itself, or even appear to show itself.

For on the Kantian picture, the pure will of rational beings, insofar as it must be thought *entirely* undetermined by anything outside it, must be thought as noumenon, or as merely an idea of reason, entirely hidden from appearance because all phenomena must appear in a chain of external causes. Of course, this has the radical implication that even my inner sense of a temporally extended process of about an action in accordance with the moral law must appear heteronomous to the free will, so that

[13] To the extent that Schiller himself says more than once that the idea of freedom must be added, lent (regulatively) to the object, I think that this ought to be read merely as a kind of cautious Kantian disclaimer, the meaning and necessity of which Schiller did not fully grasp. For he also insists that heautonomy is an objective characteristic in objects, and his whole concept of heautonomy does not fit the bill of requiring a pure idea of reason, as I am about to argue. Schiller's text contains plenty of minor unintentional infidelities to Kantian concepts, and we should not be so quick to take his application of them at their Kantian face value.

autonomy itself must be placed outside of time altogether in a purely intelligible *I.*[14] Schiller clearly recognizes and objects to this apparent alienation of the self as free will from the phenomenal self in his discussion of moral beauty, where he objects to the violence that practical reason thus seems to do to our concrete natural selves (cf. 19 Feb., 159).

This relation of externality between an inner *self* and its outer, phenomenal determinations, however, does not apply to Schiller's concept of heautonomy. For precisely as the form of existing of the object is not truly separable from its *inner essence* or *person*, the outer determinations are the determinations of the inner, that is, the content of the inner. The inner is simply the form of the outer. This can be seen more concretely by noting that, in the case of an organism, the means by which it exists are not entirely separable from the organism itself. This is the case not only for its organs but also for its means of subsistence. The cow eats grass, and the material/chemical determinations of the grass become that of the cow – i.e. the grass becomes cow.

The autonomy of the organic, as Schiller calls it, is not the autonomy of a noumenon from phenomena, but of a phenomenon from other phenomena and within the phenomenal world – that is, of one part of nature from and within the rest of nature. In this way, it is of course, merely a relative autonomy – which is to say, a kind of heteronomy. The freedom it has from nature always depends on nature. But insofar as this autonomy exists only through this relation, it is not opposed to all forms of external dependence, but rather, it has incorporated heteronomy into autonomy in such a way that it is no longer truly heteronomy.

3.2 The antinomy of the role of the understanding revisited

With the foregoing remarks, the question of the compatibility of mechanical causation and appearance not-being-determined-from-without has for the most part already been addressed, though a few remarks may be added. I spoke earlier of the fact that by appearing not-determined-from-without, Schiller meant, in the first instance, appearing distinct from mere blind mechanism by being determined according to a rule. The problem was then how this was possible without thereby appearing determined according to an external concept, and moreover, appearing *not* determined by any external concept – i.e. having a form without a concept, explaining itself without a concept.

The resolution to this problem lies in emphasizing the idea of *technica naturalis* – form of intention without intention. This can be better made intelligible through the idea of heautonomy I have explained – namely, there is no separation of will-means-end, but rather the means and end are not strictly divisible. That through which an organism exists is that for which it exists. *Will-means-end* becomes *end-means-end*, but because the end is truly the reproduction of this cycle itself, it can equally be represented as *end-end-end*, or what is exactly the same, *means-means-means*. In other words, the very fact that that by which a thing exists and that for which it exists is exactly the same removes all need for a reference to the prior representation of purpose in an external will. In this way, the understanding sees the form of purpose, but precisely because the end of that purposiveness is simply the very continuation of that form, the entire notion of prior or external representation of that purpose is canceled. It explains itself without a concept, because it is its own concept. Freedom is thus not a supersensible idea added to the thing, but the thing itself, as its own concept. In other words, heautonomy is being-for-itself.

[14] Cf. especially, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Ak 5:98)

Schiller himself did not quite make this final step, and this failure can be seen in his supposed proof of his theory of nature in technique – the curved line – which serves much better to disprove his theory. Schiller thus at times merely adds nature and technique to one another. In fact, the simplest example of nature in technique or heautonomy is not the curved line, but the natural whirlpool (or any cyclone for that matter). It *has* a form – circular movement – but it *is* itself nothing but the continuation of this form. There is no doubt that it is brought about by forces of nature, by the currents of the water, etc. But the whirlpool exists only as long as it keep spinning, and so the spinning is, in this sense, its own, because it is the spinning. That which contributes to its cyclical movement contributes to its autonomy; that which obstructs is heteronomous.

Conclusion: Freedom in Appearance

The previous analysis can be summarized as follows: by removing any form of external teleology from the idea of a thing's nature, Schiller's concept of heautonomy converts natural purpose or organic life into, as it were, an image of freedom. The connection between Schiller's view and Spinoza's concepts of nature and freedom has been noted by others,[15] but I have tried to show the broader consequences of this with respect to Schiller's concept of freedom in appearance.

Freedom, in the sense of heautonomy, can appear in the sense of genuinely showing itself, for it involves nothing behind or outside of phenomena – indeed, it exists only in showing itself. Schiller himself claims that "nature and heautonomy are objective characteristics of the objects [he has] been describing" (23 Feb., 167), and merely insists that art-objects cannot truly be heautonomous but may appear so. The sense in which Schiller insists that things in nature and art are not free but merely appear free should be understood in a double sense: they do not have free wills, but they can genuinely resemble something analogous to moral freedom – namely, 'heautonomy.' Insofar as Schiller claims that this freedom resonates with us and calls us to emulate it, this may, I believe, be read as an subtle critique against Kantian morality (which can neither show itself nor merely appear to), and a preference for freedom in the sense of actively manifested independence through and within nature:

> That is why the realm of taste is the realm of freedom – the beautiful world of the senses is the happiest symbol, as the moral ought to be, and every object of natural beauty outside me carries a guarantee of happiness which calls to me: be free like me. (23 Feb., 173)

The Kallias Letters' attempt to connect the concept freedom not only to that of beauty but also to a form of natural flourishing and happiness (rather than mere hard self-discipline) will remain central to his later 'Aesthetic Letters' and his 'Grace and Dignity.' All three of these works claim a strong fidelity to Kant's critical philosophy while, at the same time, standing in a very complicated relationship to Kant's official doctrines. Part of the special interest of the "Kallias Letters" lies precisely in the fact that, by presenting his theory of beauty in a stage of ongoing development and less-than-complete consistency, the 'Letters' bring into clear relief the fundamental conceptual tensions which define his complex relation to Kant.

[15] Beiser (2006, 223) and Houlgate (2008, 45)

In the foregoing account, I have attempted to directly acknowledge some of the inconsistencies within Schiller's presentation of that theory. In doing so, I have tried to show that, in spite of those inconsistencies, his account nonetheless contains a coherent outline of a fascinating concept of 'freedom in appearance.' In my own presentation of that outline, I have tried to present its central concept by, admittedly, filling out that sketch a bit more than Schiller himself does. Returning to methodological remarks I made in the introduction, I think that this is the only really fruitful way of reading the 'Kallias Letters' and the only way to go beyond an appraisal like Beiser's – that Schiller's theory is very *suggestive* but ultimately unsuccessful in its aims. Whether the essential idea of Schiller's own text has been faithfully expressed in this way is a question I must leave the reader to decide.

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