

Summary of Letters 11-13 of Schiller's Aesthetical Letters

By Matthew Ehret

Some words as Pre-ramble

These are among the most challenging letters and after reviewing them several times over, I will do my best to satisfactorily make his thought and intention as transparent as possible. Unfortunately due to the length of time accrued since our group reading of them and my writing these words, I will have to leave out the particulars of individual thoughts and conversation which flowed from the minds of the members of our original reading. My memory is just not that good.

Before I begin, let me first re-establish as a bit of context that Schiller has created a new language based upon the various "opposing" qualities of the human condition (becoming/temporal vs being/eternal).

What I have written below in red are my thoughts which Schiller inspired but are not directly taken from Schiller.

Letter 11

He establishes in letter 11 the existence of our changing and unchanging aspects which I will go through briefly for context. Schiller explains that our **changing aspect** is determined by external circumstances (determined by otherness) and the **unchanging aspect** is the permanence of the self as **being**, and as such is self-subsisting. He makes a point, following Nicholas of Cusa that the **Maximum and Necessary Being** is the only state in which the self and its determinations **are one and the same**. "Divinity is because it is and always will be and was, and is infinite". For all else in creation, both domains must coexist yet respect the sovereignty of each domain and it is our duty to discover how their partnership must harmonize in order for our ideal nature to become. While this is here stated, it is left for future letters to be proven.

As **Freedom** is in its essential character a pure and eternal idea, our being (is-ness) which is pure and eternal is the basis for our Freedom (ie: we are free to be our true nature- the problem what our TRUE NATURE IS, is not self-evident but must be discovered) but at the same time since the unchanging part of humanity will never be free from the changing/feeling aspect (as we are not God), we must figure out how this works.

He also explains that for MEANING to be discoverable in anything changing, it is required that there exist something unchanging as the necessary context (his example: "we say a flower blooms and fades, but for this to have meaning, the existence of the Ideal concept of Flower must exist"). This is where the idea of TIME is given meaning ("without time, personality would exist in potential but not in actuality"). **A thought that arose in my mind was the existence of a lie. How do we identify a lie? Well we cannot certainly if we have no idea of TRUTH as a context first. How about ugliness or any other vice? What must exist within us to judge any thinkable vice or defect?**

He ends with a clever statement “when man changes, he EXISTS (ie: in time)”, whereas when he remains unchangeable HE exists (the ideal oneness, and unity that we have as divine within us that transcends time). He also says “I lead back to the concept of the divinity from which I have proceeded”.

In case people are still uncertain, his aesthetical concepts flow from the concept of Man as Made in the Living Image of the Creator. This is the basis for our courage when he said earlier that we must DARE TO BE WISE! A nice irony is now created for the coexistence of bold divine empowerment of having something in common with GOD and prizing the HUMILITY needed to be free which is nice food for thought.

Letters 12 and 13

Here he now develops his language to a greater degree, whereby he introduces the dual concepts of the 1) *Sensuous Instinct* and 2) *Formal Instinct*

The sensuous is tied as you can guess to the Changing/material domain where our passions and feelings are awakened and unfold **BUT NOT their perfectibility.**

The formal instinct is needed to account for the perfectibility of the self as it is where the unchanging ideas of Best/good , Worst/bad exist upon which our judgements of improvement or decay exist. It starts from the Absolute existence of Man and Strives to set him Free. Schiller’s words “*it annuls time and encompasses ALL time. It wishes that the real be necessary and eternal and that the eternal be necessary and real. It thus insists upon Truth and Justice*”.

I enjoyed his legal reference: “*Where the sensuous forms cases, the formal gives laws*”. This awoke a thought in myself that the Civil Law vs Common Law dispute could learn a lot from Schiller. Where Civil law is rooted in “French-catholic custom” and centers upon the Rules of the Legal Code, the “British-Protestant Common Law” derives its authority from particular cases which occur in time and thus override the “unchangeable laws”. Compare this to American Constitutional Law (when properly understood) which is much more Schillerian and founded upon a perfectible Natural Law. Edgar Poe made fun of this dichotomy in his Eureka: Thoughts on the Material and Spiritual Origins of the Universe when he eviscerates the apriori system of Ares-totle’s creeping and the a-posteriori system of the Hog’s (Francis Bacon’s) crawling.

The sensuous instinct has its’ vital usefulness too says Schiller. It is not merely something which pulls us away from Truth and Justice, but rather helps us from falling into the cold abyss of unfeeling abstraction which gives birth to the Barbarian. He says “*with indestructible bonds it fetters the higher striving spirit to the world of sense, and calls back abstraction to the boundaries of the present form from its wanderings into the infinite.*”

Schiller introduces a wonderful footnote to give his formal description sharper meaning where he explains that the loss of an appreciation for the usefulness in sensual instinct has un-necessarily held back the advance of science and done irreparable harm to our mankind’s knowledge of the universe. He explained in this footnote that the scientist will often impose his/her formal/moral concepts onto the

way they think the universe should be, and in so doing miss the “empirical” sensory evidence that would give them a true sense of the way the universe actually IS. He gives the concrete example (echoing Plato’s Philebus dialogue of the One, the Many and the Infinite) of the formal idea of Harmony which was so long known and adhered to but never discovered properly because too few had taken the time to investigate the causes of the consonant notes that would give the idea meaning and power. In Schiller’s words: *“After many centuries one arises, who nears her (Nature) with calm, chaste and open senses and for this reason encounters a number of phenomena, which we by our prevention have overlooked, so we are highly astonished there over, that so many eyes should have observed nothing on such a bright day. This premature striving towards harmony, before one hath gathered together the individual tones... is the grounds of fruitlessness of so many thinking heads for the best of science.”*

This very much brought to my mind Johannes Kepler’s discussions about the failure of the Pythagoreans who had a beautiful theory of the harmony of the spheres, but whose formal/mathematical instincts forbade them from acknowledging that certain proportions were dissonant (division of a string by 7ths) and that others were actually consonant.

After bringing us to realize that the objective and subjective can no longer be kept dichotomized (we must admit that we are after all investigating formal/objective truth in our subjective minds and our sensual instincts as an objective phenomenon), he ends with the beautiful statement *“Where therefore the formal instinct exerts dominion and the pure object acts in us, there is the highest enlargement of Being- there disappear all limits – there from the Unity of magnitude, in which the needy sense confined him, has man arisen to the unity of ideas which contains the entire realm of phenomena under itself... we are no more in time but rather time is in us with its entire never ending succession. We are no more individuals but rather we are Species; the judgement of all spirits is expressed by that of our own”.*