

11 Schiller and Marx on Specialization and Self-Realization

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On a number of issues Friedrich Schiller and Karl Marx appear to occupy quite different positions in political philosophy. For instance, while Schiller has often been described as an aesthete who repudiates social change,¹ Marx famously criticized previous philosophers for merely interpreting the world, and argued that the point must be to change it;² similarly, while Schiller has been described as an elitist who took a dim view of the ‘lower and more numerous classes’,³ Marx rhapsodized about the ‘nobility’ of the proletariat and saw them as the liberators of humanity;⁴ and finally, while Schiller is often interpreted as a philosopher who held an unwavering commitment to liberal principles about the inviolability of the individual, Marx has been interpreted as an opponent of liberal individualism, whose vision of communism calls, in the words of one commentator, for ‘the sacrifice of the individual to the collective and of private interests to the interests of the whole’ (Churchich 1994, 165).⁵

The idea of common ground between Schiller and Marx may seem even more remote when we examine the references to Schiller in Marx’s writings. Although Marx was fond of using philosophical and literary references, there is relatively little discussion of Schiller in his works. What little Marx did write is, however, sufficient for the author of a major study of Marx’s relationship to German poetry to conclude that Marx did not hold Schiller in high regard (Demetz 1969, 98).⁶ More importantly, in one of his early papers on politics and German literature, Engels contrasts Schiller unfavourably with Goethe, crediting Goethe with the sharper insight into German political life and criticizing Schiller, by contrast, for his aestheticism and quietism (Engels 1976, 259). Thus, given that Schiller and Marx seem to hold quite different political views, and that the founders of Marxism seem to have been ambivalent about Schiller, the idea of commonality may seem improbable.

In this paper I will not try and establish causation from Schiller to Marx. But I will make the case that there is more common ground in their philosophical positions than one might initially suppose. I focus in particular on two issues: their critical accounts of the pernicious effects

of specialization and their positive visions about how these pernicious effects might be overcome. I argue that Schiller and Marx put forward a very similar critique of specialization, according to which the increased specialization of modern life has created stunted human beings who are unable to develop their many-sided nature. While Schiller and Marx claim that specialization has stunted individuals, however, they also recognize that it has increased the productive power of society as a whole, in a way that makes a return to a simpler mode of production impossible and undesirable. This poses a problem for their respective accounts of a future society. The problem centres on the need to overcome the pernicious effects of specialization in a way that does not forsake the gains specialization has simultaneously brought in train. On the face of it, their replies to this problem diverge, since Marx calls for radical social change (a move to communist social arrangements) whereas Schiller rules out radical social change and recommends aesthetic education. But even here, where the distance between them at first seems great, I shall argue that we again find important points of commonality in their positions.

I find these connections between Schiller and Marx very interesting—for three reasons. First of all, comparing Schiller and Marx provides us with a more nuanced interpretation of Marx's relationship to earlier German philosophy. This has two aspects. First, it shows how an important thread in Marx's position is continuous with themes from earlier German philosophy. Far from breaking with this tradition, Marx took Schiller's critique of specialization and ideal of human wholeness further, integrating it within a more systematic analysis of modern capitalist production. Second, it points us towards an aspect of Marx's thought that is at odds with the philosopher who is commonly held to be the predominant influence upon him, namely G.W.F. Hegel. For although Hegel did not see the increased specialization of modern life as an entirely benign force—it plays a role in the generation of the rabble after all—he does not belong to the Schiller-Marx line of thought that sees specialization as an obstacle to self-realization.⁷ In fact, Hegel is a trenchant critic of that line of thought, describing it, in characteristic fashion, as a form of 'abstract thinking which stops short at the universal and so does not reach actuality'.⁸ Without going into the details, Hegel's view is that it is only by specializing, that is, by focusing on some things and not others in our life, that we can particularize ourselves as individuals and contribute to the actualization of our community. In other words, for Hegel it is only by specializing that we can achieve self-realization.⁹ As we shall see, Schiller and Marx have a more individualistic conception of self-realization, according to which self-realization is achieved, not through our specialized contribution to the social whole, but through becoming, in a certain sense, whole in ourselves.¹⁰

Second, comparing Schiller and Marx sheds light on aspects of Marx's (and to a lesser extent Schiller's)¹¹ position that have sometimes been overlooked, leading to what I believe to be some serious misinterpretations of his philosophical position. Not least, I shall argue that it shows that Marx's position has an uncompromising commitment to ethical individualism, the view that collective flourishing (the development of the powers and capacities of society) cannot come at the expense of individual self-realization. In this way, I hope to show how comparing Schiller and Marx can help us come to an interesting reading of Marx's philosophy, one which is more complex than the one-sided caricatures we are all too often presented with.

Finally, I shall also suggest that revisiting Schiller and Marx's thought can illuminate some important but under-theorized questions for political philosophy. These include questions about the relationship between specialization and self-realization and about how the pernicious effects of specialization might be counteracted. To be clear, I will not argue that Schiller and Marx provide us with all the answers to these questions. In fact, I will argue that at times both take their conclusions too far. While Schiller and Marx are right to see *certain* types of specialization (e.g. the type of specialization typical of modern factory production) as inimical to self-realization, not all specialization is; indeed, I will suggest that the division of work into various different occupations, with individuals focusing on one or very few of these occupations for a reasonable length of time, is entirely compatible with the kind of self-realization—the 'all-round development' of individuals—that Schiller and Marx prized. However, I will argue that their writings pose these important but philosophically neglected questions, and that considering the strengths and weaknesses of their positions can help us think through what a plausible response might involve. This is surely a worthwhile task for political philosophy, for specialization has only intensified since Schiller and Marx's day and recent writings about the future of work have predicted that we stand on the verge of a new wave of economic specialization (Malone, Laubacher and Johns 2011). Thus, revisiting Schiller and Marx's writings on specialization and self-realization is not merely 'history for history's sake', but a way of thinking about a range of issues of contemporary concern.

The paper proceeds as follows. I begin (1) by discussing Schiller's critique of specialization, before going on to consider (2) his suggestive but less developed ideas about how the pernicious effects of specialization can be counteracted. I will then show (3) how Marx's critique of specialization follows Schiller's quite closely, while also deepening his analysis in important respects. Next (4), I consider Marx's suggestive ideas for counteracting the pernicious effects of specialization in a future communist society. The following section (5) concludes.

1 Schiller's Critique of Specialization

In the sixth letter of his *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller draws a famous contrast between the exquisite wholeness of the ancients and the impoverishment of the moderns:

That polyloid character of the Greek States, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence but could, when need arose, grow into the whole organism, now made way for an ingenious clock-work, in which, out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical collective life ensued. . . . Everlastingly chained to a single little fragment of the Whole, man himself develops into nothing but a fragment; everlastingly in his ear the monotonous sound of the wheel that he turns, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of putting the stamp of humanity upon his own nature, he becomes nothing more than the imprint of his occupation or of his specialized knowledge.

(Schiller 1967, 35)

According to Schiller, modern individuals are impoverished. In contrast to the ancient Greeks, who developed their powers and capacities in an all-round way, modern individuals develop only a fragment of their many-sided nature. With the moderns, 'the various faculties appear as separate in practice as they are distinguished by the psychologist in theory, and we see not merely individuals, but whole classes of men, developing but one part of their potentialities' (Schiller 1967, 33).

According to Schiller, the primary cause of this impoverishment is the increased specialization of modern life. Whereas the ancient Greeks performed a variety of occupations, modern individuals are 'everlastingly chained' to one occupation and consequently only develop one aspect of their nature. However, while Schiller identifies specialization as the primary cause of human impoverishment, it is important to note that he sees the accentuation of specialization as having a political rather than an economic cause. Specifically, economic specialization is required by the increasing complexity of the state: 'once the increasingly complex machinery of the State necessitated a more rigorous separation of ranks and occupations . . . the unity of human nature was severed' (Schiller 1967, 33). As we shall see, Schiller's belief in the primacy of politics in explaining the accentuation of specialization is one of the major ways in which his analysis differs from Marx's.

Schiller's contrast between ancients and moderns raises the question of how the pernicious effects of specialization might be counteracted. His initial remarks might seem to suggest that the way to overcome the pernicious effects of specialization is to revert back to the model of the Greeks, where specialization was less intense and where a greater development

of human powers, therefore, was possible. If this is Schiller's position, however, it would be open to two serious doubts. First, one might doubt whether Schiller's portrayal of the ancients is an accurate one, that is, whether the ancients really had the properties Schiller says they have. Second, one might doubt whether the properties of antiquity are replicable under modern conditions. Not least, even if we grant that the Greeks did achieve a higher development of human powers than us moderns, one might think that this was because they had a regime of slave labour that liberated them from the performance of necessary but intrinsically unrewarding work—where, needless to say, such a solution is no longer a live one for us today.

While Schiller is plainly attracted to the ideal of ancient Greece, however, it is clear that he does not think that reverting back is a serious option for us today. In fact, Schiller claims that our age has some advantages over Greece. Although specialization has impoverished individuals, it has concurrently enriched the collective:

I do not underrate the advantages which the human race today, considered as a whole and weighed in the balance of intellect, can boast in what is best in the ancient world. But, it has to take up the challenge in serried ranks, and let the whole measure itself against whole. What individual Modern could sally forth and engage, man against man, with an individual Athenian for the prize of humanity?

(Schiller 1967, 33).

Thus, according to Schiller, modern individuals are much poorer than their ancient counterparts, but by uniting their fragmented powers in a complex system of production, the moderns can achieve things that outstrip the ancients. In the modern division of labour, individual impoverishment and collective flourishing have come hand-in-hand. As J. S. Mill would similarly lament, 'the greatness of England is now all collective; individually small, we only appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining' (Mill 1991, 78).

In this way, Schiller's analysis of specialization—as being injurious for individuals but beneficial for the collective—presents a problem to be solved in the rest of the *Aesthetic Letters*. The problem centres on the need to overcome the pernicious effects of specialization on individuals in a way that does not forsake the gains specialization has simultaneously brought the collective. Reverting back to the ideal of ancient Greece is not only impossible but undesirable, since it would involve giving up the gains of specialization. But neither can the division of labour be accommodated in its existing form. For this would mean sacrificing some individuals for the achievement of a collective end, and in a famous passage at the end of the sixth letter, Schiller writes that man cannot be made to 'miss himself' for the benefit of either present or future generations

(Schiller 1967, 43). Thus, Schiller's concern for the self-realization of all individuals—what I shall call his ethical individualism—rules out an arrangement in which some toil in deadening occupations for the benefit of others.

2 Schiller Positive Vision

Following Schiller's account of the impoverishment of the moderns in the sixth letter, one might expect subsequent letters to be concerned with the question of how the institutions of the modern world are to be transformed to overcome the pernicious effects of specialization. However, no such discussion is forthcoming. In the subsequent letter, Schiller states that social and political transformations are impossible under current conditions, and that the problems identified in the sixth letter must be addressed by reforming the citizens of the state, rather than the state itself.

Schiller's claim, of course, is that only a programme of aesthetic education can overcome the impoverishment of human powers and make individuals whole and free: 'it is only through Beauty that man makes his way to Freedom' (Schiller 1967, 9). How will aesthetic education make us whole and free? Schiller's discussion of this question is complex, but briefly: in his view, there is a fundamental division in human beings between the two major sides of human nature: the sensible and the rational. Both of these sides of human nature are described as 'drives': there is the 'sense drive' that encompasses sensations, feelings and needs, and the 'form drive' that encompasses reason. Both of these drive has its own particular trajectory, which has potential to come into conflict with the other, but also—contra Kant—potential for cooperation and integration. Schiller claims that the dominance of either one of the drives has negative consequences for human wholeness and freedom: he worries both about the 'pernicious effects . . . of an undue surrender to our sensuous nature' as well as the 'nefarious influence exerted upon our knowledge and upon our conduct by a preponderance of rationality' (Schiller 1967, 89). In order to counteract the dominance of either drive, Schiller states the need to cultivate a third drive, the play drive, which restores harmony by synthesizing the other two. When this harmony is successful, reason does not dominate sensibility and sensibility does not dominate reason. Rather, both sides of human nature are fully actualized and neither side dominates the other. Schiller's name for this state of harmony is 'play'; and for Schiller play represents the highest form of freedom, for it is the freedom of the whole of one's nature—rational and sensible—not merely one side of it:

It is precisely play, and play alone, that makes man complete and displays at once his twofold nature. . . . Man plays only when he is in

the full sense of the word a man, and he is only wholly a Man when he is playing.

(Schiller 1967, 79–80)

Having introduced the concept of play, Schiller now returns to the core claim of the *Aesthetic Letters*: that only beauty can induce the harmony of play in us. His thought is that all ‘other forms of perception divide man, because they are founded exclusively upon the sensuous or spiritual part of his being’, whereas the perception of beauty, by contrast, is the ‘common object of both impulses, that is to say of the play impulse’ (Schiller 1967, 176–177). However, for beauty to induce this harmony in us, we need to be able to perceive beauty properly, and this requires education. And so we return to Schiller’s core claim: that the problems of modernity can only be overcome through aesthetic education.

As will be clear, after the opening letters that set out the social problem he intends to solve, Schiller’s discussion of aesthetic education becomes quite abstract and the social issues with which he began seem to fall from view.¹² In particular, Schiller never explains how, once individuals have been made whole as a result of their aesthetic education, that wholeness will enable them to overcome the pernicious effects of specialization. However, his account does hint at various possibilities, and in what follows I will explore these.

The first possibility is that aesthetic education develops and harmonizes the capacities of the individual, and this, in turn, transforms the work they perform. On this model, the conditions of work are not changed, but the way individuals relate to those conditions is, and this transforms their experience of their work.¹³ In particular, aesthetic education enables individuals to have an aesthetic relationship to their work: rather than being a mere means for the attainment of further valuable ends, work becomes something close to art, in that is contemplative and performed for its own sake. Now, the idea that education, aesthetic or otherwise, can transform work is not implausible. It is a familiar experience that certain tasks—like cookery, for example—can be fulfilling for those who have ability and temperament to perform them, but drudgery for those who do not. The issue is whether aesthetic education, and the wholeness it brings, can transform all work. Could it, for example, transform work that is physically dangerous, work that is mind-numbingly dull or work that is unpleasant on account of the conditions under which it must be performed? At some points Schiller appears optimistic that it can: a ‘noble nature possesses the gift of transforming purely by its matter of handling it, even the most trifling occupation, or the most petty of objects, into something infinite’ (Schiller 1967, 167). But that is open to doubt. It could just as well be argued that aesthetic education could have the opposite effect: that the better educated people are, the more bored

and frustrated they will become in the performance of work that does not engage the higher faculties.

The second possibility is that an aesthetic education enables individuals to transcend the confines of their specialization and perform various different functions within the state. It will be remembered that Schiller complains about modern individuals being ‘everlastingly chained’ to the performance of just one occupation. This at least implies that future individuals will not be chained, that they will perform a variety of tasks instead of specializing on just one. On this model, no one specializes on one task, and aesthetic education is required to ensure that individuals have a sufficiently well-rounded set of faculties to enable them to perform multiple occupations. This is not possible for most people under present conditions who, Schiller claims, consume their ‘meagre sum of powers’ in the single occupation to which they are consigned (Schiller 1967, 37). However, there are problems with this model as an interpretation of Schiller and as a philosophical position in its own right. With regards to the former, the problem is that it requires the state to take a very active role regulating economic life. This, however, would seem to be incompatible with Schiller’s liberal commitment to non-interference.¹⁴ With regards to the latter, it is not clear whether moving from job to job will necessarily give rise to the all-round development of individuals Schiller prized. I return to this issue in §4.

The third possibility is that aesthetic education will be primarily designed for the enrichment not of work but of leisure.¹⁵ Schiller complains that the working classes are too exhausted from toil to make use of the limited leisure they have, whereas the non-working elite, who have leisure in abundance, make no good use of it (Schiller 1967, 25–27). On this model, aesthetic education is a means for ensuring that individuals spend their leisure actively cultivating their faculties, rather than indolently or on trivial occupations. Once more, however, there is a problem here. Under present conditions the enrichment of leisure via aesthetic education would only benefit a privileged non-working elite, who have leisure to cultivate. It would be no help for the working classes, for they are (as Schiller admits) too exhausted from toil to make use of the limited free time they have. Such a solution, therefore, would be incompatible with Schiller’s concern for the self-realization of *all* individuals. Thus, if this solution is to apply to all people, it would have to be accompanied by a social policy that would distribute work more evenly across society to ensure that each individual has a reasonable quantity of leisure. Once more, however, this would seem to clash to Schiller’s commitment to non-interference. Moreover, although the enrichment of leisure is a desirable goal, there is something unsatisfying about a solution that limits itself to extending leisure and leaving the conditions of work unchanged.

In this section I have surveyed three ways in which Schiller’s claim that aesthetic education is necessary for overcoming the pernicious effects of

specialization could be understood: aesthetic education might transform the way individuals think about work; it might allow individuals to perform a variety of different occupations; or it might be a means to ensure individuals spend their leisure cultivating their many-sided nature. Of course, these options are not mutually exclusive: a hybrid view is possible—for instance, aesthetic education could enrich work and leisure, rather than just one of those domains. However, as I shall show in the subsequent discussion of Marx, a combination of these views also faces difficulties.

3 Marx's Critique of Specialization

I now turn from Schiller to Marx. In this section, I argue that Marx's critique of specialization has much in common with Schiller's, but that Marx provides a more systematic account of why specialization has intensified in the way it has.

A concern with the pernicious effects of specialization is a recurring theme of Marx's thought. To make these criticisms, Marx also draws on the model of the ancient world to criticize the moderns. While Marx does not quote directly from Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters*, he does quote the French lawyer and historian Pierre-Édouard Lémontey, whose contrast between the wholeness of the ancients and the impoverishment of the moderns strongly recalls Schiller's:

We are struck with admiration . . . when we see among the Ancients the same person distinguishing himself to a high degree as philosopher, poet orator, historian, priest, administrator, general of an army. Our souls are appalled at the sight of so vast a domain. Each one of us plants his hedge and shuts himself up in his enclosure. I do not know whether by this parcellation the field is enlarged, but I do know that man is belittled.

(Marx 1976, 190)

As this quotation shows, what Marx found attractive about the ancients was precisely what also attracted Schiller: namely, that they did not limit themselves to just one occupation (as a philosopher, or a poet, or an orator or a historian) as we moderns do now, but rather performed all or at least many of these occupations with distinction.

While Marx is not immune to the allure of the ancients, however, he, like Schiller once more, does not think that reverting back to an earlier model of society is either possible or desirable for us today. Thus, in the *Grundrisse* Marx accepts that the ancient world can 'seem very exalted when set against the modern world', but he makes clear that the modern social world is superior (Marx 1987, 411). For although the ancients *appear* to have developed their individual powers to a higher level than

the moderns, this is only because the productive powers of society were underdeveloped:

During earlier stages of development, the single individual seems more fully developed because he has not yet worked out the fullness of his relations and has not yet set them over against himself as independent social powers and relations. It is as ridiculous to long for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that the present complete emptiness must be permanent.

(Marx 1987, 90).

The modern world, by contrast, has witnessed an unprecedented development of productive power. But under capitalism this rich development of the productive powers of society occurs in contrast to the impoverishment of individuals:

In the bourgeois economy – and in the epoch of production to which it corresponds – this complete unfolding of man’s inner potentiality turns into his complete emptying-out. His universal objectification becomes his total alienation, and the demolition of all determined one-sided aims becomes the sacrifice of the [human] end-in-itself to a wholly external purpose.

(Marx 1987, 412)

Schiller asked: ‘[w]hence this disadvantage amongst individuals when Society as a whole is at such an advantage?’ (Schiller 1967, 33). It is in reply to this question that Marx’s analysis achieves a higher level of theoretical sophistication. The crux of Marx’s answer, given in volume one part four of *Capital*, is that the intensification of specialization is not a contingent feature of modern societies, nor a consequence of the increased complexity of the modern state (as Schiller had suggested), but rather results from the very nature of the modern world’s mode of production, capitalism. To understand why this is the case, we must pay attention to Marx’s definition of capitalism as a mode of production where the means of production are privately owned, where workers own nothing but their own labour-power, and where the goal of production is the relentless pursuit of profit. The key point is that, because production under capitalism is driven by the pursuit of profit, capitalists are constantly looking for ways to maximize economic efficiency, that is, to extract the maximum possible output from their workers at the lowest possible cost. This gives capitalists a powerful incentive to divide labour, because by dividing the manufacture of a product into its constituent tasks, and allocating each of those tasks to different workers, who then perform the same task over and over, workers are able to produce far more than if the same number of workers individually made a product

from start to finish. While the increase in productivity provides a major incentive for specialization, Marx also points out that capitalism's relentless pursuit of profit provides an additional incentive for specialization to be accompanied by de-skilling. For by reducing job-complexity so that potentially anyone can perform the work, capitalists need not pay high wages for scarce, finely developed skills. Finally, because capitalism is also characterized by the fact that it is a social system where capitalists own the means of production and workers own no productive force other than their labour-power, it also follows that the working class are powerless to prevent the specialization of the labour process that is of great benefit to capitalists but profoundly injurious to their own well-being. Far from being an unfortunate but ultimately contingent feature of modern societies, then, Marx's analysis shows how the intensification of economic specialization flows from the very nature of a social system where the means of production are privately owned, where workers own no productive force but their labour-power, and where the goal of production is the relentless pursuit of profit.

While this suggests a rather gloomy depiction of modern work, however, Marx also identifies a number of tendencies already developing within capitalism that seem to him to anticipate better things to come. For instance, also in *Capital* he writes that:

Modern Industry imposes the necessity of recognizing, as a fundamental law of production, variation of work, consequently fitness of the labourer for varied work, consequently the greatest possible development of his varied aptitudes. . . . Modern industry compels society to replace the worker of today, crippled by life-long repetition of one and the same trivial operation, and thus reduced to a mere fragment of a man, by the fully developed individual, fit for a variety of labours, ready to face any change of production, and to whom the different social functions he performs, are but so many modes of giving free scope to his own natural and acquired powers.

(Marx 1996 490–491)

Here Marx makes two claims. The first is that machinery and modern industry will eradicate, or at least significantly reduce, the demand for specialists and finely developed skills. Rather than being a specialist in one line of activity, the worker of the future will be a generalist, capable of turning their hand to whatever task society requires. The second is that this is a positive development, for it will lead to a higher development of human powers than has previously been possible. Both claims are open to doubt. The first claim, while not entirely false, is exaggerated. Elsewhere Marx similarly predicts that machinery and modern industry 'wipes out specialists' (Marx 1976, 190). Yet, this prediction is refuted by the observation that, more than a century and a half since Marx penned

those words, there remain a number of highly skilled jobs in our economy. What Marx seemed to overlook here is the fact that, as well as reducing the demand for certain skills, technological advancement also creates a need for new skills and new specializations. The second claim, as I will argue in §4, is too optimistic. Of course, a worker may move from job to job in the way Marx described. But this does not mean they will necessarily develop a wide range of abilities; in fact, they may not develop fewer abilities than a specialist in a moderately interesting job.

Before I turn to Marx's positive vision about how the pernicious effects of specialization are to be counteracted, I close this section by emphasizing another point of similarity between his critique of specialization and Schiller's: namely, that both of their views rely on an uncompromising form of ethical individualism that denies that collective flourishing can come at the expense of individual self-realization. I emphasize this aspect of Marx's position because there is a surprisingly resilient misinterpretation of Marx as an ethical collectivist whose vision of communism calls for a sacrifice of individual.¹⁶ Far from sacrificing the individual to the collective, however, Marx's critique of specialization implies the opposite: that we cannot sacrifice individuals for the achievement of collective ends. For specialization increases the productive power of society, yet Marx argues that these gains cannot be tolerated if they are achieved at the expense of individual self-realization. Just as Schiller claims that man cannot be made to 'miss himself' for the benefit of others, then, Marx's critique of the division of labour also implies that we cannot use individuals as a mere means for the production of goods and services. Marx envisioned communism as a society in which 'the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all' (Marx and Engels 1976, 506), not one—like capitalism—in which the free development of some is parasitic on the alienated labour of others.

4 Marx's Positive Vision

I have argued that there is common ground in Schiller and Marx's critique of specialization. But although Schiller and Marx share some similar criticisms of the division of labour, it might be thought that their positive visions about how it should be transformed diverge in significant ways. However, I will argue that in their respective visions of a future society we once again find a common thread running through their writings. In particular, the three solutions that Schiller only hints at in the *Aesthetic Letters* are put forward as explicit proposals for counteracting the pernicious effect of specialization in Marx's vision of a future communist society.

It will be remembered that the first model we found in Schiller was one in which human consciousness is transformed in a way that allowed individuals to take pleasure in their work. It might seem that such a

proposal is foreign to Marx, for his account of overcoming alienation is often thought to emphasize a change in social conditions rather than human consciousness.¹⁷ What I want to emphasize here, however, is that although Marx certainly thinks that a thoroughgoing change of social conditions is necessary for overcoming alienation, a transformation of consciousness is as central to his positive vision as it is to Schiller's. This point is made clear in the early Marx's 'Comments on James Mill', where he describes what it would be like if we had produced as 'human beings', which is to say, in an unalienated fashion under communism. In that event, writes Marx:

In your enjoyment or use of my product I would have the direct enjoyment both of being conscious of having satisfied a human need by my work . . . of having thus created an object corresponding to the needs of another man's essential nature.

(Marx 1975a, 227–228)¹⁸

The transformation from capitalism to communism, as Marx envisions it here, is not only a transformation of social conditions. It is also a transformation of human consciousness, a change in the way we think about the work we do and how it relates to others. Specifically, it is a change from a capitalist society in which we produce for others only instrumentally, as a mere means to the achievement of a further valuable end, to a communist society in which satisfying another's need is itself a motivation for productive contribution. Thus, just as it would be a mistake to see Schiller's emphasis on aesthetic condition as involving a repudiation of social change, it would also be just as mistaken to argue that Marx thinks that overcoming alienation only requires a change in social conditions.¹⁹

Is this a plausible response to the problem of specialization? On the face of it, Marx's idea of a transformation of human consciousness seems open to the same set of counter-examples as Schiller's idea of aesthetic education. Is it plausible to think that communist individuals can find fulfilment in *all* work—for example, in work that is routine, hazardous, or just plain horrible? It seems unlikely. However, Marx does have some lines of response at his disposal. For instance, he can point out that even when work is not intrinsically interesting, one can still attain the fulfilment that comes from the knowledge that you have satisfied another's need (as well as the fulfilment that comes from the knowledge that the other recognizes and appreciates the fact that you have satisfied their need). Thus, even the most mundane work need not be lack value to the person performing it. Moreover, because Marx—unlike Schiller—envisions the transformation of human consciousness taking place alongside a social policy that distributes labour 'more and more evenly divided among all the able-bodied members of society', his vision of a future

society ensures that, while some mundane tasks remain, no one is con- signed to the exclusive performance of any of them (Marx 1996, 539– 540). Thus, although mundane work will have to be done in all forms of society, Marx hopes that the knowledge of its worth, and the fact that it is distributed to everyone able to perform it, means that it will not be an onerous burden. Such work may never be ‘life’s prime want’, as the ‘Critique of the Gotha Programme’ optimistically puts it, but it is not implausible to think that it could be viewed as part and parcel of human existence.

Let us now turn to Marx’s second model. In Schiller this was, of course, the idea that aesthetic education will enable individuals to transcend their specialism and perform a number of roles within the state. We find a clear analogue in Marx and Engels’s discussion of specialization under communism in *The German Ideology*:

[A]s soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him, and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; whereas in communist society, where nobody has one sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming a hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.

(Marx and Engels 1975, 47)

Here Marx and Engels suggest, among other things,²⁰ that future indi- viduals will enjoy a great variety of labour. They complain that workers under capitalism have ‘a particular, exclusive sphere of activity’—that is, there are hunters, fisherman and critics, but the hunters don’t criti- cize and critics don’t fish. In a communist society, by contrast, nobody will have just ‘one sphere of activity’. Rather than being a specialist in one job, each individual will engage in multiple activities, ‘hunting in the morning, fishing in the afternoon, rearing cattle in the evening and criti- cizing after dinner’.²¹

A number of commentators have challenged the Marxian ideal of self- realization that underlies this vision of a communist society: the idea that self-realization consists in the ‘full’ or ‘all-round’ development of human powers (Elster 1985, 521–522; Cohen 1988, 142–144). According to these critics, this represents an ‘unrealizable’ and ‘not necessarily desir- able’ conception of self-realization. It is unrealizable, for it requires an impossibly total development of the one’s powers; and it is not necessar- ily desirable, for it overlooks that we are faced with the choice between

the virtuoso development of one or very few abilities and the more mediocre development of many.

Rather than arguing about the nature of self-realization, I think we should be pluralistic and grant that the well-rounded development of one's abilities can be one (but certainly not the only) form of self-realization, for it seems plausible to think that some degree of well-roundedness is attainable in most human lives, and that such a degree, if achieved, is desirable.²² However, even if we allow that self-realization can be obtained in the all-round development of one's powers, we might question whether engaging in multiple activities is the only way, or even the best way, to achieve it. One point is that doing a number of jobs does not guarantee all-round development. For the mere fact that people move from job to job does not ensure that they will exercise and develop a wider-range of abilities. For workers may move from job to job and be continually learning the basics, rather than developing any satisfying aptitude; or they may, as Plamenatz says, 'move from factory to factory, from town to town, from one branch of industry to another, and yet find themselves doing much the same type of work everywhere' (Plamenatz 1975, 170). Contra Marx, then, one may move from job to job and yet not achieve all-round development.

But not only is performing multiple activities not necessarily sufficient for all-round development; it is also doubtful whether it is even necessary for such development—doubtful, that is, whether individuals need to perform a number of jobs in order to achieve an all-round development of their powers. At bottom, Marx's claim seems to be that someone who specializes on one activity develops just one ability and thereby neglects many others. Yet, this argument overlooks the extent to which complex specializations often require the exercise, development and successful integration of a number of abilities. For example, to be an excellent surgeon one needs to master a body of knowledge and develop a range of technical skills. But one also needs to develop certain social and personal qualities to deal with one's patients effectively and get along with one's colleagues. Even activities that are often thought to require a very high development of one particular ability often require the development and successful integration of several. For example, sports not only require the development of athletic abilities; they also require players to solve tactical and strategic problems.

I have argued that Marx's position is blind to two possibilities: that someone who engages in multiple occupations may not develop a wide range of abilities and that someone who specializes in one or very few complex activities could achieve an impressively full development of theirs. Someone who turned screws in the morning, hammered rivets in the afternoon and pulled a lever after dinner would develop fewer abilities than a mere specialist in a moderately interesting job.

However, this is not to say that the idea of moving between jobs is completely wrongheaded. There is a good point buried in the 'hunt in the

morning' passage. It is that given that there will always be some jobs that are inherently unattractive, on account of them being dangerous, fatiguing, mind-numbingly dull and so on, rotating these jobs between people may be a reasonable way of dealing with them. What I am envisioning here is not a society in which individuals 'hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, and criticize after dinner', but one in which individuals spend some time away from their primary specialization—whether this be by rotation or as part of some kind of system of service—doing work that nobody wants to do (at least exclusively) but nonetheless needs doing. With regards to these jobs, abolishing specialization—ensuring that no one spends their whole working life in a deadening occupation—may indeed be an appropriate response.²³

Let us now turn to the third model we found in Schiller, the idea that aesthetic education will be a means for the improvement, not of work, but of leisure. Once more, we find an analogue in another famous quotation from the third volume of *Capital*:

[T]he realm of freedom actually begins only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; thus in the very nature of things it lies beyond the sphere of actual material production . . . Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favourable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it none the less remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working-day is its basic prerequisite.

(Marx 1998, 807)²⁴

In this passage Marx is not saying that necessary labour under communism will be alienated or unfree. Indeed, in the passage he speaks of freedom in the 'realm of necessity' ('freedom in this field'), and of conditions of work that are 'worthy of human nature'. However, he is clearly envisioning a society in which leisure, rather than labour, is the primary site of human self-realization. According to this view, real freedom starts when work directed at needs stops.

In my earlier discussion of Schiller, I identified two problems with this model. First of all, under present conditions the emphasis on the development of human powers in leisure would only benefit a non-working elite who have leisure to cultivate. Second, there is something unsatisfying about a proposal that focuses on increasing the amount of free time individuals have at their disposal, while leaving the conditions of work unchanged.

Now, Marx has a response to the first problem, for (as we have seen) he envisions an egalitarian distribution of labour that drafts all able-bodied people into the workforce. The second problem, however, requires a new response. In reply, Marx might say that although the primary focus is on shortening the working-day, this is entirely compatible with improving it. After all, there is no contradiction in wanting more leisure and better work. We look to increase leisure and improve work, rather than focusing our energies on just one of those domains.

In closing this section, however, I want to point towards a problem for this view. The society Marx describes in the third volume of *Capital* is geared towards increasing leisure. A society with this goal may accept an intensive division of labour to increase productivity and decrease time spent satisfying needs. Given the continuation of an intensive division of labour, it is likely that some mundane labour will remain; indeed, Marx admits this. However, such labour may well be one that people choose to endure, because the working-day is short and because people have the real freedom to engage in fulfilling activity in their free time. By contrast, a society that is geared towards bringing about unalienated work for all may well look to eliminate the division of labour typical of factory production in order to bring about less intense but more meaningful forms of work. The citizens of such a society would have to work more or consume less than in the leisure society described in the third volume of *Capital*, but this is a price that they might be willing to pay for the counterbalancing increases in the quality of their work. Thus, while better work and more leisure are desirable goals, they may not hang together in the way Marx optimistically assumed.²⁵

5 Conclusion

We have seen that there is a common thread running through Schiller and Marx's writings on specialization and self-realization. This is interesting at the historical, scholarly and philosophical levels. At the historical level, understanding these connections presents us with a more nuanced view of Marx's relationship to his predecessors: it shows how an important thread in Marx's position—a thread that is rejected by Hegel—is continuous with themes from earlier German philosophy. At the scholarly level, understanding these connections sheds light on their philosophical positions: not least, it draws our attention to an unpromisingly individualistic aspect of Marx's vision of communism. And finally, at the philosophical level, revisiting Schiller and Marx's writings draws our attention to a number of important but under-theorized issues. Although I have argued that they are sometimes guilty of taking their conclusions too far, I hope to have shown that Schiller and Marx's thought on specialization and self-realization still has something to say to us today.²⁶

Notes

- 1 For a classic statement of this view, see Lukács (1947).
- 2 This, of course, is a gloss on Marx's final theses on Feuerbach: 'The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it' (Marx 1975c, 7).
- 3 For the claim that Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* are elitist, see Kain (1982, 25–27). Although Schiller is indeed critical of the 'crude, lawless instincts' of the lower classes, it is worth emphasizing that his assessment of the upper classes is even less favourable: 'The cultivated classes, on the other hand, offer the even more repugnant spectacle of lethargy, and of a deprivation of character which offends the more because culture is itself the source' (Schiller 1967, 25–26).
- 4 This is a gloss on Marx's description of French workers in the 'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts', for whom 'the brotherhood of man is not a hollow phrase, it is a reality, and the nobility of man shines forth from their work-worn figures' (Marx 1975b, 313).
- 5 For two other overly collectivist statements about Marx's vision of communism, see Pashukanis (1983, 160); and Lukes (1985, 97–98).
- 6 For an alternative view, which plausibly claims that Marx's view of Schiller was more complex and positive than Demetz and others have supposed, see Praver (1975).
- 7 The Hegelian line of thought has other adherents. For instance, in *Ethical Studies* F.H. Bradley responds to the 'complaint of our day on the dwindling of human nature'. According to this complaint, 'the higher the organism the more are its functions specified, and hence narrowed. The man becomes a machine, or the piece of a machine; and, though the world grows 'the individual withers'. Like Hegel, Bradley suggests that this complaint rests on a 'false view of things'. The 'breadth of my life is not measured by the multitude of my pursuits, nor the space I take up amongst other men; but by the fullness of the whole life which I know as mine. It is true that less now depends on each of us, as this or that man; it is not true that our individuality is therefore lessened, that therefore we have less in us' (Bradley 1876, 188–189). Interestingly, Rawls synthesizes these two lines of thought. On the one hand, Rawls echoes Marx and Schiller's critique of the division of labour: 'no one need be servilely dependent on others and made to choose between monotonous and routine occupations which are deadening to human thought and sensibility' (Rawls 1971, 529). On the other hand, however, Rawls echoes Hegel and Bradley's point that specialization is both necessary and compatible with self-realization: 'It is tempting to suppose that everyone might fully realize his powers and that some at least can become complete exemplars of humanity. But this is impossible. It is a feature of human sociability that we are by ourselves but parts of what we might be' (Rawls 1971, 529). And 'it is only in active cooperation with others that one's powers reach fruition. Only in a social union is the individual complete' (Rawls 1971, 524 n.4).
- 8 Hegel (1991: §207R, 239). As this quotation makes clear, Hegel's positive view of specialization is underpinned by his metaphysical views concerning the need for particularization; for helpful discussion of this point, see Stern (1989).
- 9 Thus, quoting Goethe, Hegel writes: 'Whoever aspires to great things . . . must be able to limit himself' (Hegel 1991: §13A, 46–47).
- 10 Thus, I think Michael Hardimon is correct when he writes that: 'If we look still more deeply into Hegel's view, we can say that the crucial thing for him

is not the actualization of any given single human being but rather the actualization of the community . . . from a Hegelian standpoint, the most important need that is met in providing a social sector within which people can actualize themselves as individuals in the strong sense is not the need of the individuals who are members of the community but rather the need of the community itself' (Hardimon 1994, 188–189). It is this collectivist vision of self-realization that Marx and Schiller reject.

- 11 In particular, by showing how Schiller's critique of specialization anticipates Marx's criticisms about alienated labour under capitalism, we can see how Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* contains an acute response to one of the major social issues of his day. In this way, this chapter builds upon recent work on Schiller that argues that his aesthetic writings are certainly not a flight from politics. See Beiser (2005) and Moggach (2007).
- 12 Although they do make a brief return in his remarkable discussion of the Aesthetic State in Letter XXVII.
- 13 Thus, Kain writes that for Schiller 'the qualitative transformation of work stems entirely from the character of the individual – due to this aesthetic education, his wholeness, spontaneity, and unity. Nothing is said of transforming the actual conditions of work' (Kain 1982, 23).
- 14 Schiller's commitment to the liberal principle of non-interference is exhibited in the following passage from 'Die Gesetzgebung des Lykurgus und Solon':

If our legislators have done wrong in neglecting moral duties and virtues, the Greek legislators have done wrong by inculcating moral duties according to the coercion of the laws. For moral beauty of actions the first condition is freedom of will, and this freedom is gone, as soon as one wants to compel moral virtue through civil penalties. The most noble privilege of human nature is to determine oneself and to do the good for the sake of the good. No civil law may command fidelity toward a friend, generosity toward an enemy, gratitude toward a father and mother; for as soon as it does this a free moral feeling becomes transformed into a work of fear and a slavish impulse' (Beiser 2005, 127).

For discussion of this aspect of Schiller's position, see Beiser (2005, 126–129).

- 15 At some points in the *Aesthetic Letters*, Schiller might be seen to suggest that leisure is indeed his ideal. Thus, he writes that really free activity is activity unconstrained by necessity, and so opposed to work, understood as activity directed at satisfying needs: 'An animal may be said to be at work, when the stimulus to work is some lack; it may be said to be at play, when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality' (Schiller 1967, 207).
- 16 See note 5.
- 17 Thus, Kain argues that 'Schiller expects to realize this aesthetic relationship [between producer and their object] by remaking the subject, by an aesthetic education of the individual', whereas Marx, by contrast, 'expects to bring about an aesthetic relationship by changing the object, by remaking society and labour' (Kain 1982, 11).
- 18 For a lucid interpretation of this passage, see Brudney (1998, Chapter 5).
- 19 While both Marx and Schiller emphasize social change and a change in human consciousness, this is not to say that their thought on this issue is identical in every respect. As we have seen, Schiller thinks that social change can only occur once human consciousness has been transformed through aesthetic education. Thus, the change in human consciousness precedes the change in social conditions. For Marx, however, the transformation of social

- conditions—the change from capitalism to communism via socialism—precedes the change in human consciousness. In Marx’s view, it is only after the revolution that a communist consciousness will prevail.
- 20 ‘Among other things’ because in this paragraph Marx and Engels make other criticisms of capitalism that are distinct from their critique of specialization. For instance, they complain that under capitalism the worker has a job ‘forced upon him’. Here, the problem is not specialization, but its involuntary, coercive character. Furthermore, the idea that future individuals will hunt, fish, rear cattle and criticize *without ever becoming* a hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic also suggests that Marx and Engels are envisioning an abolition of social roles. For further discussion, see Cohen (1988, 141–144).
 - 21 Doubts have been expressed, however, over how far this passage reflects Marx’s considered view about (the absence of) specialization under communism (Carver 1998, 87–119; but cf. Sayers 2011, 136–141). The doubts are reasonable ones. Marx consistently emphasized that communism will be a productive and technologically advanced society, yet the pre-dinner activities he and Engels list here—hunting, fishing and cow-herding—do not sound especially productive, and the post-dinner activity—critical criticism—is not one Marx and Engels favour. However, if we put the specific activities Marx and Engels list to one side, the passage is consistent with Marx’s other remarks on this topic, which also emphasize the importance of ‘all-round development’ and the need to engage in varied activities to achieve it. So to give just one example, in *Capital* Marx quotes approvingly from the account of a French worker who performed a number of jobs, being employed variously as a ‘typographer, slater, plumber, etc.’, and consequently felt himself ‘less of a mollusc and more of a man’ (Marx 1996, 490). In short, although the hunting, fishing, shepherding and criticizing is not to be taken seriously, there is no reason to think that the passage’s underlying ideas are similarly insincere.
 - 22 For an interesting defence of well-roundedness, see Hurka (1987).
 - 23 For a helpful discussion of job rotation, see Walzer (1983, 165–184).
 - 24 I have provided a more detailed interpretation of this passage in Kandiyali (2014).
 - 25 Marx denied the trade-off I identify here on the implausible grounds that once individuals were liberated from the shackles of specialization they would develop their powers in ways that raise productivity to unparalleled levels. In the higher phase of communist society, we are told, ‘the productive forces [will] increase with the all-round development of the individual’ (Marx 1989, 87).
 - 26 Earlier versions of this paper were given at the eighth annual conference of the Marx and Philosophy Society in London and at the Marx and the Aesthetic conference at the University of Amsterdam; I am grateful to participants at both events for discussion. For helpful comments and criticisms, I would like to thank Chris Bennett, Andrew Chitty, David Leopold, Sean Sayers, John Skorupski, Bob Stern, Daniel Viehoff and Lea Ypi.

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