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«*The way to the head must be opened through the heart*»
Enlightenment and Herzensbildung in Schiller

ABSTRACT. The following paper discusses Schiller's interpretation of the German concept of *Bildung*, which appears to be a central term in Germany's culture, especially (but not limited to) the educational realm. As *Bildung* underwent massive transformations and has been re-interpreted multiple times throughout German history, this paper will start with a definitory exercise trying to organize the dynamics surrounding the term. Secondly, a two-fold historical context – firstly regarding the wider political and social dynamics of the time and secondly, a more biographical approach focusing on Schiller – will be provided. These contextualizing efforts will be succeeded by elaborations on Schiller's concept of *Herzensbildung*. The paper closes with a summary of key insights and further potential endeavors.

1. Introducing the German Concept of Bildung

The German concept of *Bildung* bears great potential for confusion and misunderstandings. Not just does it appear untranslatable into the English language (cf. Oelkers 1999) as the international discourse on education has developed diverging focus (cf. Vogt & Neuhaus 2021a), *Bildung* has also undergone enormous transformations since its introduction to the German language in the 11th century (cf. Neuhaus & Vogt 2022). Generally speaking, the history of the concept originated when monks – more specifically, monk Notker III. of St. Gallen – translated the Latin word *imaginatio* as *Bildung* (cf. Dörpinghaus & Uphoff 2011, 63) thereby describing the circumstance that God created mankind in his image (*German: Ebenbild*). Until the 18th century, the word and concept of *Bildung* remained primarily in the religious domain (cf. Nordenbo 2002, 342) describing processes of creation, making, or hardening (cf. Schneider 2012, 303) – all three (craft-related) descriptions

are hinting at the spiritual-religious processes of form-giving (cf. Kluge 1989), namely the subject's (self-)formation in God's intended way (cf. Neuhaus, Pieper & Vogt 2023). While *Bildung* has always featured a religious connotation (cf. Hellmeier 2016, 73), it entered the educational realm in the 18th century and, as Luhmann and Schorr argue (1988), has become pedagogy's «god-term» – abstract enough to enable discourse while simultaneously narrow enough so that the diverse discourse has a common point of reference (cf. Vogt & Neuhaus 2021a). It may be this fusion of the religious and the educational strata which led Koselleck (1990/2010, 114) to the observation that religious motives can still be spotted in (allegedly) secularized educational institutions, processes, and teachings.

Entering the educational realm in the 18th century, the concept of *Bildung* has attracted the attention of many of Germany's great philosophers, thinkers, scholars, writers, and artists, especially during the – intellectual extremely potent – times of German Idealism and New Humanism. What the large majority of these intellectuals had in common was, according to S. P. Stieger (2020, 65), that they «were dissatisfied with the educational goals of their contemporaries. Criticizing their orientation towards technical progress and usefulness as unethical and one-sided, the German New Humanists had their own vision of the desirable human condition». This latter condition strongly orients itself towards Ancient Greek ideals (cf. Neuhaus 2021; Lamm 2005, 93), thereby emphasizing a holistic and balanced approach to self-cultivation (cf. Neuhaus & Vogt 2022; cf. Humboldt 1792/2002, 64), which – apart from technical skill and knowledge – also considers (among others) moral development a meaningful dimension. According to S. E. Nordenbo, balance in this context should be understood as an internal (i.e. balancing one's own domains of competences) as well as an external process as «the individual and the public must be in harmony. Personal morality and politics are two sides of the same coin» (Nordenbo 2002, 348). Historically speaking, New Humanism's obsession with Ancient Greek ideals partly stems from the *Zeitgeist* (cf. Alves 2019) but was also perpetuated by the fascination with Ancient Greece on the part of personalities such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, who can be considered a central

figure of the German educational and *Bildung's* discourse (cf. Horlacher 2011, 38/39). Additionally, the protestant thinkers of the Enlightenment as well as New Humanism translated and interpreted the Ancient Greek texts and in the act of doing so put a distinctive (religious) spin on them (cf. Tröhler & Horlacher 2019, 4), which adds another layer of confusion on the relationship of *Bildung* and its referenced ideals.

However, apart from the rather philosophical discussion, *Bildung* also served – or, more precisely, was instrumentalized – for more worldly purposes, such as Germany's cultural demarcation from France (cf. Horlacher 2011), which followed the geopolitical tensions between the two countries. Further, the idea of *Bildung* also had effects on the social order within the German territory because, in the words of Stieger, «[w]hen the feudal system collapsed, the educational system (called *Bildungssystem* in German) took over an essential part of the task of organizing social relations and the distribution of wealth, power, and knowledge» (Stieger 2020, 66). Through certification, which could only be obtained in national *Bildungsinstitutionen*, the Prussian-German state not just regulated access to civil servant positions (cf. Neuhaus, Jacobsen & Vogt 2021; Neuhaus & Jacobsen 2022) but also legitimized the diverging social and economic outcomes of individuals (cf. Vogt & Neuhaus 2021b) as a certain class of economically successful individuals understood itself as *Bildungsbürgertum* (cf. Neuhaus 2021). Summarizing, it can be stated that the concept, interpretation, and ultimately meaning of *Bildung* – as all proxy concepts facilitating the search for truth – has always oscillated between two poles, one being rather outcome-oriented, the other rather focusing on inward-directed processes (cf. Neuhaus, Pieper & Vogt 2023). Despite the countless criticisms to which *Bildung* has – justly as well as unjustly – been exposed, it has consolidated itself as a central point of reference in educational research but also in public debate and is considered by many as a «discursive pivotal point in German history» (Bollenbeck 1994, 195). As such, *Bildung* with all its twists and turns can be considered a key concept of German culture and history. Yet, it should also not be forgotten that to this day there is still no comprehensive and unanimously agreed upon definition

of *Bildung* and therefore all approaches and conceptions of *Bildung* must be read in their specific historical context (cf. Böhm 2005, 90).

This paper will focus on an under-investigated and, as we shall argue, undervalued interpretation of *Bildung*, namely the concept of *Herzensbildung* [literally: education of the heart] as illustrated by German poet, playwright, and philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805). *Herzensbildung* should not be seen as just another facet of the rich philosophical discourse surrounding the concept of *Bildung*, but could also be read as a (much needed) plea for a re-calibration of current educational as well as societal trends. In order to argue for this standpoint, this paper will follow a three-part structure: Firstly, it will illustrate the historical as well as biographical circumstances in which Friedrich Schiller found himself and which, at least partially, influenced his approach to *Bildung* (section 2); as argued earlier, each concept of *Bildung* must be read in its specific historical background and section two will provide such a contextualization. After having sketched out relevant contexts, this paper will provide an interpretation of some excerpts of Schiller's Aesthetic Letters [*German*: «Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen»] (section 3), since this work has proven itself crucial to the conceptualization of *Herzensbildung*. Section 3 will not just illustrate Schiller's thoughts on (*Herzens*-)*Bildung* but will also systematically relate them to the historical context previously outlined. The paper shall close with a summary of key insights (section 4) and shall further provide exemplary perspectives on how Schiller's concept could enrich current institutions and ideas.

2. *Herzensbildung* – Historical and Biographical Contexts

The concept of *Herzensbildung* – at the time, the heart was considered the place where feelings and moods originate (cf. von Hermann & Pfister 1863, 394-396) – has been central to Schiller; in fact, he even referenced it when discussing desirable traits he has been looking for in a female companion (cf. Kämper 2006, 12). Given the centrality of *Herzensbildung* for Schiller's work and life, the question arises which referential frames – i.e. ideals, ideas, historical occurrences and events – influenced Schiller in developing the

ideas encompassed in *Herzensbildung*. The following paragraphs will sketch out key contexts which can enrich the (otherwise decontextualized) analysis of the concept in Schiller's letters.

2.1. The French Revolution and Industrialization – The Larger Historical Context

Generally speaking, Schiller worked and published in the prime of New Humanism (around 1750 until 1830), a time in which the ideas of freedom – read as the individual's emancipation from external forces (cf. Weitz 2015, 470) – and renewal were central to philosophical thinking (cf. Ode 2022, 37). As such, it should not come as a surprise that Schiller's concept and thought features many contact points with works of his contemporaries, such as Immanuel Kant, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, or Wilhelm von Humboldt (cf. Neuhaus & Vogt 2021a). Due to the strong emphasis on freedom and self-cultivation as well as its implication on *Bildung* and the associated institutions, the 18th century is sometimes also referred to as the pedagogical century (cf. Brachmann 2008). What all of these philosophical discussions and conceptualizations share was the idea that through *Bildung* the individual could initiate a self-formation process which leads to his or her betterment and – through accumulation – also to the improvement of the entire state or civilization (cf. Frevert & Wulf 2012, 2). The necessity for this personal as well as national/civilizational betterment however stems from observations made abroad, namely the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror which followed it.

Despite the Enlightenment's ideals, which largely inspired the French Revolution (cf. Fischer 1975, 432), Schiller and his contemporaries observed that public order collapsed and was succeeded by an immoral reign of terror after the removal of Louis XVI from the French throne. According to this view, the eradication of the Ancien Régime did not result in larger degrees of freedom or the betterment of the people (cf. Ode 2022, 37) and while «[t]his new thinking [Enlightenment] reflected changing economic realities: the rise of private property, market competition, and the bourgeois» (Carothers & Barndt 1999, 18), the French Revolution resulted in a state of political and legal arbitrariness endangering the very principles

Enlightenment's thought deemed central. The failure of the French Revolution was meaningful for Schiller in a plethora of ways. Foremost, it shook Schiller's beliefs in the correctness concerning the Enlightenment's concept of the human being as well as the state since «Clarification of the terms alone cannot achieve this» (Schiller 2010, 141). Later he concludes that reason and rationality alone can only create laws, yet «the courageous will and the living feeling must carry it out» (Schiller 2001, 330). This lack of willpower, feeling, and courage is sometimes referred to as the Enlightenment's anthropological misjudgment (Neuenfeld 2005, 37) which reduces the human being to its rationality and intellect and thereby neglects its potential for impulsive action. Alongside the power vacuum in France after the beheading of Louis XVI, this neglect of human's impulsive nature – one could also conceptualize it as a lack of maturity and/or morality – resulted in a deficit of freedom and the amplification of class differences (cf. Ode 2022, 37). Schiller took these observations seriously since his concept of *Herzensbildung* was designed to enable people to act more maturely and prevent a repetition of the events outlined above. According to Schiller, only *Herzensbildung* could provide a meaningful basis to initiate such a process (cf. Koch 2009, 404).

However, the French revolution and the associated processes and developments were not the only influential factors on Schiller's thinking. Apart from the observations made abroad, Schiller also considered conditions and developments in (the territory which should later become) Germany, namely the industrialization and the associated changes in the (occupational) lives of the people. Even though the observations made by Kocka (1988, 5) mainly refer to the *Kaiserreich* (1871-1918), the foundation for these developments were also laid in Schiller's time as the territories which should later become Germany experienced industrialization prior to the unification of the country. Compared to other European states at the time, Germany became a nation state relatively late, a process known as the German *Sonderweg* (cf. Kocka 1988, 3/4). As such, these observations provide a useful point of reference. Kocka (1988, 5) states that Germany «appeared to be a strange mixture of highly successful capitalist industrialization and socio-

economic modernization on the one hand, and of surviving pre-industrial institutions, power relations and cultures on the other» (cf. also Wehler 1973). In short: the state Schiller lived in experienced a certain degree of fragmentation, disunity, and brokenness due to the different socio-economic as well as occupational realities. However, this rift did not just divide different people or socio-economic classes but also affected the individual. As a result of processes which are today known as functional differentiation¹, the individual experiences alienation from its labor – an observation already made by Karl Marx (cf. 1996) – but also no longer has the chance to participate in multiple occupations. Given the fact that New Humanism's ideal human is a holistically educated and well-rounded being, the processes initiated and perpetuated by industrialization pose a serious threat to the proclaimed aims. Schiller himself observed this mismatch and argued that the given (working) conditions – including the necessity for specialization – make it impossible for the individual to educate or shape him- or herself in a holistic way as this way of working and living only enables partial or fragmented formation (cf. Koch 2009, 404). Schiller on the matter in letter 6: «In it [the modern world] he must specialize in a way that makes it impossible for him to develop into a «totality» (wholeness). Eternally bound only to a single small fragment of the whole, man forms himself only as a fragment» (qtd. in Koch 2009, 404). The program of *Herzensbildung* was also meant to address the inner fragmentation of the individual. As such, it can be argued that *Herzensbildung* – in the spirit of the Ancient Greek ideals and informed by the observations made in France – should be read as an agenda tackling the larger societal problems by improving the moral judgement of

¹ First formalized by Niklas Luhmann, functional differentiation describes the fact that each and every individual gradually professionalizes in one area of expertise and no longer splits its capacities between different occupations (cf. Schimank 2005). Thereby, each and every involved actor is gradually more dependent on others while also being more effective at his/her (single-minded) occupation. This process requires certain societal pre-conditions, such as the ability to communicate, trade/make exchanges etc., and is considered a marker of modern societies.

the individual as «the individual and the public must be in harmony. Personal morality and politics are two sides of the same coin» (Nordenbo 2002, 348). The Ancient Greeks even went a step further as they «thought of culture as character» (Gaddis 2018, 44).

2.2. Schiller's as *Lebenskünstler* – Biographical Contexts

As argued earlier, the time in which Schiller lived was characterized by transitions, turmoil, upheaval, and even revolutions – a fact which is also mirrored by his own biography as Ode (2022, 38) put it:

His father is a surgeon, he is the only son alongside five sisters. He begins law school at a military academy, where he experiences coercion and disciplining. He breaks off his studies, switches to medicine and becomes a regimental doctor. It may be striking that one of the best-known German poets was a doctor by profession. The knowledge he has acquired does not prevent him from cultivating a lifestyle that favors early physical decline.²

Relatively early in his career as a poet and playwright (at age 23), Schiller became hugely successful with his play *Die Räuber* (1782/83), a success which was mostly powered by young and freedom-loving adolescents as well as the *Bildungsbürgertum* (the educated neo-bourgeoisie) for whom his literature became a household name (cf. Sharpe 1998, 70). While the class of formally educated social climbers celebrated the criticism of the feudal system brought forward in *Die Räuber*, Schiller became a fugitive as the ruling class (in this case the duke) did not tolerate the critical attitude towards the system and issued an arrest warrant for Schiller (cf. Ode 2022, 38) – the official warrant argues that Schiller distanced himself from his medical workplace without permission (cf. Luserke-Jacqui 2011, 607). The following six years were primarily determined by his insecure legal as well as economic conditions, the latter also being amplified by his lavish lifestyle (cf. Ode 2022, 38). Only after being hired as a philosophy and history professor in Jena, Schiller was able to consolidate his lifestyle (cf. Prüfer 2002,

² Sources which only exist in German have been translated by the authors.

77-79), yet his health gradually deteriorated. Due to his newly acquired position as well as to his unabated fame coming from his continuous literary outputs, Schiller came in contact with most of the – German but also international – intellectual elites of the time. In 1799, Schiller alongside his family moved to Weimar where he also died in 1805 at age 45. Looking at his biography, Ode (2022, 38) assesses Schiller's life(style) as following:

His biography reveals to a large extent a kind of person who is nowadays commonly referred to as an «artist of life», and by this latter we have in mind those contemporaries who do not act according to mere instrumental rationality, but instead, out of their own conviction, do behave regardless or against prevailing conventions. He must toil for his success without the secure income and reputation enjoyed by his friend Goethe. He is denied that social independence which is illustrated and normatively claimed in his aesthetic concept of education by means of the figure of the artist.

Considering Schiller's personal as well as professional background, this paper adopts Wilkinson's and Willoughby's (1967) viewpoint and treats Schiller's letters as a philosophical inquiry into diverging sets of domains with beauty and aesthetics being central to his thinking. As such, an investigation of the concept of *Herzensbildung* may not just be relevant to the scholarship of *Bildung* – until today, a key concept of German culture – but also deepen the understanding of Schiller's philosophical presuppositions.

3. Herzensbildung in Schiller's Politic and Aesthetic project

In order to properly understand the concept of *Herzensbildung*, it is essential to briefly reconstruct the main claims of letters 1 to 8 of the *Ästhetische Briefe*. In the reconstruction proposed below, we also refer to the *Augustenburger Briefe* as an important source for understanding Schiller's thought. The excerpts are cited by letter number. All translations are our own.

The *Ästhetische Briefe* is the most systematic and influential among Schiller's philosophical works and a brief consideration of its genesis may help to shed some light on Schiller's intentions in writing them. In gratitude for receiving a stipend from the Prince von Augustenburg, Schiller began to write a series of letters, addressed to the prince, containing his views on art

and aesthetic beauty. His initial purpose was to provide a foundation for aesthetics or an «analytic of the beautiful», following the project he had been pursuing since the *Kallias Briefe*. The *Augustenburger Briefe*³, written to the Prince from Summer of 1793 onwards, provided the raw material to much of the *Ästhetische Briefe*. Yet, in the process of writing them, Schiller oscillated between two different plans. As it can be observed by scrolling through Schiller's letters to Körner, Garve and others in this period, by the Summer of 1794, Schiller appeared to relinquish the project of writing a foundation for aesthetics and devoted himself instead to aesthetic education and the role of beauty in the cultural development of humanity. In October of the same year nevertheless he resumed his original project of an analytic of the beautiful. After much vacillation and wavering, he finally made up his mind and decided to merge the two projects, purporting to write a study on aesthetic education accompanied by a theory of the beautiful⁴.

A traditional view of the *Briefe* construes them as an evasive retreat from politics into the ideal world of art⁵. But this scarcely seems to be Schiller's true intentions. For Schiller, the relationship between aesthetics and politics is much more complex than a mere alternative between an apolitical aestheticism

³ Schiller is believed to have sent seven long letters to the Prince. However, in February 1794 there was a fire in the palace where the letters were kept. Only five of the letters were recovered from copies of the originals. After the fire, the Prince asked Schiller to rewrite them, a request he could hardly refuse. In rewriting them, however, Schiller reformulated his thinking, which was moving ever closer to their final formulation in the *Ästhetische Briefe*.

⁴ Some commentators have argued that this decision has led to a divided, incoherent work, reflecting two contrasting views of beauty. While the discussion of aesthetic education approach beauty primarily as a means towards political and moral ends, the analytic of the beautiful considers beauty as an end in itself. This view is advocated, for example, in Wolfgang Düsing, *Friedrich Schiller, Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, Text, Materialien, Kommentar* (Munich: Hanser, 1975), 138-141. We will not take sides in this polemic here, because what concerns us is not the structure of the *Briefe* per se, but primarily the concept of aesthetic education.

⁵ This view is shared by Georg Lukács, *Goethe und seine Zeit* (Bern: Francke, 1947); Georg Lukács, «Zur Ästhetik Schillers», in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Ästhetik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 1954) and Wilkinson and Willoughby, «Introduction» to *Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1967: xi-cxcvi.

and an instrumentalization of art for political purposes. As he puts it in the second letter, referring to the general enthusiasm aroused by the French Revolution, he wonders whether it is not unreasonable to look for a «code of laws for the aesthetic world» instead of being concerned with «the most perfect of all works of art, the building up of true political freedom». But Schiller ponders that «art is a daughter of freedom» and that it alone is capable of freeing man from the «necessity» that «bends a degraded humanity beneath its tyrannous yoke» and of overcoming «*Utility*», the «great idol of the age, to which all powers must do service and all talents swear allegiance». Schiller concludes the letter with the cryptic claim that «it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom» (Schiller, 1795/1980, p. 24) the meaning of which will become clear only much latter in the *Briefe*.

To understand why Schiller seems to prioritize beauty and art over politics, we need to consider the source of his political thought, which is in the modern republican tradition, that of Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Rousseau and Ferguson⁶. The core principle of this tradition is that civil liberty arises from moral character. Thus, for these thinkers, a republican constitution is only possible if citizens are virtuous, if they are capable of putting the common good before their private interests. When an attempt is made to found a republic without virtuous citizens, the inevitable result is its degeneration into an anarchy in which everyone tries to make their own interests prevail over those of others. From this comes Schiller's harsh diagnosis of modern society and his critique of the French Revolution. Indeed, Schiller's diagnosis of his own time is far from flattering:

Among the lower and more numerous classes we find crude, lawless impulses which have been unleashed by the loosening of the bonds of civil order and are hastening with uncontrollable rage to their brutal satisfaction [...]. On the other hand, the civilized classes present to us the still more repugnant spectacle of indolence, and a depravity of character which is even more appalling since culture itself is the source of it. (Fifth Letter)

⁶ On the influence of the republican tradition on Schiller, see Beiser (2005), p. 123-126 and Beiser (1992), p. 85-98.

Schiller sees his own society as «uncontrolled» and «corrupted,» relying upon a fragile social contract that risks relapsing into savagery or barbarism at every moment. Because of this state of affairs, sociability and civility are nothing but a superficial external veneer, which only disguises the crudest egoism that lies inside: «Selfishness has established its system in the very bosom of our exquisitely refined society, and we experience all the contagions and all the calamities of community without the accompaniment of a communal spirit» (Fifth Letter).

From this stance derives his attitude toward the French Revolution. For him, the outbreak of the Revolution brought the hope of a new humanity, based on law, justice, and freedom. But the degeneration of the revolution into the Reign of Terror was an eloquent sign that society was not prepared for it. In Schiller's words, the «attempt of the French people to establish themselves in their sacred human rights and to build a political freedom» is utterly fair, but the revolutionary terror showed that «the moment was the most propitious, but it encountered a corrupted generation, which was not up to the task» (*Augustenburger Briefe*)⁷. A republican constitution remains a dead letter if the people defending it follow their own self-interests instead of seeking the common good, in which case, it would only mean the replacement of a despotism by another. That is why Schiller believes that any attempt to change a nation's constitution is conditional on reforming the character of the people first. Using the Kantian principle of the autonomy of practical reason, he argues that the individual only is entitled to civil liberty if he/she can demonstrate the capacity for moral freedom.

Yet the reason for the failure of the Revolution resides also in the very nature of modern society. The present form of humanity is contrasted by Schiller with its past form, especially the form it had assumed in classical Greece. He thus opposes the divided, fragmented, and artificial character

⁷ In the *Ästhetische Briefe*, Schiller results at a similar (diagnostic) statement: «The fabric of the natural State is floundering, its rotten foundations are yielding, and there seems to be a *physical* possibility of setting Law upon the throne, of honoring Man at last as an end in himself and making true freedom the basis of political association. Vain hope! The *moral* possibility is wanting, and the favorable moment finds an apathetic generation» (Fifth Letter).

of modern mankind to the wholesome, natural, and genuine character of Greek humanity. From this point of view, an Athenian of the classical era represented in himself his entire world and the full range of human potentialities, whereas a modern European is seen as just a cog in a vast lifeless mechanism. It was culture itself - through the division of labor and the modern mechanical state - that broke the inner unity of human nature. In this way, the state has become a cold and abstract whole that rules over the concrete life of the individual and prevents him from developing his full human potential. Schiller also states, however, that there was no other way available to develop the multiple human potentialities in a complex society than by opposing them to each other. From this derives the claim that «the antagonism of powers is the great instrument of culture, but it is only the instrument; for as long as it persists, we are only on the way towards culture» (Sixth Letter).

The separate formation of human powers is beneficial for society at large, but not for the individual, who is subjected to a «fragmentary cultivation of human powers». And yet without such separation, the great achievements of modern science, philosophy, and art would not have been possible. For Schiller, nevertheless, there is no reason why present-day man/woman should be content to have his nature mutilated or to be a servant to the well-being of a future humanity. Schiller claims that wholeness is a prescription of reason itself and thus is part of nature's design for the human species. The dialectic that opposes the cultivation of individual powers to the formation of their totality must be only apparent. The wholeness of human nature must be able to be restored by some means that is available to us.

In the seventh letter, Schiller considers the possibility that this task can be accomplished by the action of the State, but soon dismisses it because the State, in its present form, is the source of the problem rather than its solution. A more wholesome humanity could not be founded by the State, but rather it is the State itself that would have to be founded on an uncorrupted humanity⁸. If this does not take place, any attempt at political reform becomes

⁸ Schiller regards the State not as a purpose in itself, but rather as a precondition for the true purpose, namely, the integral development of humanity. That is why he contrasts

«inopportune» and even «chimerical». It is only when this integral nature of the human being develops, when man starts to succeed in overcoming his/her inner division that he/she will be able to be the craftsman of the «political creation of Reason» (Seventh Letter). For the State is made by human beings, and only undivided and uncorrupted men/women can generate a State that is virtuous and uncorrupted. That is why a political revolution is not enough for this task, because it risks only replacing one despotism with another.

It is up to people to reestablish in their nature the totality destroyed by the artifice of modern civilization, and this is precisely the task that pertains to art. Schiller argues that aesthetic education is just a provisional means of human integration until this utopian future comes. Schiller's anthropology divides human nature in three drives that are grounded in physiology (the underlying unity of body and mind) and dynamically connected to one another. The *Stofftrieb* (sensuous drive) comes from our physical nature and allows us to deal with objects to fulfill our desires, instincts, and bodily needs. The individual who is under the *Stofftrieb* dwell in the present, living from moment to moment. The *Formtrieb* (formal drive) comes from our rational and intellectual nature and reflects our capacity for logical reasoning and abstract thinking. In contrast to the *Stofftrieb*, it is only concerned with what is timelessly true, like moral principles. But these two drives are not to be thought of as necessarily in conflict. We need both, but they must be harmonized through a third drive, the *Spieltrieb* (play-instinct) that seeks to balance our sensuous and rational natures. The experience of aesthetic beauty brings equilibrium to the two contrasting natures in us: «Through Beauty the sensuous man is led to form and to thought; through Beauty the spiritual man is brought back to matter and restored to the world of sense» (Eighteenth Letter)

the Athenian State that, under Solon, left the Athenian Citizenry free to develop, with the static and rigid Spartan state. In Athens the state was merely the vehicle for the human flourishing, in Sparta, at the contrary, the state was seen as an end in and for itself. This is of course a highly idealized view of classical Antiquity, but it contributes to enlighten Schiller's position concerning the state.

In Schiller's work, Beauty and art should be thought of in the broadest possible meaning, including not only the fine arts, but also good manners, social conventions, codes of honor etc. Contrary to what culture critics like Rousseau would say, refinement of manners is not a dispensable luxury, but a sign that the substance of social life is gradually being purified by the aesthetic form. Without the refinement of taste, human beings cannot develop a social character, harmonizing the aspirations of the individual with the general will of society:

Taste alone brings harmony into society, because it establishes harmony in the individual. All other forms of perception divide a man, because they are exclusively based either on the sensuous or on the intellectual part of his being; only the perception of the Beautiful makes something whole of him, because both his natures must accord with it. (Twenty-seventh Letter)

The political role attributed by Schiller to art and aesthetic education is closely intertwined with his consideration of the Enlightenment. The great goals of the Enlightenment movement - to eliminate superstition and create a rational society and state - could only be achieved if true Enlightenment reached the great public. The failure of the French Revolution to establish a stable republican constitution, however, cast doubt on the Enlightenment program itself. Since in the Revolution the sovereignty of reason became the Reign of Terror, it was doubtful whether it is possible or advisable to ground society and the state on purely rational principles. In Germany, this crisis of enlightened reason gave rise to the famous controversy between theory and practice among German *intelligentsia*⁹. Schiller emphasized ae-

⁹ This dispute took place mainly in the pages of the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. The core of the controversy was the role of reason in politics, that is, whether reason alone is capable of determining the fundamental principles of the state and serving as a guide for practice. The participants in the dispute were divided between those who argued that reason alone is sufficient to define the basic principles of morality and legislation (Kant and Fichte) and those who objected to this conclusion, either on the basis of religion or prudential considerations (Rehberg, Gentz and Möser). Schiller was not directly involved in the controversy, but his arguments in the *Briefe* seem to be a response to it.

sthetic education as a means of bridging the gap between theory and practice, bringing Enlightenment reason to the broader public. He recognizes that *Aufklärung* led to enormous advances in the realm of intellect, developing the theoretical culture. However, this progress did not take place to the same extent in practical culture, which is the necessary and indispensable complement to the former:

The more urgent need of our age seems [...] to be the ennoblement of feelings and the ethical purification of will, for a great deal has already been done for the enlightenment of the understanding. We lack not so much knowledge of truth and right, but rather the effectiveness of this knowledge in determining the will; not so much light, but rather warmth; not so much philosophical culture, but rather aesthetic culture. I consider the latter to be the most effective instrument of character formation, and at the same time the one that is completely independent of the political situation, and thus can be maintained even without the help of the state. (*Augustenburger Briefe*)

Schiller also suggests that merely rational enlightenment, not tempered by feeling, was not only inadequate, but even dangerous: «The intellectual enlightenment on which the refined strata of society, not without justification, pride themselves, reveals on the whole an influence on character so little ennobling that it rather provides maxims to confirm depravity» (Fifth Letter)¹⁰. The destructive fury of the character Franz Moor in Schiller's play

¹⁰ In the *Augustenburger Briefe*, Schiller is still more emphatic in his critique of enlightenment: «The Enlightenment, of which the higher strata of our age not unjustly boast, is merely theoretical culture, and, taken as a whole, shows so little ennobling influence on the dispositions of men [*Gesinnung*] that it rather only helps to bring corruption into a system and to make it more incurable. A refined and consistent Epicureanism has begun to stifle all energy of character, and the ever-tightening fetters of necessity, as well as the increased dependence of mankind on the physical realm, has gradually led to the maxim of passivity and painful obedience to hold as the highest rule of life. Hence the narrowness in thought, the powerlessness in action, the pitiful mediocrity in achievement, which characterizes our age to its shame. And so we see the spirit of time wavering between barbarism and slackness, freethought and superstition, brutishness and infatuation, and it is only the balance of vices that still holds the whole together».

Die Räuber (1781) personifies the risk of this unilateral cultivation of mind at the expenses of feeling. The aristocratic villain Moor presents himself as a convicted materialist and considers others, his father and brother included, as mere means to his ends. Yet, as an example of the return of the repressed, his dreams are filled with phantasies of perdition and damnation, which ultimately drives him to kill himself. Franz Moor personifies thus enlightened reason reduced to pure rational calculation.

This is where *Herzensbildung* comes in. By the Eighth Letter, Schiller already established that aesthetic education is essential in the task of extending and spreading the Enlightenment. Unlike law and purely theoretical principles, the arts, by addressing the heart and imagination of the spectator, have a direct effect on their character. It is the concrete images of the theater, for example, that make virtue attractive and vice repellent, and not the abstract principles of the philosopher or the legislator. By acting on the very core of the spectator, art has the power to change not only their outward behavior (this is the role of the law), but also their attitudes and dispositions. It is through art that it will be possible to make reason sensible, incorporating the principles of reason into each person's own life.

The formation of sensibility, the cultivation of feeling through aesthetic form is seen by Schiller as the urgent task of his time and as a solution to the crisis of the Enlightenment brought about by the revolutionary terror in France:

It is, therefore, not enough to say that all enlightenment of the understanding deserves our respect only insofar as it flows back upon the character; to a certain extent it proceeds from the character, since the way to the head must be opened through the heart. The development of the faculty of sensibility is then the more pressing need of our age, not merely because it becomes a means of making the improved insight effective for our life, but for the very reason that it awakens us to this improvement. (Eighth Letter)

According to Schillerian anthropology, it is feelings and not abstract principles that determine action. By itself, however, the heart alone is not a good guide to action. This is so because those who allow themselves to be controlled only by their feelings can be easy prey for all kinds of fanaticism and

«enthusiasm» (*Schwärmerei*). It is from the coincidence between a «pure will» and a «clear understanding» that the harmonious and balanced character that is the purpose of aesthetic education can be achieved. The role of reason is to establish the law, but it is up to the heart to enforce it. The drives of human nature are the only driving forces in the world of the senses and, for this reason, only an educated sensibility is capable of overcoming «hostile egoism» and establishing the «law of sociability». The obstacles to the establishment of a rational society and state do not lie in the lack of knowledge or literate culture, but in the lack of decision, the «inertia of nature» and the «cowardice of the heart» (*Augustenburger Briefe*).

By moving away from Enlightenment rationalism, Schiller is already anticipating the much bolder claims of Jena romanticism, a form of romantic aestheticism that completely abandons the political aspirations of the *Aufklärung*. However, it is important to note that Schiller consistently maintained his commitment to the republican tradition and to Enlightenment ideals. The strength of his thought comes precisely from the way Schiller strove to balance the tension between opposites without giving in to either pole. His aesthetic project articulates in a complex and creative way the tensions between reason and sensibility, intellectual culture and the culture of feeling that were the substance of the philosophical and aesthetic controversy of that period.

4. Summary and Potential Implications

As we have argued above, in the process of elaboration of his aesthetic letters, Schiller was led to propose the concept of *Herzensbildung* as a response to three historical processes of his time: (1) the Enlightenment; (2) the German *Sonderweg*; and (3) the alienation of the individual in the modern commercial society. To conclude, each of these three aspects shall be briefly summarized and, in addition, some of the implications of Schiller's concept for the present will be highlighted.

First and foremost, the concept of *Herzensbildung* was proposed as a form of approaching the perceived shortcomings of the Enlightenment, which Schiller believed failed to address the human need for a balanced

development of all its faculties in an all-rounded formation. His critique of the French Revolution stems precisely from this diagnosis of the modern condition. In his view, informed primarily by the classical republican tradition, the revolution degenerated into a reign of terror because those who took part in it were not up to the task set before them. From a degenerated humanity, one cannot expect a virtuous state, but only anarchy and chaos. In order to address this shortcoming, it would be necessary to build up wholesome personalities, capable of putting the common good above their private selfishness, and this is a task that falls to art and to *Herzensbildung*.

Schiller's emphasis on an all-rounded education was also influenced by the fragmented and disunified state of Germany during his time. He believed that *Herzensbildung* could help to overcome these divisions and create a more cohesive and integrated society, thus providing a cultural foundation for the country as a nation. Finally, Schiller recognized the negative effects of industrialization on individual well-being, such as alienation from labor and fragmentation of the self. He saw *Herzensbildung* as a way to counteract these effects and help individuals maintain their integrity and wholeness.

Schiller's diagnosis – it should not be forgotten that Schiller was trained as a medical doctor – of the predicaments of his own time, as expressed in the aesthetic letters, is grounded in an anthropology that has resonated with subsequent generations of writers, artists and philosophers. For Schiller, the human being must be considered from a «full anthropological evaluation», according to which all the forces of the human spirit must be harmonized: practical reason and feeling, the universality of law and the individuality of inclination, nature and art, objectivity and subjectivity, head and heart. Yet in modern civilization, according to this diagnosis, reason has been overdeveloped but in limited directions. Consequently, the cultivation of feeling and sensibility, i.e., *Herzensbildung*, is viewed as the urgent task of the age, a task of momentous political and ethical implications.

Taking the observations of this paper seriously, the widespread image that Schiller's letters imply a kind of exile in the aesthetic domain as a result of his disillusionment with the French Revolution should be considered incorrect. Instead, Schiller can be read in a way that the aesthetic realm

functions both as an intermediary between the current physical state (governed by necessity and interest) and the future ethical state (governed by virtue and the common good) but also as a precondition for all political freedom. In an age when the development of civilization seemed to increasingly alienate man from himself, Schiller called on his contemporaries to further develop the ideas of the Enlightenment, based on harmony between intellect and sensibility, reason and feeling. This consideration of the unity of human nature, as inextricably linked to aesthetic formation, can be considered Schiller's most lasting contribution to modern thought.

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