

COMPLETION OF HUMANITY, SCHILLER'S AESTHETICISM AND FREEDOM

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ABSTRACT

*As the great German literary theorist and philosophical aesthetician of the 18th century, Schiller was a giant of the era. Examining the essential function of aesthetic education from the perspective of humanity is the starting point and final destination of Schiller's aesthetic education. In the representative work *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, it is proposed to pursue the perfection of human nature and promote the freedom of reason. Aesthetics plays an important role in restoring the fragmented human nature. First of all, play drive as the internal basis to achieve the complete humanity is the inevitable requirement for people to move towards their own unity, which neutralizes sense and reason. Secondly, the process of play drive is the process of forming a living form, that is, the process of forming beauty in the widest sense. Therefore, beauty is the living form of the harmonious movement of sense and reason. Humanity achieves a whole existence in the freedom of beauty*

KEYWORDS: *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man; Completion of Humanity; Aestheticism and Freedom*

INTRODUCTION

Almost all theories in humanities and social sciences are centered on the topic of "human" in the history of human thought, which in the end all serve and attribute to the problem of "human". The understanding of human, or the assumption of human nature, is the first prerequisite for their thinking. Each ideology is not just a theory of thought, but a theory of human nature that indicates a course of action in some way.

In ancient Greece, the knowledge of Deity reflected the earliest understanding of human beings about the world and people. Human nature and divinity were combined to a certain extent. The concerns of the ancient Greeks ranged from the nature attributes to the social and cultural attributes of human beings. And the cognition of human nature shows the opposite view of good and evil, as well as physical and spiritual. It embodies the pursuit of a harmonious and free individual by the ancient Greeks of rationality. After the rise of the tyrannical Roman Empire, the rational spirit of Greece was relatively maintained, at the same time the human naturalness and secular features were also released to the greatest extent. The cruel reality made them return to themselves and seek the rationality of existence from the individual. So, this introspection laid the foundation for the development of Christianity. Since the Medieval Ages, Christianity has monopolized the entire culture and human spiritual life. In this "dark time", the view of human nature was closely connected with Christian theology, so-called the humanity under divinity. The hostility to the physical body suppressed human naturalness and leads to distortion of humanity, and the admiration of reason also made the spirituality in human nature further developed, with the purpose of becoming the obedient servant of God. During the Renaissance, humanism advocated taking people as the center to evaluate everything, and the

principle status of man was unprecedentedly enhanced. Naturalness became the main content of humanity, and it was encouraged to demonstrate the basic content of humanity from a rational perspective.

Since the Enlightenment, the ideas of Rousseau and Kant have directly influenced Schiller's thoughts of human nature. Rousseau's philosophy of good nature and theory of natural law guided Schiller's pursuit of perfect humanity, calling for the completion of human nature through education. Furthermore, Kant's philosophical thought directly affected Schiller's analysis of humanity and aesthetic thinking. The unity of man's duality is also an important embodiment of Schiller's aesthetic thought.

Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man was written to a Danish Prince, Friedrich Christian of Schleswig-Holstein Augustenburg, on the subject of aesthetic education. Though these Letters are not a strictly philosophical work, Schiller occupies a recognizable and important place in the history of aesthetic philosophy. What Schiller establishes is that the subject matter of philosophy must proceed from his understanding of beauty, and that the truly philosophical mind is the aesthetical state of mind. The whole burden of the argument in these Letters is, in a single sentence that Man must pass through the aesthetic condition, from the merely physical, in order to reach the rational or moral.

SCHILLER'S "FRAGMENTATION" THEORY OF HUMAN NATURE

The Complete Living Condition of Ancient Greeks

The condition of humanity is characteristic of all peoples who are engaged in culture, Schiller rejoins that the Greeks, who were wedded to all the delights of art and to all the dignity of wisdom¹, did so without sacrificing the human heart and falling a prey to seduction. Among the ancient Greeks, the sense and the mind were not rigidly separated. Thus, for the Greeks, reason does not mutilate nature. In fullness of form no less than of content, at once philosophic and creative, sensitive and energetic, the Greeks combined the first youth of imagination with manhood of reason in a glorious manifestation of humanity (33).

The individual Greek was qualified to be the representative of his age, because it was from all-unifying nature. Among the Greeks, poetry was not corrupted by supercilious wit or speculation by sophistry, because both honored the truth. This, Schiller emphasizes, is reflected in the humanity of the Greek gods. As Schiller writes, "the whole of humanity was missing in no individual god." This humanity is in contrast to the fragmented nature of man in modern age, in which the individual develops only one-sidedly, rather than in his full, universal potential. However, the polypoid character of Greek states, in which every individual enjoyed an independent existence, grew into the whole organism.

Schiller regarded the living conditions of the Greeks as a model for modern people, but he did not mean to return to ancient Greece, but merely "assumed their names, their battle cries, their costumes to enact a new historic scene in such time-honored disguise and with such borrowed language²." Therefore, what Schiller admired was not the actual social status of ancient Greece, but an ideal projection of the state of human existence he hoped to achieve.

¹ Friedrich, Schiller. Letters on The Aesthetic Education of Man. Trans. Reginald Snell (New York: Yale University Press, 1954) 33. All the following quotations of the novel are taken from the same edition with the page number indicated in the parenthesis.

² Marx, Karl. "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte." *Die Revolution* 1(1852):9

The Greeks in the stage of self-sufficient development possessed the wholeness in humanity, though their state was simple, but it was a harmonious organization. Their lives were full of serenity, completion, individual freedom, happiness, and integration of man and nature. At the same time, human nature has been fully developed. This balance can exist not because of simplicity and roughness, but because the various forces in it are in confrontation and one single force is dissolved in the confrontation, while imagination and all-dividing intellect can get the highest development without suppressing each other. This ideal beauty reflects the great humanity thought, representing all the excellent qualities and pursuits of human beings, and these can be seen from the personified deities and heroes of Greece. High Reason does not tear the human nature in pieces, rather by combining it in varying ways; for the whole of humanity was never lacking in any single god.

Defects of Modern People Fragmentation

The “fragment” is opposite to the “whole”, and its significance can only be shown in the comparison of those two. “Fragmentation” is Schiller’s metaphorical description of the living conditions of individuals in modern society. He does not refer to the specific physical structure of people, but to the way people feel about the world and their living conditions.

It was civilization itself which inflicted this wound upon modern man. Once the increase of empirical knowledge, and more exact modes of thought, made sharper divisions between the sciences inevitable, and once the increasingly complex machinery of state necessitated a more rigorous separation of ranks and occupations, then the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious power at variance (34). Man was alienated and became a too; state made way for an ingenious clockwork, in which; out of the piecing together of innumerable but lifeless parts, a mechanical kind of collective life ensued.

In modern times, due to the development of civilization and the state becoming a state of need, man can only develop a certain kind of power on him, thus destroying his natural harmonious status and becoming less relevant to the collective, incomplete and solitary fragments. This one-sided development is absolutely necessary for the development of civilization and the progress of mankind, but the individual sacrifices himself for the purpose of this world and loses the integrity of his own character. Then, people must be at liberty to restore by means of a higher Art this wholeness in out nature which Art has destroyed. Totality of character must therefore be found in a people that is capable and worthy of exchanging the State of need for the State of freedom (30).

THEORY OF PLAY

Play is considered to be just as important a function as reason. This kind of function has accompanied human beings to stand out from animals, and has always played an important role in the process of civilization. Schiller used Kant’s elaboration of play in aesthetic judgment, linking play to humanity. He believes that play is aesthetics, which is a manifestation of human nature’s pursuit of freedom and a place to achieve integrity of humanity and considered Schiller to think that games are aesthetics, which is a manifestation of human nature's pursuit of freedom. Only in games can humans achieve human integrity.

Sensuous Drive and Formal Drive

Towards the accomplishment of this twofold task of giving reality to the necessity within, and subjecting to the law of necessity the reality without (54). From the very nature of man as a “finite infinite” or as sensuous-rational, Schiller derives the existence of “two opposite forces” or drives. The first of these is the sensuous drive; the second is the formal drive.

The sensuous drive places man in the limits of time, and makes him matter. Matter is nothing but alteration or reality which fills time. Everything in time is successive. Thus, where this drive works exclusively, man is nothing but a unity of magnitude, a filled moment of time. Thus, his personality is annulled as long as sensation alone rules him. The formal drive proceeds from the absolute existence of man, or from his rational nature, and strives to set him free to bring harmony into the diversity of his manifestation, and to maintain his person despite all changes of condition. As Schiller writes, “Since we are we to all eternity,” the formal drive encompasses the whole succession of time: It annuls time, it annuls alteration.

If sensuality predominates, then man will never be he himself; if the formal drive annuls the sensuous, he will never be “something else,” consequently he will be naught (nonentity). Both drives, therefore, need to have limits set to them and, in as much as they can be thought of as energies, need to be relaxed. Personality must keep the sensuous drive within its proper bounds, and receptivity, or nature, must do the same with the formal drive (59).

However, the two are not by nature opposed. The task of culture is therefore twofold firstly, to secure sensuousness against the encroachments of freedom; secondly to secure the personality against the power of sensations. The former, it achieves through the education of the capacity of feeling, the latter through the education of the capacity of reason. The perfection of the capacity of feeling requires the greatest possible mutability and extensiveness; the perfection of the capacity of reason, the greatest possible self-reliance and intensity. The more many-sided the receptivity, the more potentialities does he develop in himself. The more strength and depth of the personality, the more freedom the reason wins, the more form he creates outside himself.

Concept of Play and Play Drive

Since the two are not by nature opposed, they can be reconciled to each other by so-called play drive. The concept of the play drive, not as a separate, third fundamental drive, but rather, as the way in which the sensuous and formal drives act together in reciprocal combination. Such a reciprocal relation of the two drives is “the task of reason.”

It is “the idea of his humanity, hence an infinite, to which he can approach ever more closely in the course of time, but without ever reaching it.” Man cannot be fully man as long as he satisfies only one of the two drives exclusively or only one after the other successively. He is truly man only when both drives act at the same time. Only then does he have a complete intuition of his humanity. The object which provides him this intuition is a symbol of his “realized destiny.”

In the Critique of Judgment, Kant does indeed refer in passing to “free play,” as a state of mind in which one’s cognitive powers are free of any definite concept which limits them to a particular rule of cognition³ But Schiller makes the play drive the central concept of his entire aesthetics. For Schiller, the play drive will annul all

³ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Trans. J. H. Bernard. (New York: Hafner Press, 1951) 52

compulsion and set man free, not only physically, but also morally. According to this drive, Man strives to combine change with perseverance, as well as acceptance and creation. It deprives feelings and passions of their dynamic power, it will bring them into harmony with the ideas of reason; and to the extent that it deprives the laws of reason of their moral compulsion, it will reconcile them with the interest of the sense (61).

In addition, we should also consider Schiller's concept of play from the standpoint of Plato, who in Book VII of *The Republic* wrote that "nothing that is learned under compulsion stays with the mind. ... Do not, then, my friend, keep children to their studies by compulsion but by play."⁴, which also emphasizes the significance of play.

AESTHETIC EDUCATION COMPLETE HUMANITY

Play and Humanity

In his abstract analysis of human nature, Schiller created the play drive, trying to find a kind of humanity evidence in the human body that he can restore his true self. The play drive is the internal basis for the fulfillment of human nature, and the inevitable requirement for man to move towards their own unity.

The biggest feature of play is to give people a pleasure of freedom. As long as it is under the coercive power of any kind of force, man has no freedom at all. Only play can get rid of this kind of restriction, and make the sense and reason coexist harmoniously, thus giving people freedom. Therefore, human nature requires play, and play inevitably brings about the perfection of human nature. Only in play can humans get rid of the limitations of the two forces in nature and maintain a neutral state between the law and the need, and people will be in a free and happy mood. So all freedom must be manifested in the individual and must also be related to human nature.

The Birth of Living Form

Schiller associates the play drive with all human life activities, indicating that "The object of the play-drive, represented in a general schema, may therefore be called living form: a concept serving to designate all the aesthetic qualities of phenomena and, in a word, what in the widest sense of the term we call beauty (62)." This "living form" is a unity of life and form. It has both sensuous content and rational form; it has both life and form. Therefore, Schiller believes that the process of play drive is the process of forming a living form, that is, the process of forming beauty in the widest sense. Beauty sprouts in the play and also allows the play to reflect the state of beauty. This is an integrated process.

Schiller defines beauty in *Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Man* Beauty is living form. In Schiller's view, "Every phenomenon whatsoever may be thought of in four different connections. A thing may relate directly to our sensuous condition (our being and well-being); that is its physical character. Or it can relate to our reason, and furnishes with knowledge; that is its logical character. Or it can relate to our will, and be regarded as an object of choice for a rational being; that is its moral character. Or finally, it can relate to the totality of our various powers, without being a specific object for any single one of them; that is, its aesthetic character (125)." Therefore, living form also has this aesthetic character, which exists in aesthetic reality. It is only determined by itself, and it is directly presented as itself and expresses itself, and completes the prescribed form of self. Without any purpose, it

⁴ Plato. *Republic, Book VII*. Trans. Paul Shorey. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961) 768

cannot be restricted. This is a kind of freedom, where beauty lies in. Beauty is the living form of the harmonious movement of sense and reason.

From this standpoint, even a block of marble, though it is and remains lifeless, can nevertheless, thanks to the architect or the sculptor, become living form; and a human being, though he may live and have form, is far from being on that account a living form. In order to be so, his form would have to be life and his life form. As long as we merely think about his form, it is lifeless, a mere abstraction; as long as we merely feel his life, it is formless, a mere impression. Only when his form lives in our feeling and his life take on form in our understanding, does he become living form (62). Hence, the living form is the perceptual zing of reason, the rationalization of sense. Reason and sense are mingled in the new form.

Beauty Freedom in Humanity

The living form is the ideal form of a person with full humanity. The living form itself has realistic physical character on the one hand and a rational spirit on the other. This living form is the result of the interaction of two opposing drives, and it is the perfect combination of reality and form as much as possible.

The play drive is a collection of sense drive and form drive, which is a union of reality with form, contingency with necessity, passivity with freedom and makes the concept of human nature complete. Therefore, with beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play. For, to mince matter no longer, man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays (64).

In Schiller's aesthetic thoughts, beauty, art, freedom and human nature are directly related, and art bears the intermediary in aesthetic education. Schiller sees Art as a daughter of Freedom, so freedom can be regained through art. Schiller believes that through aesthetic education, with the help of art, it can directly affect the spiritual part of people, change the way people feel, and thus achieve freedom. Sense and rationality are equally important. Achieving unity between the two will enable people to achieve integration with the world, and to see human-specific dignity in this integration.

Beauty is the intermediary of communication between sense and rationality. It has a creative function. This creative drive comes from the inevitable result of aesthetic activities to human nature, making rationality and sensibility still play their respective roles in the aesthetic process and provide various feelings for human as subject. Therefore, beauty does not limit the two drives in human nature, but rather makes them equal. In this aesthetic state, humanity has been fully developed while achieving balance.

What beauty brings is a change in the way people feel, which also means that the way they feel is the direct cause of a different state of existence. Feeling is a kind of reaction of a person to the world in which he lives, and the way of feeling is his state of reflection on this world, or a way of existence of a living body. Therefore, what Schiller hopes is to change the way people live in the era. Man is no longer a fragment of the machine. Everyone has his own rich and complete life experience. All choices he makes are autonomous and free. Feeling no coercion from nature or law, humanity has achieved a whole existence in the freedom of beauty.

CONCLUSIONS

Schiller's aesthetic thought is a product of the special background of Germany in the 18th century. It not only occupies an important position in the history of aestheticism, but also has a profound impact in sociology and politics. Through *Letter on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller described the magnificent pattern of humanity education and cultural development, established a kind of ideality of human nature that is unified with sense and reason, and criticized modern society. Aesthetics has become a spiritual force with liberating power and makes people transcend reality. By praising the complete living conditions of the ancient Greeks, Schiller criticized the fragmentary state of modern people and worked to find out a solution to restore full humanity. As a manifestation of human nature's pursuit of freedom, play reconciles sensuous drive and form drive. Only in play can people achieve the integrity of human nature. And aesthetics can both stimulate this kind of play drive, the mind is free in the aesthetic state. It is the highest state of freedom that gets rid of all coercion. In aesthetics, sense and reason are combined with each other to form a whole human nature, and only complete talents have freedom.

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