# Art of Politics Under the Light of Kant's and Schiller's Writings

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Abstract: Schiller underscores the pivotal role of intellectual freedom in fostering moral progress. The imperative "Sapere aude!" encapsulates an idea that can only be realized through the shared communication of thoughts. However, as a strong opponent of the Reign of Terror, Schiller believes that theoretical cultivation must be complemented by aesthetics in order to achieve the future liberal state of reason. He also contends that art could enable people to transcend personal desires and actively contribute to the establishment of political freedom. Kant supports that the public sphere is crucial for the functioning of a democratic society, as individuals gather to discuss issues of common interest. Within this sphere, he asserts that aesthetics taste and judgements contribute to build a more enlightened citizenry. In light of the above, I will first try to show how to achieve moral development in a liberal democracy through freedom of speech and aesthetics.

**Keywords:** Aesthetics, Cosmopolitanism, Kant, Moral Progress, Politics, Schiller

#### Introduction

In this paper, I aim to investigate how Kant's philosophy shaped Schiller's thinking. Schiller himself frequently acknowledges his debt to Kantian philosophy. In *Aesthetic Education*, he asserts that most of his arguments are grounded in Kantian principles. In the *Kallias letters*, he contends that "it is certain that no mortal has spoken a greater word than this Kantian word, which also encapsulates his whole philosophy: determine yourself from within yourself, which forms the basis of his entire philosophical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Schiller, F., 2004. *On the Aesthetic Education of Man.* Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, First Letter.

framework".<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Goethe, he expresses his belief in Kant's philosophy and commends the open-ended approach of his research methodology, which is rooted in the exploration of public sphere.<sup>3</sup> In addition, Schiller's aesthetic theory was based on the *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, which greatly impacted him.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Schiller expressed disapproval of certain aspects of Kantian philosophy, diverging from Kant's ideas and pursuing a distinct intellectual path. To gain a deeper comprehension of the areas where the two thinkers agree and disagree, I will analyse the concepts of moral progress and enlightenment, political freedom, and the liberal state as they are explored in their respective works, as well as their connection with aesthetic cultivation.

## 1. Political Freedom and Moral Progress

How can moral progress be achieved? When examining the reasoning presented by Kant in *Perpetual Peace* regarding the nation of devils, it becomes evident that even self-centered individuals can experience moral progress and refinement. How is this accomplished? When two devils agree to follow the law, acknowledging that they both gain advantages from their collaboration, they develop a strong desire to stick to it. Hence, we expect that a well-governed society will foster the ethical development of its citizens.<sup>5</sup> In the second part of "The Conflict of the Faculties", Kant addresses the question, "Is the human race continually progressing toward the better?" He identifies law as the guiding thread of moral progress: "not an ever-growing quantity of morality with regard to intention, but an increase of the products of legality in dutiful actions whatever their motives".

Schiller, F., 2002. Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner. In: Bernstein, J. M.,
 ed. Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 153.
 Schiller, F., 1943. Schillers Werke, Nationalausgabe. Petersen, J. et al., eds., 43 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger. Letter from Schiller to Goethe (1794-10-28). NA 27:74.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Schiller was deeply influenced by Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and, in consequence, interpreted freedom as beauty in phenomenal appearance. He was most concerned with the influence of art and beauty on rational life throughout history. Schiller argued that to the extent that the sensuous will comes to recognize the true nature of beauty, the soul is transformed into beauty itself. In this state, the moral and rational wills cease to conflict and begin to enter into harmonious accord. Dieter, H., 2003. *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*. Pacini, D. S., ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 75.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Kant, I., 1996. *Toward Perpetual Peace*. In: Gregor, M. J., ed. *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 335 – 336.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Kant, I., 1996. The Conflict of the Faculties. In: Wood, A. W. – di Giovanni, G., eds. *Religion and Rational Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 307.

What does Kant consider to be the perfect constitution? The Republican constitution guarantees a) external freedom, b) common legislation for all subjects, and c) legal equality for citizens. What is the concept of political freedom? The concept "Sapere aude!" is a call to action during the Enlightenment era, urging individuals to have the courage to think independently and rely on their own reasoning abilities. The cosmopolitan notion of Kantian philosophy can be achieved by employing public use of speech. Reason requires the presence of external freedom to guarantee the process of cultivation. Reason must be communicated for we need a criterium veritatis externum. Any actions related to the rights of others, whose guiding principles are not compatible with publicity, are unjust. This is because all principles that require publicity to achieve their purpose must align with both justice and politics.

According to Kant, his age is the age of criticism, to which everything must submit. Legislation through its majesty commonly seek to exempt itself from it. But in this way, it excites a just suspicion against itself, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to withstand its free and public examination.<sup>10</sup>

Reason must subject itself to critique in all its undertakings and cannot restrict the freedom of critique through any prohibition without damaging itself and drawing upon itself a disadvantageous suspicion. Now there is nothing so important because of its utility, nothing so holy, that it may be exempted from this searching review and inspection, which knows no respect for persons. The very existence of reason depends upon this freedom, which has no dictatorial authority, but whose claim is never anything more than the agreement of free citizens <sup>11</sup>

As mentioned by Kant, no one should deny the people the freedom of the pen. 12 While freedom of speech or writing may be taken by superior force,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Kant, I., 1996. An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment? In: Gregor, M. J., ed. *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Koukouzelis, K., 2012. Republican Citizenship and Public Use of Reason from a Cosmopolitan Point of View. In: Telegdi-Csetri, A. – Ducu, V., eds. *Cosmopolitanism and Philosophy in a Cosmopolitan Sense*. Bucharest: New Europe College, p. 111.

<sup>9</sup> Kant, I., 1996. Toward Perpetual Peace, ibid, p. 351.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Kant, I., 1998. Critique of Pure Reason. Guyer, P. – Wood, A. W., eds. Cambridge University Press, pp. 100 – 101.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 643.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Kant, I., 1996. On the Common Saying: That May be Correct in Theory, but it is of No Use in Practice. In: Gregor, M. J., ed. *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 302.

the freedom of thought can never be taken away. Therefore, it is reasonable to question whether, and with what justification, it is possible to think if we do not think collectively with others, to whom we communicate our thoughts and who, in turn, share theirs with us.<sup>13</sup> A necessary condition is the concept of the citizen as free and equal, from the perspective of republicanism. Through subjects who publicly use their own reason, even on legislative matters, Kant believes that improvements in state constitutions and reforms for better political institutions can be achieved.

As per Schiller, the most perfect of all works of art, is the building up of true political freedom within a liberal state. In his "Second Letter", Schiller uses Kantian terminology to portray individuals as human beings and citizens of the world, urging active participation in the political arena where the destiny of humanity is being determined. 14 Schiller acknowledges and does not disregard positive aspects of the Enlightenment, such as the pursuit of rationality and the promotion of human rights. The current era is characterized by enlightenment due to the widespread availability of knowledge, which enables the correction of our practical principles. To enlighten individuals, the adoption of the maxim "Sapere aude!" is urged. 15 If we are to solve that political problem in practice, we should follow the path of aesthetics, since it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. The Schillerian Critique on Kantian Philosophy

Nevertheless, Kant asserts that the greatest problem faced by the human species is the achievement of a civil society that uniformly upholds the principles of justice. This problem is at the same time the most difficult and the latest to be solved by the human species.<sup>17</sup>

However, Schiller believes that the current era does not offer a version of human nature that can be identified as an essential condition for the moral progress of society. He criticizes force, violence, and an excessive focus on mentalism. The objective is to ensure fairness in every aspect of human existence. The primary objective of civilization is to protect and

<sup>13</sup> Kant, I., 1996. What Does it Mean to Orient Oneself in Thinking? In: Wood, A. W. - di Giovanni, G., eds. Religion and Rational Theology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 16. <sup>14</sup> Schiller, F., 2004. On the Aesthetic Education of Man, ibid., Second Letter.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Eighth Letter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ibid., Second Letter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Kant, I., 2007. Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim. In: Louden R. B. – Zöller G., eds. Anthropology, History, and Education. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 112 - 114.

preserve aesthetics and individuality.

To comprehend Schiller's ideas, it is necessary to delve into his anthropology. Schiller's premise is that man is composed of two aspects: nature and mind, which can also be understood as the senses and the Reason (freedom). As a living being, he is completely bound by natural laws, but only as a spiritual or rational being can he achieve freedom and morality. Given the risk of one side dominating over the other, the key issue is to cultivate a third character capable of merging the two elements.<sup>18</sup>

This is the reason why Schiller critiques the rigidity of Kantian moral philosophy, in which the idea of duty is portrayed with severity which frightens all the Graces away. According to Schiller, individuals must integrate both pleasure and duty. He should willingly adhere to his rational principle. Kant is known as the Draco of his era. However, what is the appropriate methodology? Schiller identifies himself with the lawgiver Solon, whom he compares himself to. In this identification is not coincidental; Solon, besides being a philosopher and legislator, was also a poet. In contrast to the rigidity of Kantian ethics, Schiller presents the concept of the beautiful soul, which combines aestheticism and reason, as well as vocation and duty.

Schiller argues that individuals with a weak reason might easily attempt to seek moral perfection on the path of a gloomy and monkish asceticism.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, he contends that Kant's subjective view was a result of the prevailing intellectualism. When examining the *Xenions* passage, which was written together by the author and Goethe, we can observe the author's subtle critique of the rigidity of Kantian ethics: the author expresses a willingness to assist their friends, but laments that their actions are driven by personal emotions, leading to concerns about their own virtue.<sup>23</sup>

One of the negative aspects of the Enlightenment that Schiller identi-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Schiller, F., 2004. On the Aesthetic Education of Man, ibid., Twenty-seventh Letter.

 $<sup>^{\</sup>rm 19}$  In Greek mythology, the Graces were goddesses of charm, beauty, nature, human creativity, and goodwill.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> The Draco was a despotic lawgiver and the first man to document the code of law in ancient Sparta. The laws of the Draco were highly strict as evidenced by the fact that thieves were subjected to death penalty.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Wilm, E. C., 1906. The Relation of Schiller's Ethics to Kant. *The Philosophical Review* 15(3), p. 285. doi: https://doi.org/10.2307/2177374 and Schiller, F., 1992. On Grace and Dignity. Washington: Schiller Institute, p. 366.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Schiller, F., 1992. On Grace and Dignity, ibid., p. 365.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Goethe, J. W., Schiller, F., 1915. *Goethe and Schiller's Xenions*. Chicago: The Open Court Publishing, p. 122.

fied is the existence of Reign of Terror. Schiller rejects all types of violence, including the one inflicted by practical reason on our emotions when it ethically determines the will, as it results in something painful in the phenomenal world. We absolutely reject any form of coercion, including when it is carried out by Reason itself.<sup>24</sup>

## 3. The Role of Aesthetic Cultivation in the Light of Kantian Philosophy

The main argument of this work is that there is a need to bring together and make consistent all parts of human experience (including the senses, the spirit, mind, and reason) through the cultivation of beauty and aesthetic culture. This is seen as essential to attain the ultimate unity and harmony of the individual within the "aesthetic state". Schiller's discussion is around the concept of a sphere of goodness that seeks to ensure that all natural beings are both free and equal citizens, with the capacity to express consent to all matters. The first law of gentility is: have consideration for the freedom of others. The second: show your freedom. The correct fulfilment of both is an infinitely difficult problem, but gentility always requires it relentlessly, and it alone makes the cosmopolitan man.<sup>25</sup> The ultimate objective of humanity can only be attained by gradual progress within civilization. The core of mankind's fate is childishness, an ideal that arises from the interplay of nature and rationality.

However, we should not ignore the fact that Kant argues that aesthetics can also contribute to the cultivation of man. The human being is destined by his reason to live in a society with human beings and in it to cultivate himself, to civilize himself, and to moralize himself by means of the arts and sciences. Aesthetics is a social condition, consisting in the ability to make social judgements. It also involves the communication of feelings, pleasure or dissatisfaction, to others. Another important term explaining the importance of Kantian aesthetic philosophy, is that of "sensus communis".

By *sensus communis*, however, must be understood the idea of a communal sense, i.e., a faculty for judging that in its reflection takes account (*a priori*) of everyone else's way of representing in thought, in order as it were to hold its judgment up to human reason as a whole and thereby avoid the illusion which,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Schiller, F., 2004. On the Aesthetic Education of Man, ibid., Twenty-seventh Letter.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Schiller, F., 2002. Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner, ibid., pp. 173 – 174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Kant, I., 2007. Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View. In: Louden, R. B. – Zöller, G., eds. Anthropology, History, and Education. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 420.

from subjective private conditions that could easily be held to be objective, would have a detrimental influence on the judgment. Now this happens by one holding his judgment up not so much to the actual as to the merely possible judgments of others, and putting himself into the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that contingently attach to our own judging.<sup>27</sup>

The maxims of the sensus communis are only a negative guide: They tell us only what we must not do in thinking or on communicating if a shared plan is to be possible.<sup>28</sup> According to the first view, only those who think for themselves can contribute to a debate or a project. In the second part of the "sensus communis", only those who try to think from the other's point of view and honestly strive to listen, to interpret and to understand what others are saying are genuinely seeking to avoid opinions which others cannot agree on. The second aspect of the sensus communis is called the principle of the liberal mentality, which is adapted to the concepts of others. And finally, the third aspect concerns the endless work of the set of judgments that we formulate independently, and that we revise as we change our perspective in order to take into account the perspective of others.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the reflective and earthly aspect of the use of reason and reasoning is not governed by transcendental criteria, but by the attempt to orient one's thinking in ways that do not exclude accessibility to others. I put myself in the position in which any rational being could find himself

## 4. The Aesthetic State and the Kingdom of Ends

Schiller argues that the ultimate goal of humanity is progress, which can be achieved by means of the state. Civilization must free men. Freedom is the defining factor that grants individuals the status of being a mem-

 $<sup>^{\</sup>it 27}$  Kant, I., 2000. Critique of the Power of Judgment. Guyer, P., ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 173 – 174.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> O'Neill, O., 1990. Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 25. O'Neill detects elements of political philosophy in his central epistemological work, Critique of Pure Reason, while Arendt explores these themes even within Kant's Critique of the Power of Judgment. Arendt, H., 1992. Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy. Beiner, R., ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> As indicated by Kant, the three leading maxims are: 1) Think for oneself, 2) Think into the place of the other (in communication with human beings), 3) Always think consistently with oneself. Kant, I., 2007. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ibid., p. 308; Kant, I., 2000. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ibid., p. 174.

ber of a superior social system. The objective of Die Horen<sup>30</sup> magazine's announcement is to bring together the politically fragmented world by promoting the ideals of truth and beauty.<sup>31</sup> He discourages writers from discussing contemporary times and instead encourages them to focus on historical events and the previous society, or explore the future through philosophical eyes, with the aim of attaining real progress in the social condition. In his letter to Jacobi, he expressed the notion that while we are compelled to be citizens of our own century, philosophers, and poets, have the responsibility to transcend any specific moment or society and be really timeless.<sup>32</sup>

In his famous essay on Schiller, Thomas Mann asserts that Schiller's plays symbolize human freedom. Specifically, Mann argues that *Don Carlos* represents the freedom of Holland, *The Virgin of Orleans* represents the freedom of France, and *William Tell* represents the freedom of Switzerland.<sup>33</sup> In his little essay "The Theatre as a Moral Institution", Schiller asserts that the theatre exalts virtues and condemns transgressions that the legal system neglects to punish; when justice is corrupted by gold, the theatre takes on the role of a fair judge. By obtaining a common national play, we are going to create a sovereign nation.<sup>34</sup> His theoretical contemplation is intricately linked to his poetry and theatrical works.

The central idea of Schiller's Aesthetics is the notion of the "aesthetic state". As per the thinker's own account, the aesthetic state refers to the realm of art and beauty, occupying a distinct space between the domains of natural compulsion and moral principles. The mission is to free people from the constraints of individualism and self-interest. It aims to elevate them to the level of the collectively and, consequently, to the level of universal Reason. Ultimately, it seeks to take them from the realm of natural necessity to the realm of morality, freedom, truth, and happiness.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> In ancient Greek mythology, they were a trio of fraternal goddesses known as the Hours. The name of the magazine he managed ("Die Horen") was derived from these mythological figures. The three sisters were named Eunomia, Dike, and Eirene. The three sisters in question were offspring of Themis, the goddess associated with law, and Zeus, the god associated with force. The three sisters welcomed Aphrodite, the godness of beauty, in Cyprus. Schiller's view of the relationship between law and beauty is linked to this myth. Beauty is freedom in appearance.

<sup>31</sup> Schiller, F., 1794. Ankündigung Schillers Monatszeitschrift Die Horen. *Allgemeine Literatur*-

Zeitung 1795 (Vol. 1), pp. 1001 – 1002.

<sup>32</sup> Schiller, F., 1943. Schillers Werke, Nationalausgabe, ibid., NA 27:129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Mann, T., 2002. Δοκίμιο για τον Σίλλερ [Essay for Schiller]. Athens: Ίνδικτος, p. 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Schiller, F., 1802. Die Schaubühne als moralische Anstalt betrachtet. *Kleinere prosaische Schriften* (4), pp. 7 – 27.

Another aspect of the aesthetic state is its potential social, political, and historical value. It represents a "pure democracy" or an ideal state that may not have been achieved yet. However, as a leading principle, a practical ideal, or even a utopia, it already holds credibility.<sup>35</sup>

In Kantian moral philosophy, the Kingdom of Ends serves as the guiding principle.<sup>36</sup> Kant's methodology bears resemblance to that of Schiller. Although it may never be fully achieved, we should always consider it as a guiding principle. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant addresses the philosophy of history and civilization, asserting that "only civilization can be the ultimate purpose that we have reason to ascribe to nature with respect to the human species."<sup>37</sup>

For the completion of the Enlightenment, Kantian philosophy emphasizes the importance of educating citizens in the law. The ultimate goal of the human race is moral perfection. How should we seek this perfection, and where should we hope to find it? Kant's answer is through education. However, the educational process should be adapted to the entire civil society and would be more effective if it were organized so that talents develop alongside the formation of character in a moral manner. Only if all members of the state receive similar education will we achieve the necessary stability. Can we hope for this? Once human nature attains the highest possible perfection, justice and equality will prevail over the power of authority. This is the highest moral perfection to which humanity can hope to achieve.<sup>38</sup>

#### Conclusion

So, both the Kantian and the Schillerian teleology set as a regulative ideal the elimination of all forms of coercion up to the level of the highest moral perfection. If political philosophy cannot assume that the human species is progressing, then the entire transcendental philosophy risks remaining a wonderful but impractical idea. However, until moral perfection is achieved, if it is indeed possible, we can ensure through politics the protection of free-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Androulidakis, K., 2009. Η θεμελίωση της νεώτερης Αισθητικής: Μπάουμγκαρτεν - Καντ -Σίλλερ [The Foundation of Modern Aesthetics: Baumgarten - Kant - Schiller]. Φιλοσοφία στην Ευρώπη: Κείμενα Νεώτερης και Σύγχρονης Φιλοσοφίας. Patras: Ελληνικό Ανοικτό Πανεπιστήμιο, p. 136.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Kant, I., 1996. *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*. In: Gregor, M. J., ed. *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 83 – 88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> Kant, I., 2000. Critique of the Power of Judgment, ibid., p. 298.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Kant, I., 1997. *Lectures on Ethics*. Heath, P. – Schneewind, J. B., eds. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 222; Kant, I., 2007. *Lectures on Pedagogy*. In: Louden, R. B. – Zöller, G., eds. *Anthropology, History, and Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 446.

dom of speech, human rights, and the free exchange of ideas.

In brief, Kant argues that establishing an ideal political constitution is conditional to resolving the issue of legal relations between states. Thus, the former cannot be successfully addressed without first resolving the latter. He envisions eternal peace through the formation of a federation of independent states. On the contrary, Schiller desires the building of a political system that values beauty and aesthetics. The establishment of the European Union might be compared to Kant's concept of a federalism of free states, guaranteed by republican institutions, representing the peak of the European Union. The seal of the European Union pertains to its aesthetic aspect: it represents the selected anthem for the European Union, which is the poem "Ode to Joy" by Schiller, put to music by Beethoven.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> The melody used to symbolize the EU comes from the Ninth Symphony composed in 1823 by Ludwig Van Beethoven, when he set music to the "Ode to Joy", Friedrich von Schiller's lyrical verse from 1785. The anthem symbolises not only the European Union but also Europe in a wider sense. The poem "Ode to Joy" expresses Schiller's idealistic vision of the human race becoming brothers – a vision Beethoven shared. In 1972, the Council of Europe adopted Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" theme as its anthem. In 1985, it was adopted by EU leaders as the official anthem of the European Union. There are no words to the anthem, it consists of music only. In the universal language of music, this anthem expresses the European ideals of freedom, peace and solidarity. The European anthem is not intended to replace the national anthems of the EU countries but rather to celebrate the values they share. The anthem is played at official ceremonies involving the European Union and generally at all sorts of events with a European character. European Union. *European anthem*. [Accessed: 2024-10-26]. Available at: https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/symbols/european-anthem\_en

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