

Schiller and Delacroix; Guides Though the Aesthetic Labyrinth

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The history of Earth is riddled with conflict. From the beginning of recorded time, and to our knowledge before, conflict has been one of the only constant forms of interpersonal relations. Which leads many to wonder; why is it that none of the great thinkers have come up with a discrete and meaningful way of settling disputes. Of course settling all conflict would be ridiculous to think possible, however one would think that overall the sort of disputes that lead to wars and revolutions would have a method of deciding who is (if one is) correct in a logical and systematic fashion and bloodlessly end the struggle. Though it sounds like ludicrous nonsense, Friedrich Schiller, a German thinker and poet of the late seventeen-hundreds, did lay the foundation for what is one of the more complete works on the elements of human conflict. More specifically he defined what aesthetics are and how it defines and unifies mankind. Rather he wrote on why there is conflict and why it persists to this day and how aesthetics plays the role of mediator. To better understand these concepts one must study Friedrich Schiller's aesthetics, the roles of nature and reason, the circle of logic they create, and use the *Jaguar Attacking a Horseman* by Eugene Delacroix to better illustrate these ideas in an artistic fashion.

Friedrich Schiller begins his examination of human life at infancy (27). When man is born nature is in complete control (Schiller, 27) and all of the functions of life and behavior are based on physical needs such as: food, water, and safety. He writes in the beginning of the third letter that "she (nature) acts for him where he cannot yet act as a free intelligence for himself..." and thus man is cared for by nature until adulthood in which intelligence and reason develop. This means that man as a whole is a product of nature and that she is man's second mother in a manner of speaking.

This leads into the idea that society is a construct of nature (Schiller, 29). That in a natural state man creates a political establishment; or rather mankind is a social creature and relies on other people. Schiller goes on to say that this natural state is a good method of controlling the "physical man" as it is based on force, and thus constructs rules to enable men to work together. This system works for a

creature ruled by nature and physical laws but breaks down with the introduction of reason.

Reason is created by man's intellect and grows as the man does out of thought (Schiller, 28). Thus as logic grows it places constraints on nature. Out of reason man creates the ideal man and the moral state which are guided by the idea of perfection. Logic fights against the lawlessness of nature and tries to establish rules for the way things are.

So on stage there is logic and reason on one side and nature and freedom on the other. This conflict between natural man and ideal man, and logic versus the wild comes to ahead in the established state. The government is a natural creation lead by an exalted ruler who becomes the ideal man on behalf of their people (Schiller, 29). This logical ideal state is formed thusly but cannot and will not remain as man is a creation of freedom and nature and cannot remove nature from within without also removing his humanity, and cease to exists. So it is that man and the state are locked into a constant conflict because of this struggle between man's freedom and his logic. If a man lets logic carry him to completion then he is a lifeless drone controlled by a faceless government, however if man gives completely over to nature and freedom he destroys everything he comes into contact with and all of high-society breaks down (30).

It stands to reason then that Schiller believes humanity cannot persist and really cannot exist except out of a fluke, right? This is not the case obviously as we all still remain in an established state, and we are not clawing at each other's throats constantly (or wearing adorable little loan clothes for the most part). He himself says that, "At first sight nothing appears more self-contradictory than the tendencies of these two impulses, one aiming at mutation and the other at immutability" (67). So how does Schiller believe we can coexist? Schiller defends society and saves humanity though the concept of aesthetics. He writes in his Ninth Letter that this logic of reason and freedom is very much a product of circular logic (50); nature is created by logical ideas (elements, math, etc.) and gives rise to logical creatures (humans) but if logic destroys nature it is cutting its root so to speak and if nature destroys logic it cannot function.

The political state, and so humanity itself, is saved by the arts (Schiller, 50). Schiller explains that the government cannot give into logic or nature entirely because then it would destroy one or the other and thus destroy itself eventually (33) being that the government is but a reflection of each citizen. Art, Schiller explains, stands by itself and is beautiful despite when or where it is made (51). Like science, art lays outside of human lawlessness. Art is a product of an artist “playing” with and replicating in a dramatic form reality (76). That is to say that art is the product of imagination; it is given a living shape (physical being) by the artist and is no longer merely a form of ideas by the artist by a tangible image. Therefore Schiller equates beauty to imagination and instructs the reader that this beauty bridges the gap between nature (which creates the means of imagining) and logic (which is the force that imagines). Play is purposeful and functional, thus meaningful, and combines the laws of nature with the laws of reason freeing mankind physically and mentally (74). This playing is then the key to what makes us human, and what unites society.

In his own way Schiller has put down the basis of how humans can remain together in groups. This play impulse that leads us into our own little world as it were protects us from ever being able to allow logic to completely enslave us, but also allows us control over our instincts and inner nature. Because man is not entirely soul or entirely corporeal then beauty that is also not wholly “life” or “experience” is what man creates and maintains himself in the middle. The concept is brought up by Schiller then that if “playing” is what keeps man a rational and natural product, then is life just a game (79)? Yes and no. Schiller states that, “Man shall only play with Beauty, and he shall play only with Beauty” (80) or that beauty and imagination is the only thing that man can “play” with. Therefore art is the only physical way man can show his playing and in doing so make beauty, which sets him aside from the rest of creation but keeps him tied to it.

All this seems very good, but what does it really matter to us, the people who have to supposedly follow these ideas of aesthetics? As ideas they are all well and good but lack applications to the common

man by-enlarge, or do they? Schiller has the same idea. The ideas of aesthetics are just ideas and it is the application of reason with the force of nature that must combine to be worth anything (90). To do this logic and nature combine in beauty, “Where both qualities are united, Man will combine the greatest fullness of existence...” (69). This is not however as easy as Schiller makes it out to be; so to illustrate how art could potentially teach us the balance of reason and nature is the painting *Jaguar Attacking a Horseman* by Eugene Delacroix.

Delacroix’s image of the jaguar and the horseman (see work cited page) at first glance is a storm of color and confusion. We catch a glimpse of multiple figures caught in a fight to the death. None of the figures are well developed, that could be any man on the horse and the jaguar could easily trade its spots and be another beast of the wild. This is important as logic and nature can have any face as they are reflections of reality. The man could easily be a woman or a boat or a job. The jaguar could be a fire or a storm or competitive workplace. So we have nature in conflict with logic and holding the two together is beauty. The horse is a tool of man, a logical tame creature, but it is also a beast created in the same manner as that of the jaguar. The stallion flies through a misty blackness, like space or dreams, undecided on which side should win. The man sits on top of beauty, thrusting his sensible sword toward the feline just trying to separate himself from the brute, but not necessarily kill. The jaguar knows that the horse is bigger and stronger, but the man is weak. Nature tries to select and extinguish the physically weaker logic—it will consume itself and cease to exist. Thus, locked eternally, the two can never escape their ethereal paradox of the mind, body and spirit. Each is necessary, and none can be excluded. None of them can win, or the universe would join.

So too is it with Schiller’s examination of the world. The forces of the mind and body are at opposite and only the ability to manipulate reality internally brings the pieces together (69). Though displayed as a world scheme it would seem this metaphor is effortlessly applied to the self. If one lives too bestial a life then they will eventually die a violent (natural) death within a fight against other elements of nature.

And if one is too intellectual (rational) then rationality will lead them to forsake that which first made us human, that which was our second mother, and thus our humanity itself.

In conclusion, man is not but the sum of his parts. It is not one facet that makes him whole but the whole of his being. To be fully human, man must combine both nature and reason through aesthetics. Through Delacroix's painting we saw how reason is in conflict with nature, and how the idea of beauty holds them together. With art as an aid the totality and brutality of what Friedrich captured in his prose was displayed fully. Also in the prose of Schiller we see the conflict and the reason for it displayed vividly. To revert back to the original question, why is there conflict? Because without conflict nature could not grow, it would be a dysfunctional chaos. Only with the conflict between reason and freedom does reality knit itself together. So, between logic and nature man must play, or perish.

Works Cited

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