

Introduction

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In recent years more and more attention has been directed toward mid- and late-eighteenth-century German thought. While Kant and Hegel have been responsible for a regular and abundant flow of secondary literature, as well as the source of new developments within philosophical scholarship, a number of other, formerly less well-known figures, have captured the attention of thinkers in the English-speaking world. German Romanticism has especially benefitted from this interest. Thanks to the intense work that has been produced in recent years in the field of German Romanticism, we can now appreciate the scholarship devoted to this period as much richer and wider than the mere discussion of taste to which more traditional approaches had tended to reduce it in the past. The many elements of German Romanticism came together to form an aesthetic whole that was indeed larger than the sum of its parts; and its parts were each already complicated enough in themselves. Those parts included, but were not limited to the political aspects and the formation of modern democracy; the metaphysical, epistemological, and practical (ethico-political) implications of the Enlightenment; the specific encounter with the classical world that served to both reinvent that world and to invent a newer Modern world; and, of course, the highlighting of the very limits of the discoveries to which those parts gave rise. In short, German Romanticism brought to light the possibility of an aesthetic approach to philosophy that was concerned with much more than the analysis of taste for which it is mostly known through its Kantian formulation, since it developed an account of aesthetic interest that, even though acutely aware of its Kantian source, went beyond that source and

developed a critical apparatus directed toward its own production. Stated more simply, we can now see in German Romanticism what Foucault saw in Kant's short essay on the Enlightenment: "an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and the experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*]."¹

One figure who seems to have become somehow lost in this discussion is Friedrich Schiller. With few exceptions, Schiller has been absent as a reference point in philosophical literature, at least for the second half of the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first century, and particularly in secondary literature in English. Indeed, the neglect of Schiller as a philosopher is a refrain that has accompanied the treatment of his work since the inception of its critical appraisal. This is not to say that Schiller has never been treated with regard to his philosophical contribution, but it is to assert that he has only rarely been subject to such treatment within the tradition of philosophical scholarship. In a lecture given at Yale in 2005, in the context of the celebration of 200 years of Schiller's death, Frederick Beiser stated that since the end of the Second World War, and in visible contrast to the role Schiller used to play in the philosophical scene at the end of nineteenth century, "the study of Schiller's philosophy has not only entered into an abrupt decline but is virtually dead."² This is partially due, Beiser continues, to the increasing specialization of the English-speaking academic world, where a figure such as Schiller, who moves between literature, poetry, and philosophy, does not find an adequate place and hence has mostly been relegated to literary studies. Just a quick look at the secondary bibliography on Schiller in English, even in the last ten years, confirms this observation. The two more recent compilations on Schiller published in English, Paul Kerry's 2007 volume and Jeffrey High's 2011 collection of essays,³ come mainly from literary studies and German studies, with only one or two chapters developed from a more explicitly philosophical perspective.

Even when the philosophical discussion does turn to Schiller, the typical form of such examination is to begin by noting the absence or inadequacy of Schiller's philosophical contribution, and to then proceed either with a more historical configuration of Schiller's aesthetic writings, or an analysis exhibiting his debt to—and often misinterpretation of—Kant or his being not yet Hegel. A notable exception to this trend in the English speaking world is Frederick Beiser's 2005 book, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination*, which is, indeed, as its title suggests, a re-examination devoted to showing the depth and originality of Schiller's philosophical contributions, connected to, but also previous to and independent from his encounter with Kant. For all of that, however,

Beiser's magisterial study has not led to the new wave in the English-speaking world of philosophical studies on Schiller that one might have expected. This is even more conspicuous when one notices the wave of recent philosophical literature on Schiller in other languages. Starting in 2005, with the 200th-year anniversary of Schiller's death, a number of publications in French, German, Italian, and Spanish, to mention just the most numerous, has been changing for the last ten years the academic discussion and approach to Schiller.⁴ Just a look at the titles of some of these works reveals the shift in Schiller's scholarship, or as Valerio Rocco has also suggested, a "paradigm turn" in Schiller's studies.⁵ Jeffrey High's 2004 *Schillers Rebellionskonzept und die Französische Revolution*, Gilles Darras' 2005 *L'âme suspecte. L'anthropologie littéraire dans les premiers oeuvres de Schiller*, Laura Macor's 2008 *Il giro fangoso dell'umana destinazione. Friedrich Schiller dall'illuminismo al criticism*,⁶ Yvonne Nilges's 2012 *Schiller und das Recht*, and the edited collections *Schiller: estética y libertad* by María del Rosario Acosta (2008), *El pensamiento filosófico de Friedrich Schiller* by Brigitte Jirku and Julio Rodríguez (2009), *La actualidad de Friedrich Schiller. Para una crítica cultural al inicio del siglo XXI* by Horst Nitschack and Reinhard Babel (2010), *Friedrich Schiller. Der unterschätzte Theoretiker* by Georg Bollenbeck and Lothar Ehrlich (2010), and *Schiller im philosophischen Kontext* by Cordula Burtscher and Markus Hien (2011), to mention just a few, all show a very present preoccupation to vindicate Schiller as a philosopher while also demonstrating his contemporary relevance.⁷

This volume hopes to continue this trend and to give it a decisive impulse in the English-speaking world. The pertinence of Schiller's work is unquestionable, and his philosophical importance extends beyond his dramas and his aesthetic and political writings into his intense dialogue with Kant, his influence on German Romanticism and Idealism, his very unique approach to the question and practice of philosophical critique, and his preoccupation with hermeneutics and phenomenology, among other subjects. Some of the papers collected here elaborate on Schiller's relation to the philosophy of his time and show how his proposals were not a misinterpretation of Kantian philosophy—which he read rather late in his own development as a thinker—nor simply preliminary ideas that would find a more developed and rigorous exposition in later thinkers like Schelling and Hegel, but rather the original result of a mature thinker who was very much engaged with the ethico-political and aesthetico-philosophical debates of his time and who, by the time of the *Aesthetic Letters*, had already developed his own perspective and standpoint concerning the question of freedom and its relation and tension with the questions of culture, history, and the political. Some others concentrate rather on reading Schiller from today's

perspective, and producing a dialogue between his own originality as a thinker and current philosophical debates.



The essays largely dedicated to the engagement of Schiller's philosophical thinking with others within his own epoch comprise one of the two sections of this collection. Each of the chapters in this first section emphasizes the productive dialogue between Schiller and other thinkers of his time, rather than presenting his philosophical thought as a misinterpretation or misappropriation of the philosophers that would have influenced him. Yvonne Nilges's essay engages in a detailed account of the way Schiller's political proposals in the *Aesthetic Letters* responds to and criticizes Rousseau's political philosophy, even though references to Rousseau almost always remain implicit in Schiller's texts. Schiller's aesthetic education is related, Nilges argues, to a philosophical conception of both the political and the historical nature of the State, which attempts to reconstruct the enlightened and humanistic spirit of Rousseau's larger project of a historical transformation of the bourgeois into a *citoyen*, rather than emphasizing the concept of the general will as it is presented in Rousseau's political philosophy, and particularly in his theory of the Social Contract.

Following this same interest in rescuing Schiller as a political thinker of his time, intimately engaged in a philosophical criticism of the French Revolution, but further than this, in a philosophical critique of the possibilities and limits of the very idea of philosophy as historical critique, María del Rosario Acosta's essay develops a comparison between Schiller and Hegel's approaches to the French Revolution and its subsequent Reign of Terror. Acosta is interested in rescuing the essentially philosophical and conceptual character of Schiller's approach, which has been highlighted in the secondary literature in the case of Hegel, but almost entirely ignored when it comes to Schiller. Comparing Hegel and Schiller allows Acosta to demonstrate the originality and maturity of Schiller's critique, and the striking clarity of his diagnosis, produced almost ten years before Hegel's.

Laura Macor and Manfred Frank's contributions also demonstrate the originality of Schiller's philosophy through his engagement with Kant. Macor shows that many of the central features of Schiller's philosophical thought precede rather than result from his encounter with Kant and demonstrates that this needs to be taken into account in order to understand the nuances of Schiller's critical engagement with Kant's practical philosophy. For Macor, Schiller is much more of a Kantian than the secondary literature has been

willing to recognize, and his notion of aesthetic freedom is not to be understood—as Kant himself did—as a critique of Kant’s conception of autonomy as much as an endorsement of Kantian moral principles supplemented with a more complete account of moral agency. Frank’s essay, in turn, argues that Schiller’s engagement with Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* anticipates Schelling’s interpretations of Kant and also provides the “first glimmer” of the philosophy of nature that would be developed by Schelling and the Romantics.

Frederick Beiser’s exploration of Schiller as a “pessimist” brings the first part of this volume to a close by showing the importance of Schiller on the philosophical developments of the nineteenth century. In his contribution, Beiser reinforces his insistence, as developed in his previous work, on the need to recognize Schiller’s texts on their own merits as an important and original step in the history of philosophy, this time by investigating the connections between Schiller’s work and later “pessimists” like Arthur Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann, Philipp Mainländer (1841–1876), and Julius Bahnsen (1830–1881).

In this way, Beiser’s essay helps to show the unexpected encounters that can still be brought to light through a rigorous engagement with the reception of Schiller in his time.



There is yet another reason for the neglect of Schiller’s significance for philosophy, which has to do with historical and political circumstances that are not specific to Schiller, but that certainly seem to be exaggerated concerning his work. These circumstances are particularly curious with regard to Schiller, for they concern one of the main targets of his philosophical essays. What we mean here is the use of Schiller for political purposes, and the link that has been suggested between his thought and the historical experience of the totalization and aestheticization of politics in the first half of the twentieth century, especially in the context of National Socialism. The most famous accusations come from Paul de Man, who points to the relationship between Schiller’s proposal of an aesthetic state—which, according to him, is a dangerous misinterpretation and erroneous translation of Kantian aesthetics—and Goebbel’s ideal of the political as a work of art.⁸ One cannot ignore this side of the studies treating Schiller, but as has been the case with so many authors in the last decades, it is also a philosophical responsibility to study their limits and extent of their implications, and re-read Schiller in light of this awareness. Only then can a rigorous reading of Schiller show how aware he was of such risks, and how not only his *Aesthetic Letters*, but also his other writings on

aesthetics, history, and art, are also critical elaborations of the very notion of the political and involve a redetermination of aesthetic ground that demands an alteration in what we mean by political means. On this subject, we have the historians and Germanists to thank for their careful and exacting work.⁹

One of the main interests of the present compilation is to revisit Schiller's aesthetical-political proposal from a philosophical perspective, and to put it in dialogue with contemporary approaches and criticisms to the question of the relationship between aesthetics and politics. It is this concern that guides the second part of our collection. Thus, each of the essays in this section proposes to place Schiller in conversation with contemporary philosophy. Dahlstrom's essay, which opens this part of the volume, provides a penetrating reading of Schiller's *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* that shows it to be a precursor to a poetic phenomenology. His analysis of the naïve and sentimental calls for a phenomenology similar to Husserl's bracketing, while showing how this kind of reflection problematizes the very distinction between them. This problematization results, for Schiller, in the synthesis of the naïve and sentimental, though one that preserves the conflict between them. Thus, Dahlstrom's reading already introduces a reading of Schiller in light of twentieth-century philosophical concerns, and in close connection to a conversation with twentieth-century philosophical thinkers.

Jacques Rancière's piece on Schiller's aesthetic promise is the first of a few contributions in this volume devoted to showing how, rather than arguing for an aestheticized politics that can then be subordinated to a specific political agenda, Schiller's proposal is a call to redirect our attention and rethink the ground of the aesthetic. This rethinking can then be taken as the first step of a re-elaboration of what we call "the political" and the very realm of its means. According to Rancière, Schiller's notion of aesthetic play, as conceptualized in his *Aesthetic Letters*, introduces an autonomy of aesthetic practice that can dissolve the hierarchical relationship between the poles of appearance and reality, and bring forth a politics of nondomination. In discussion with Rancière's reading, and critically engaging both Schiller and Rancière from the perspective opened by Schiller's *Don Carlos*, Christoph Menke questions some of the philosophical presuppositions that guide Rancière's call for a "redistribution of the sensible," pointing out the possible blind spots of such a redistribution and delineating some of the risks of a conception of the political grounded on the autonomy of the aesthetic.

Jeffrey Powell also directs his attention to Schiller's notion of play, this time, however, to treat the kind of political subjugation that is usually associated with Walter Benjamin's aestheticization of the political. Powell considers

contemporary readings of Schiller's aesthetics and their relation to Kant. He highlights the dangers of an oversimplification of Schiller's aesthetics and the overestimation of Kant's aesthetics. In the end, and contrary to contemporary critical readings of Schiller (de Man being perhaps the most well-known), Powell shows that it is actually Schiller's analysis that leads to what Benjamin called political aesthetics, while Kant leads rather to an early version of Benjamin's "aestheticization of the political." Finally, Luciana Cadahia's essay helps to preserve the contemporary relevance of Schiller's political thought by reading Schiller's conception of "positivity" in the light of what Foucault calls the *dispositif*. By putting in dialogue Schiller's aesthetic conception of positivity with Deleuze and Martín-Barbero's more dialectical interpretations of Foucault's originally critical conception of the term, Cadahia's chapter shows the critical potential of Schiller's conception of positivity in the *Aesthetic Letters*. Far from considering it as a stigmatized form of power, Cadahia shows that, for Schiller, and against a more Hegelian tradition of thought, positivity as *dispositif* can become a productive form of aesthetic-political mediation.

With all these questions and circumstances in mind, it is our hope that this collection will answer the call for a renewed appreciation of Schiller's philosophical thought, which does not only mean a look into his more philosophical work, but also in the aesthetic, ethical, and epistemological reflections behind his entire intellectual production.¹⁰

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?" in *Dits et écrits II, 1976–1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 1396. In English, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*, volume one, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow, trans. Catherine Porter (New York: The New Press, 1997), 319.

2. Frederick Beiser, "Un lamento" (*A Lament*), in *Friedrich Schiller: Estética y Libertad*, ed. M. R. Acosta (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional, 2008), p. 131. The lecture, given in Yale in 2005, was also published in its English earlier version in Paul Kerry (ed.) *Schiller; Playwright, Poet, Philosopher, Historian* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007). Paul Kerry also begins an essay that sets out to assess the reception of Schiller's political contribution by noting the neglect of Schiller for both philosophy and political thought. Besides quoting Beiser's lecture, Kerry notices the absence of Schiller in the series *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*.

3. See Paul Kerry (ed.), *Schiller; Playwright, Poet, Philosopher, Historian* (New York: Peter Lang, 2007) and *Who Is This Schiller Now?*, ed. Jeffrey L. High, Nicholas Martin, and Norbert Oellers (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011).

4. As Laura Macor notices in her introduction to a special issue on Friedrich Schiller in *Philosophical Readings* published in 2013, this wave was preceded by an earlier wave in the 1980s in Germany that may have played a decisive, even if quiet, role in the more recent escalation of philosophical literature on Schiller. Macor mentions, among others, papers written during the 1980s and 1990s by Hans-Jürgen Schings and Dieter Borchmeyer, and the more influential monographic study by Wolfgang Riedel, *Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller. Zur Ideengeschichte der medizinischen Schriften und der 'Philosophischen Briefe'* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1985). These were all, however, still coming from the field of German studies, while the more recent wave is, as Macor also notices, more interdisciplinary in tone, and more philosophical in depth and scope. Cf. Laura Macor, "Introducing the New Schiller," *Philosophical Readings*, volume 5 (2013): 3–6.

5. Cf. Valerio Rocco Lozano, "Los cambios de paradigma de la 'Schiller-Forschung,'" *Daimon Revista Internacional de Filosofía*, 46 (2009): 205–13.

6. Translated into German and expanded in 2010, *Der morastige Zirkel der menschlichen Bestimmung. Friedrich Schillers Weg von der Aufklärung zu Kant* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann).

7. Cf. for a more complete account of secondary bibliography on Schiller the very detailed list of recent publications offered by Macor in "Introducing the New Schiller," 4–5. Cf. also the very important work that the journal *Philosophical Readings* has also done in this regard, by producing in the last five years two entire special issues devoted to Schiller as a philosopher (cf. Volume 5, 2013, edited by Laura Macor and devoted to "Reading Schiller Anew" and Volume 9, 2017, edited by Laura Macor and Valerio Rocco and devoted to Friedrich Schiller and the French Revolution).

8. See Paul De Man "Kant and Schiller" in *The Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). For a more detailed treatment of this problem see M. R. Acosta "Making other people's feelings our own" in *Who Is This Schiller Now?*, ed. Jeffrey L. High, Nicholas Martin, and Norbert Oellers (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011), 187ff.

9. A fine, more recent example of this is provided by Wulf Koepke in his "The Reception of Schiller in the Twentieth Century" in *A Companion to the Works of Friedrich Schiller*, ed. Steven D. Martinson (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2005), 271–93.

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