Friedrich Schiller Is No Kantian (British Lies Notwithstanding)

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 and the subsequent reunification of Germany, an extraordinary number of new books has been published by British publishing houses on the subject of Friedrich Schiller’s writings. These include J. Sychrava’s Schiller to Derrida: Idealism in Aesthetics (1989), L. Sharpe’s Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thought and Politics (1991); T.J. Reed’s Schiller (1991); and now, Patrick T. Murray’s new book on Schiller’s Aesthetic Education of Man.

Although none of these books mentions the Schiller Institute, its English translations of Schiller’s works, or its global political activities, the hostile attitude which each of these books expresses towards Schiller’s actual thought leads one to conclude that they are a British-intelligence cultural warfare operation against both the continental tradition of Leibniz and Schiller, and the activities of the Schiller Institute itself.

Patrick T. Murray’s book is perhaps the most insidious of them all, in that it purports to conduct a rigorous philosophical discussion of Schiller’s most important aesthetic writing, by means of a painstaking treatment of each of its twenty-seven Letters.

Turning Schiller into Kant

The fundamental methodological error made in this book is reflected in its title. Although in the course of the book Murray identifies various locations where he reports that Schiller breaks from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, he nonetheless views Friedrich Schiller as no more than a Kantian. To arrive at this conclusion, Murray readily admits that he must cut through Schiller’s “considerable usage of metaphorical language and imagery, which when ‘translated’ into literal language often reveals Kantian and Fichtean concepts which themselves require elucidation.” In another place, Murray writes that the last three pages of Schiller’s work “rely heavily on the Kantian critical philosophy for their frame-work, a reliance made more difficult than usual to discern due to Schiller’s usage of a series of unnecessarily obscure images and metaphors.”

These two passages elucidate Murray’s dishonest and destructive method: eliminate the metaphorical content of Schiller’s writing and reduce it by means of a literal translation to Kantian philosophy. As Murray writes, “by its end, Schiller’s own aesthetic position is closely identified with that of Kant.”

That Murray’s book is dishonest on this account, is demonstrated by the fact that he refers to a letter written by Schiller to Goethe on January 7, 1795, in which Schiller explicitly states that his analysis is not based upon any particular philosophy, but rather is drawn from an analysis of his own whole being. “As the beautiful itself is derived from man as a whole, so my analysis of it is drawn from my own whole humanity . . . .” In the same letter, not cited by Murray, Schiller writes that “the poet is the only true man, and the best philosopher is only a caricature in respect to him.” Schiller writes the same thing in the first letter: “My ideas, created more from uniform intercourse with my self than a rich experience of the world or acquired through lectures, will not deny their origin, will make themselves guilty of any other error rather than sectarianism and rather fall from their own weakness, than maintain themselves through authority and alien strength.”

In another letter to Goethe written on February 19, 1795, Schiller writes that “one learns nothing of the final causes of the beautiful” in Kant’s aesthetic writings.

Concept of Beauty

In order to portray Schiller as a Kantian, Murray goes so far as to argue that there is “a break with the theory of beauty in Schiller’s Kallias letters (1793).” It was in this writing that Schiller not only attacked Kant’s Categorical Imperative, which he does both in the “Letters on the Aesthetical Education of Man” and in “On Grace and Dignity,” but Kant’s entire aesthetical theory, which Schiller says, “seems to me to miss fully the concept of beauty.”

As a result of this dishonesty, Murray then argues that “Letters 1 to 18 express and seek to prove Schillerian ideals (of freedom, harmony and wholeness); Letters 19 to 21 rest upon a derivatively Fichtean epistemology; Letters 22 to 27 represent the introduction of an increasingly Kantian view of beauty and aesthetic experience. It is as though, as the treatise progressed, Schiller began to doubt his philosophical ability to prove the theoretical necessity and practical viability of his ideals, and increasingly looked to one, and then the other, of his two great philosophical contemporaries for assistance in bringing his philosophical enterprise to a successful conclusion.”
In 1684, Leibniz published his *Novum Methodus pro Maximis et Minimis*, a powerful calculus, reflecting his digestion of the work of Nicolaus of Cusa, Leonardo de Vinci, and Johannes Kepler, conveyed to Leibniz via Pascal, Desargues, and Huyghens. His "analysis situs" approach depended upon his location of the "maximum-minimum" topology in terms of man being created in the image of God.

In contrast, when Newton published his first work, *Principia Mathematica*, in 1687, the scientific community was asked to accept the numerical niceties of the inverse-square law, as a sufficient explanation of physical processes: two bodies act upon each other across some distance according to a numerical relationship, a curious scientific method rooted in superstitions of those beliefs. Excluding what Newton burned before dying, it is known that he wrote voluminously and obsessively on theology, prophecy, and alchemy. Objecting to the Leibnizians, he wrote: "If God be called . . . the omnipotent, they take it in a metaphysical sense for God's power of creating all things out of nothing whereas it is meant principally of his universal irresistible monarchal power to teach us obedience." His reasoning: "For in the Creed after the words I believe in one God the father almighty are added the words creator of heaven and earth as not included in the former." [New-