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## Dispute with Kant

### 1. TRADITIONS OF MISINTERPRETATION

The recent renaissance of Kant's moral philosophy in the Anglophone world has been remarkably successful in clearing away some traditional misunderstandings of Kant, and in making philosophers re-examine some of Kant's central principles. One respect in which the new neo-Kantians have been very busy explaining and defending Kant concerns the role of feeling in moral conduct.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars have been keen to dispel the popular image of Kant as a hard-bitten ascetic who denies any moral value to feeling. They point out that Kant's 'purity thesis' about the moral worth of actions—that an action has a moral worth only if it is done for the sake of duty alone—does not mean that moral actions must be done *without*, or even *contrary to*, inclination and feeling. Perfectly correctly, they argue that, on Kantian premises, it is possible for duty to be the *sole* reason for my action *and* for me to be inclined to do my duty. Some of these scholars go even further: they insist that Kant not only *permits* but *demand*s a role for feeling in moral life, for he stresses that it is a duty to cultivate feelings of sympathy, and he makes pleasure in doing one's duty a sign of virtue.

Defending Kant against the charge of asceticism has made many neo-Kantian scholars reconsider—though usually only *en passant*—an old dispute between Kant and Schiller which took place in 1793. They mention this dispute because they see Schiller as the source of the classic objection against Kant's 'asceticism'. Supposedly, Schiller was the first to accuse Kant of neglecting the role of feeling in moral action, and so he started a whole tradition of misunderstanding. According to the neo-Kantian interpretation,<sup>2</sup> Schiller understands Kant to be saying that an

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Barbara Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from Duty', in *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 1–22; Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 107–28; 162–79; Marcia Baron, *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 117–226; Paul Guyer, *Kant and the Experience of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 335–93; and Tom Sorrell, 'Kant's Good Will and our Good Nature', *Kant-Studien* 78 (1987), 87–101.

<sup>2</sup> See H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 47. Paton's interpretation has been especially influential, and it has set the precedent for most neo-Kantian commentators, who constantly cite him. See, e.g., Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 110; Baron, *Kantian Ethics almost without Apology*, 147; Herman,

action has moral worth only if the agent does *not* want to do it, or only if he or she has no inclination to do it. So if someone does their duty from a feeling of sympathy it has no moral worth; but if they do it with no feeling at all, or even in a begrudging manner, it does have a moral value. Hence Schiller attributes to Kant—or so the interpretation goes—the paradoxical view that it is morally desirable *not to want to do* the action you morally ought to do. Such, at any rate, seems to be the main point behind Schiller’s infamous epigram, which is cited constantly in the neo-Kantian literature:

*The Scruple of Conscience*

‘Gladly I serve my friends, but alas I do it with pleasure.  
Hence I am plagued with doubt that I am not virtuous.

*The Verdict*

For that there is no other advice: you must try to despise them,  
And then do with aversion what your duty commands.’<sup>3</sup>

Some of these scholars assert, or at least imply, that Schiller holds the very opposite view he attributes to Kant: namely, that an action has a moral worth only if the agent wants to perform it. They assume that, for Schiller, a truly moral action is one where duty ceases to be a constraint, and where the agent acts on ‘duty from inclination’. There seems to be some evidence for this view, given that Schiller himself once said ‘man not only *may* but *ought* to bring desire and duty in harmony; he should obey his will with joy.’<sup>4</sup>

The chief aim of the present chapter is to show that the neo-Kantians have completely misunderstood Schiller’s dispute with Kant.<sup>5</sup> As a result, they have neglected the important issues raised by it. Usually, they have interpreted this controversy in very narrow terms as a dispute about the conditions for the moral worth of actions, as if all that were at stake were whether feeling adds to, or detracts from, moral conduct. Yet it must be stressed: this was *never* really an issue during Schiller’s dispute with Kant. Throughout this dispute, Schiller reaffirmed

*The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 2 n1; J. B. Schneewind, ‘Autonomy, Obligation and Virtue: An Overview of Kant’s Moral Philosophy’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 327, 338 n34; Roger Sullivan, *Kant’s Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 122–4, 336; Allen Wood, *Kant’s Ethical Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 11, 28–9; and Robert Louden, *Kant’s Impure Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77, 203.

<sup>3</sup> Schiller, *Werke, Nationalausgabe*, ed. Julius Petersen and Friedrich Beißner (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1943ff.), I, 357. All citations of Schiller will be to this now standard edition, designated ‘NA’; roman numerals refer to volume numbers, arabic numerals to page numbers, and italicized arabic numerals to line numbers. All translations of Schiller are my own.

<sup>4</sup> See *Anmut und Würde*, XX, 283, 35–7. Allison interprets this sentence along the lines suggested here. See *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, 181.

<sup>5</sup> The honorable exception here is Paul Guyer, who rightly sees that Schiller’s intention in *Anmut und Würde* is more to defend than attack Kant. See *Experience of Freedom*, 351–5.

two of Kant's fundamental theses about moral actions: that moral obligations should be justified on the basis of reason alone, and that duty should be the sole motive for moral conduct.

My task here is essentially historical and exegetical: to explain the basic points at issue in the Kant–Schiller dispute. This is no easy task for several reasons. First, the notorious obscurity of the texts, both Kant's and Schiller's. Second, Kant and Schiller themselves never achieved complete clarity about the issues dividing them. They sometimes expressed their complete agreement about fundamental principles, only to return to criticizing one another. Third, there is a long history of misinterpretation and controversy about the dispute. There is disagreement not only about *how* to interpret the main issues, but also about *whether* there was really a dispute at all. Some scholars have argued that Kant and Schiller never really disagreed about fundamentals, and that Schiller only wanted to supplement or develop Kant's principles.<sup>6</sup> Regarding this last issue, I will argue that there was indeed a great deal of agreement between Kant and Schiller, and much more than has been assumed by the neo-Kantians; nevertheless, there were still fundamental disagreements between them. The source of their disagreement concerned nothing less than the classical question of the highest good or the end of life itself.

But my task has not only been to set the record straight. For I have come not to bury Schiller but to praise him. I will attempt to defend Schiller on several grounds. First, I shall argue that his concept of moral grace, or duty from inclination, is perfectly consistent, and compatible with some of the demands of Kant's moral rigorism. Second, I shall contend that Schiller was not the hopeless idealist about human nature that he is often taken to be, and that he was not guilty of the charge of 'moral fanaticism' which has recently been levelled against him.<sup>7</sup> Third, and most importantly, I want to argue that Schiller has a broader and more satisfactory account of the highest good or the ends of life than Kant. While Kant's concept of the highest good is narrowly moralistic, making morality alone the sole supreme good, Schiller's leaves room for other non-moral values while not compromising the integrity of morality itself.

<sup>6</sup> This was the thesis of Karl Vorländer, 'Ethischer Rigorismus und sittliche Schönheit', *Philosophische Monatshefte* XXX (1894), 225–80, 371–405, and 534–77; and Eugen Kühnemann in the introduction to his edition of *Schillers philosophische Schriften und Gedichte* (Leipzig: Meiner, 1922), 31–7, 41–51. Vorländer and Kühnemann were sharply criticized by Hans Reiner in his *Pflicht und Neigung* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1951) (reprinted and translated as *Duty and Inclination* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1983)). Reiner argued that Vorländer's and Kühnemann's attempt to stress the continuity from Kant to Schiller had overlooked the fundamental differences in their ethics. Though Reiner had a point, he does not really specify precisely the central issue at stake between Kant and Schiller; it is unclear whether he thinks Kant and Schiller disagree about the moral worth of actions, the justification of moral principles, the ends of life and the highest good, or the role of emotions in morality.

<sup>7</sup> This criticism has been suggested by Gerold Prauss, *Kant über Freiheit als Autonomie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), 247–8. It has been endorsed by Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 183–4.

## 2. THE SPIRIT AND THE LETTER

The main evidence cited on behalf of the neo-Kantian interpretation of Schiller is, almost always, nothing more than Schiller's epigram. Unfortunately, most contemporary Anglo-American Kant scholars have almost entirely ignored Schiller's main ethical works—*Anmut und Würde* and *Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*—which are pivotal for any accurate and complete understanding of his dispute with Kant.<sup>8</sup> As a result, Schiller's epigram is taken out of context and given an importance it scarcely deserves.

First of all it is important to stress that Schiller's epigram is really only a joke. Some scholars take it as serious criticism;<sup>9</sup> but this is unlikely. Schiller's epigram appears as part of a series—the so-called *Xenien*—which were intended as witticisms and caricatures. Other scholars recognize the epigram as a joke; but, because there is truth in jest, they see serious criticism behind it. So the question is then: What is the point behind the joke? If we consider Schiller's other works and correspondence, there can be only one answer. The aim of the epigram was not to ridicule Kant's doctrine but only to spoof *one common misunderstanding* of it. That Schiller intended it in this sense is clear from *Anmut und Würde* and his June 13, 1794 letter to Kant where he states explicitly that his aim is to criticize a widespread *misinterpretation* of his theory.<sup>10</sup> While Schiller did hold that Kant's *exposition* or *wording* was vulnerable to jest, he never believed that this was the case for his *doctrine* or *meaning*.

The central weakness of the neo-Kantian interpretation is that it drastically underrates the depth and breadth of Schiller's *agreement* with Kant. Precisely where these scholars think that Schiller is taking issue with Kant, Schiller was desperately trying to defend him. The irony here is very rich: Schiller wanted to vindicate Kant against the very objections which the neo-Kantians think Schiller made against Kant!

That Schiller was a Kantian on some of the basic principles of ethics there cannot be any doubt. On several occasions,<sup>11</sup> Schiller expressly stated that he is a Kantian regarding the foundation of ethics. More specifically, he is explicit that he accepts at least two of Kant's central theses: (1) that the principles of morality must be based upon reason rather than happiness, and (2) that an action has moral worth only if it is done for the sake of duty. In other words, Schiller endorsed

<sup>8</sup> Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 180–4, rightly stresses the significance of *Anmut und Würde*, which he takes as the main text for Schiller's views. However, Allison focuses his attention entirely on this work without placing it in its wider context.

<sup>9</sup> Paton, *Categorical Imperative*, 48, indignantly dismissed the epigram as 'poor poetry and worse criticism'. Lewis White Beck rightly saw that it was only a joke. See his *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 231n63.

<sup>10</sup> See NA XXVI, 13, 2–6; and XX, 284, 21.

<sup>11</sup> See *Anmut und Würde*, XX, 282–3; *Ästhetische Briefe* XX, 310, 348n. Also see the December 3, 1793 letter to Augustenbug, XXVI, 322 (cited below).

Kant's fundamental propositions about the *justification* of moral principles and the *moral worth* of human actions.

That Schiller accepts the first thesis is clear and uncontroversial. He is explicit that it is Kant's great contribution to ethics to have shown against the eudemonists that happiness cannot justify moral principles or establish the morality of human conduct (XX 282–3). That he also endorses the second thesis is far less clear and far more controversial, at least if we consider the common neo-Kantian interpretation of Schiller. There can be no doubt, however, that Schiller is a strict Kantian in this regard too. He is perfectly clear about the point in *Anmut und Würde*. Regarding the morality of an action, he places himself firmly on the side of the 'moral rigorists' who insist on strictly following the moral law, and against the 'latitudinarians' who relax its requirements (XX, 283, 16–22).<sup>12</sup> He then explains very explicitly that such rigorism means excluding happiness as a motive for human action and making the moral law *alone* its sole motive: 'Even if the drive toward happiness does not assert any blind power over human beings, it still wants to have its voice in moral decisions, and thus it damages the purity of the will, which ought to follow *only* the laws and never its drives' (282, 32–6; my italics). To put the whole matter beyond a shadow of a doubt, it is worthwhile citing Schiller's December 3, 1793 letter to Prince von Augustenburg, where he states his Kantian *credo* in the most explicit and emphatic terms:

Immediately and provisionally, I confess that in the chief points of moral doctrine I think completely like a Kantian. I believe and am convinced that only those of our actions are called *moral* to which we are determined merely by the respect for the law and not by inclinations, however refined these inclinations might be, and whatever imposing names they might carry. I accept with the most rigorist moralist that virtue must rest upon itself, and cannot be dependent upon some end different from it. The good is (according to Kantian principles, which I completely endorse in this regard) what happens because it is good.<sup>13</sup>

It is also noteworthy that Schiller then goes on, here and elsewhere, to endorse Kant's thesis in all its detail and variations. He is clear that actions done from benevolent inclinations alone, where there is no recognition of moral principle, have no moral worth.<sup>14</sup> He also praises moral actions that follow moral principle *contrary* to inclination: it is precisely these actions that have dignity, which alone

<sup>12</sup> Of course, Schiller also says that he is a latitudinarian regarding the execution of the moral law in the sensible world. But, for reasons we shall see below, this does not contradict his rigorism. Schiller's terms 'rigorist' and 'latitudinarian' come from the first edition of Kant's *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, VI, 22–23n. All references to Kant will be to the now standard Akademie edition, *Kants gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1902ff.).

<sup>13</sup> See Schiller, *Werke*, XXVI, 322, 14–24. In his 'Schiller und Kant', *Kant-Studien* 47 (1955/56), 113–47, Paul Menzer maintains that this letter represents an earlier position that Schiller discarded when he made his objection against Kant's rigorism (see 128). But this is untenable, because Schiller had written *Anmut und Würde* in the Summer of 1793. In any case, as the above citations show, Schiller's position in *Anmut und Würde* is entirely consistent with the letter to Augustenburg.

<sup>14</sup> He illustrates this point with a fable in the December 3, 1793 letter to Augustenburg, XXVI, 327.

reveals the sublimity of the human soul.<sup>15</sup> Finally, and most importantly, he denies that actions must exhibit grace if they are to have moral worth. Consider these lines from *Anmut und Würde*:

So much appears to be certain: that the approval of sensibility, even when it does not make the morality of an action suspicious, is at the very least still not in a position to *confirm* (*zu verbürgen*) it. The sensible expression of this approval in grace never provides a sufficient and valid proof of the morality of an action; and from the beautiful conduct of a disposition one will never experience its moral worth.<sup>16</sup>

These lines make it clear that Schiller does *not* hold the view, so commonly attributed to him, that actions have moral worth only if they show grace or are done from inclination. So far was Schiller from holding this view that he went to great pains to warn against it. In two essays published in *Die Horen* in 1795—‘Ueber die nothwendigen Grenzen beim Gebrauch schöner Formen’ and ‘Ueber den moralischen Nutzen ästhetischer Sitten’<sup>17</sup>—he distinguishes sharply between the realms of the moral and the aesthetic, arguing that taste oversteps its proper boundaries whenever it attempts to provide a basis for moral maxims and motives. Schiller flatly denies that taste should have a *legislative* function in morals, i.e. it cannot justify our duties; and although he concedes it an *executive* role, i.e. it can help us to perform our duties, he does so only under very limited conditions. While taste helps to *promote* moral action, because it is the first stage in the education of our sensibility, it cannot *create* moral action, which demands that we act from motives of reason alone (XXI, 28). Indeed, taste poses a threat to the purity and autonomy of morals, Schiller observed, because its purpose is to cultivate feelings of pleasure, which might tempt us from the path of duty (32). The very nature of taste involves a danger for morality, he further argued, because its purpose is to *unite* the intellectual and the sensible sides of a human being; but morality demands that we *separate* these aspects of ourselves, because it requires that we act from reason alone (3, 21–2). The dangers of the aesthetic realm for morality are especially clear in the case of love, Schiller insists, because love can be a source of self-deception: we think that we are acting purely selflessly, and so according to moral principle, when ultimately a deeper selfishness is at play (24–5). In general, Schiller’s argument in these essays reveals his continuing adherence to Kantian principles, at least concerning the justification of moral principles and the conditions of moral action. While Schiller does go a step further than

<sup>15</sup> This is the argument of the second half of *Anmut und Würde*. See esp. XX, 289, 298–9. It is important to note that Schiller does not take the view that moral action *as such* must involve the co-operation of sensibility. He realizes all too well that moral action sometimes demands sacrifice and suffering. Cf. Jeffrey Gauthier, ‘Schiller’s Critique of Kant’s Moral Psychology’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 27 (1997), 513–44, esp. 533, 535–6. Gauthier’s reconstruction of Schiller’s theory is false because it leaves no place for dignity.

<sup>16</sup> *Anmut und Würde*, XX 283, 7–15.

<sup>17</sup> NA XXI, 3–27, 28–37. Both essays were written in 1793, shortly after *Anmut und Würde*. Concerning Schiller’s distinction between the aesthetic and moral, see also his discussion of aesthetic and moral appraisal in ‘Ueber das Pathetische’, NA XX, 213–21.

Kant in making the aesthetic unify reason and sensibility, he stresses in true Kantian fashion that this must never compromise the purity and autonomy of morals.<sup>18</sup>

For all his agreement with Kant, Schiller does have one bone to pick with him. In *Anmut und Würde* he complains that Kant has overstated his case by drawing too sharp a contrast between duty and inclination (XX, 284–5). Kant's contrast is so drastic and exaggerated, Schiller says, that he *makes it appear* as if doing our duty must be contrary to our inclinations, or as if a moral action must exclude all feelings of sympathy and benevolent inclinations. Schiller then makes his notorious barb that Kant *seems to be preaching* 'a dark and monkish asceticism' (*einer finstern und mönchischen Ascetik*) (XX, 284, 19). No other remark had such a stinging effect upon Kant, who will soon go to great pains to show that his ethics is not guilty of it.

Nevertheless, it is important to see that Schiller does not think that Kant is really guilty of this charge. He insists that Kant does not *mean* to banish all inclination and feeling from moral action, though he admits that his *words* do lend themselves to that interpretation. The sharp contrast between duty and inclination, Schiller maintains, is really only a fault of Kant's *exposition* rather than his *doctrine* (XX, 284, 31–6). He then states explicitly that the point of Kant's contrast is not to provide a general analysis of the conditions of moral worth but only to show the cases where it is possible to know that an action is done from duty alone.<sup>19</sup> By focusing on actions done from duty *contrary to* inclination, Kant does not mean to exclude all inclination from moral action, but only to demonstrate that moral action does not require inclination. These actions illustrate pure moral motivation because there cannot be any doubt that there is another sensible motive for them. This last point is noteworthy if only because Schiller has been accused of ignoring it, as if he held that Kant meant to exclude all inclination from moral action.<sup>20</sup>

Schiller is such a Kantian that he even goes on to exonerate Kant's exposition, which, he thinks, was a necessity for his time and place. Kant made such a sharp distinction between duty and inclination, he explains, to combat the influence of

<sup>18</sup> In his editorial comments to 'Ueber den moralischen Nutzen', Benno von Wiese points out that the similarity in content between this essay and Schiller's December 3, 1793 letter to Prince von Augustenburg, but notes that Schiller drops his Kantian confession of faith, XXI, 324, 325. Wiese argues that this is evidence for Schiller's increasingly self-conscious departure from Kantian principles. Whatever Schiller's reasons for omitting the confession, the content of the essay is perfectly Kantian. Regarding Kant's rigorism, Schiller never changed his essentially affirmative position. This point was rightly stressed long ago by Karl Tomaschek, *Schiller in seinem Verhältnisse zur Wissenschaft* (Vienna: Gerold, 1862), 238.

<sup>19</sup> See *Anmut und Würde*, XX, 282–3, 37–9, 1–2: 'Um also völlig sicher zu seyn, daß die Neigung nicht *mit* bestimmte, sieht man sie lieber im Krieg, als im Einverständnis mit dem Vernunftgesetze, weil es gar zu leicht seyn kann, daß ihre Fürsprache allein ihm seine Macht über den Willen verschaffte.'

<sup>20</sup> That Schiller is guilty of confusing these issues is the heart of Paton's defense of Kant. See his *The Categorical Imperative*, 48–9. Remarkably, Hans Reiner, who is otherwise sympathetic to Schiller, cites the above lines out of context to make the same criticism of Schiller. See his *Duty and Inclination*, 31. In the lines cited above he omits the crucial opening phrase: 'Um also völlig sicher zu seyn'.

the prevalent materialism and eudemonism, which constantly confused morality and happiness (XX, 284–5). His age had been so corrupted by these doctrines that it required shock treatment rather than gentle persuasion. Hence Kant became ‘the Draco of his age’.

### 3. DUTY FROM INCLINATION

Schiller’s endorsement of Kant’s purity thesis regarding the morality of action—that an action should be done for the sake of duty alone—appears to raise a serious problem of consistency. Namely, how can Schiller square his allegiance to this thesis with the central concept of *Anmut und Würde*: moral grace? According to that concept, morality not only permits, but requires us to do duty from inclination (XX, 283). In other words, we should do our duty not reluctantly but happily, not with resentment but with pleasure. But such a concept seems to add an impure motive of sensibility to human action, undermining Kant’s demand for moral purity. For if we do our duty from inclination, it seems that the object of inclination either mixes with or even replaces duty as the motive for action. Even worse, this concept appears to undermine the whole idea of moral obligation; for, as Kant would later tirelessly insist against Schiller, there is no point to an imperative unless we could have the temptation *not* to act on it.

Because of these apparent implications of Schiller’s concept of moral grace, some neo-Kantian scholars have assumed that Schiller did not, and indeed could not, accept Kant’s moral purity thesis. If, however, we keep in mind the context of assumptions behind Schiller’s concept, it becomes clear that there is no real contradiction with the Kantian thesis. Furthermore, it becomes obvious that Kant’s criticism of Schiller misses the point.

There are three assumptions to the context, each of them requiring some explanation.

¶ First, an obvious but often overlooked point: the inclination toward duty in moral grace is not innate or natural but acquired and moral. It arises from moral education, and it consists in nothing less than virtue, the habit of acting on moral principle. It is important to stress that Schiller does not think that people *naturally* and *spontaneously*, without a moral education, act according to the principles of morality. Here again it is necessary to stress that Schiller was not a champion of Shaftesbury’s or Rousseau’s view that people are naturally good, innately equipped with good sentiments. No less than Kant, Schiller holds that some natural desires and feelings are selfish and directed toward pleasure,<sup>21</sup> and that it is necessary for the will to struggle against them if it is to act on moral principle.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>21</sup> See *Ästhetische Briefe*, NA XX, 315, 4; 392, 20–1; 388, 30; 389, 25–30. This point finds its strongest confirmation in Schiller’s picture of the *Naturstand* in Letter XXIV, 388–9.

<sup>22</sup> See *Anmut und Würde*, XX, 293.

he does not think that we ever will, even with a sufficiently long and intense moral education, transform all the desires of sensibility so that they conform perfectly to morality. He recognizes that there are many natural desires and feelings that are, and forever will be, resistant to the forces of moral education and the power of the will to control them.<sup>23</sup> Following Kant, Schiller stresses that, for human beings, the holy will is an ideal which we should strive for but which we cannot ever attain.<sup>24</sup> Hence the portrayal of Schiller as a moral fanatic—someone who thinks that moral principles are completely dispensable because people naturally and spontaneously act according to them—is groundless.

If we keep in mind Schiller's distinction between natural and moral inclinations, and his realism about the conflict between some natural drives and duty, then it becomes clear that Schiller is *not* undermining the concept of moral obligation. While moral imperatives are indeed pointless in the case of *moral* inclinations and feelings, simply because the person would already have incorporated moral principles into his will in creating them, they are still necessary to restrain *natural* inclinations and feelings, which are never completely eradicated and remain a constant source of temptation. Schiller could perfectly well acknowledge, then, Kant's insistence that moral imperatives apply only when a person has some inclination to act against them.

¶ Second, the concept of an inclination (*Neigung*) is ambiguous. It might refer to a *motive*, which involves the reason or end of an action; or it might refer to some *disposition*, which consists in the manner or style of action. Of course, it could also refer to both of these. But Schiller's concept of grace uses the term exclusively in the latter rather than the former sense. In other words, it describes not *why* someone does something but *how* they do it, that is, whether they do it gladly or reluctantly, with great effort or with ease. In *Anmut und Würde* Schiller is very explicit about this point. He explains that the concept of grace concerns not the purpose of the action but the manner of its performance, and he remarks that one and the same purpose can be achieved in many different ways (267). He also states clearly that he intends to defend the role of sensibility regarding not the *justification* but only the *execution* of the moral law (283).

The implications should be clear: if Schiller uses the concept of inclination in this more limited adverbial sense, then an inclination to duty does not imply a competing reason for action to moral principle; it is then possible to do an act gracefully while doing it only for moral reasons.

¶ Third, Schiller thinks that moral grace is a requirement not of the morality of an *action* but only of the morality of a *person*. He maintains that a person can perform individual moral actions even though he or she does not have a fixed or settled moral character. Someone might recognize his moral duty, and act for this reason alone; yet he or she could still lack a moral character because they act in a

<sup>23</sup> See *ibid.*, XX, 289, 35–8; 291, 25–8; 293, 14–9, 28–37.

<sup>24</sup> See *Ästhetische Briefe*, XX, 352–3, 360; and *Anmut und Würde*, XX, 289–90.

begrudging and perfunctory spirit. There is no conflict, then, between Schiller's concept of moral grace and Kant's moral purity thesis since each performs a distinct task. While the moral purity thesis establishes the conditions of moral *action*, the concept of grace determines the conditions for moral *character*. Schiller made the distinction between these tasks perfectly clear in the following pivotal passage from *Anmut und Würde*:

As much as I am convinced—and just because I am so—that the share of inclination in a free action proves nothing about its pure dutifulness, for just this reason I also believe myself to be able to conclude that the share of inclination in an action can reveal the moral perfection of a person. The human being is not designed simply to perform single moral actions but to be a moral being. Not virtues but the virtue is prescribed for him, and virtue is nothing less than 'an inclination to duty'. (283, 23–31)

This passage is crucial because it states, if only implicitly, Schiller's main intention in *Anmut und Würde*. In introducing the concept of moral grace his aim is not to correct Kant's doctrines but to support and supplement them. While Schiller completely accepts Kant's account of the *morality of an action*, he is convinced that Kant still needs a theory of the *morality of a person*. In *Anmut und Würde* Schiller's main reservation about Kant's ethics is that the Kantian account of the morality of actions could be mistaken for an account of the moral worth of the person. It might then seem as if a person who acts morally, yet begrudgingly and perfunctorily, might still be virtuous. This would be not only a *non sequitur* but a completely false account of moral virtue. As Schiller put the point: 'It does not give a good opinion of a person if he can so little trust the voice of his feelings (*Triebe*) that he is forced on every occasion first to judge them by the moral law' (287, 2–5).

Schiller does not think that Kant intends to provide an account of virtue in the *Grundlegung* or second *Kritik*; but he does think that he needs one if he is to avoid obvious objections. He fears that if Kant's thesis were mistaken for a theory of moral character, then it would become vulnerable to the charge of monasticism. Kant could avoid this objection, Schiller believes, only if he supplements his thesis about moral action with an account of moral virtue and character. Such an account would provide a place for moral feeling and inclination, and thus show the possibility of performing moral action from inclination and with feeling. If this could be clearly explained, then it would remove the most common objection against Kant's rigorism, and so make his doctrine more acceptable to the public. Hence, far from endorsing the common objection about Kant's monasticism, Schiller really wanted to refute it, because he saw it as the main obstacle to the general reception of Kant's ethics.<sup>25</sup> We now can better appreciate the rich irony behind the neo-Kantian criticism of Schiller: for Schiller was on the side of the neo-Kantians, the first in their tradition to provide a sympathetic reconstruction of Kant.

<sup>25</sup> See Schiller's account of his motives in his June 13, 1794 letter to Kant, XXVII, 13.

That Schiller did not think he was providing a *competing* account of moral virtue to Kant in *Anmut und Würde* becomes clear as soon as we recall one basic historical fact: that, when Schiller was writing *Anmut und Würde* in the early Summer of 1793, Kant had still not published his own account of moral virtue, which would appear only in the Summer of 1797 as the second part of the *Metaphysik der Sitten*. Since the 1780s Kant had announced his plans to publish a *Metaphysik der Sitten*, which would contain a *Tugendlehre*, and rumors about its imminent publication were rife.<sup>26</sup> The buzz reached a crescendo in Jena in early 1793—only months before Schiller wrote *Anmut und Würde*—when Kant told J. B. Erhard, a member of the Reinhold circle, that he was now finishing his *Tugendlehre*.<sup>27</sup> Having direct contacts with Reinhold and his circle, Schiller was fully informed about the situation; and, like many of his contemporaries, he too eagerly awaited the appearance of Kant's work.<sup>28</sup> Under the circumstances, then, he could not *attack* Kant's theory on virtue—for he knew that Kant still did not have one—but only *anticipate* it. He could only hope that Kant's theory would follow along the lines he suggested in *Anmut und Würde*. But, as we shall soon see, his hopes were not to be entirely fulfilled; for Kant, an attentive reader of Schiller's work, proved to be very ambivalent about it.

#### 4. AESTHETIC CHARACTER IN KANT

What was Kant's reaction to Schiller's *Anmut und Würde*? Given Schiller's Kantian principles and sympathies, it is not surprising that Kant's initial response was, at least superficially, positive. In a long footnote appended to the second edition of his *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, Kant praised Schiller's essay on grace and dignity as 'composed with a master's hand', and he even declared that 'we are at one on the most important principles' (VI, 23n). While he was irked by Schiller's 'objection' that his account of moral obligation seems to involve 'a monastic frame of mind', he still maintained that their apparent disagreement could be easily resolved simply by clarifying the issues.

Despite his eagerness to reach agreement with Schiller, Kant's footnote betrays his underlying ambivalence about Schiller's project for an aesthetic of morals. On the one hand, Kant *distances himself* from the project because he fears that it can undermine the integrity and purity of moral motivation. If there can be an

<sup>26</sup> Kant first announced his plans in the preface to the *Grundlegung*, IV, 391. For the history of the publication of this work, see Karl Vorländer's introduction to his edition of the *Metaphysik der Sitten* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1966), IX–XIII.

<sup>27</sup> See Kant to J. B. Erhard, December 21, 1792. Kant writes about 'meiner unter Händen habenden Metaphysik der Sitten'.

<sup>28</sup> Schiller's involvement in the rumour grist is apparent from his October 28, 1794 letter to Erhard, NA XXVII, 72. Strangely, Schiller states here that he has heard from Kant himself that his work will soon appear; yet Kant first wrote Schiller in March 30, 1795. It seems that Schiller was reporting indirectly what Kant had told others.

inclination to duty, then inclination will either replace or diminish duty as a motive for action. Hence Kant reminds Schiller that ‘when duty alone is the theme, the graces keep a respectful distance’ (VI, 23n). The very idea of duty excludes the possibility of grace, Kant argues, because the concept of duty involves necessity, a constraint on our desires and feelings, while the concept of grace implies spontaneity, freedom from constraint. There would be indeed no point at all to a moral imperative or obligation, Kant argues, unless the agent could have the temptation *not* to perform the action.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, however, Kant *embraces* Schiller’s project insofar as he has to concede his point that it is better to do one’s duty gracefully rather than resentfully (24n). Thus he admits that there is ‘an aesthetic character’ to virtue, which consists in a courageous and cheerful rather than a fearful and dejected frame of mind. Kant even goes on to argue that ‘a heart which is happy in the performance of duty’ is ‘a sign of the genuine virtuous disposition’, because such a heart shows that a person has attained a love of the good, and so has made the moral law the ultimate maxim of all his actions (24n).

Kant’s reply to Schiller is puzzling because he seems to give with one hand what he takes with the other. It appears both to forbid and to allow Schiller’s central thesis that it is possible to do duty from inclination, or that it is possible to take pleasure in acting on moral obligations. Kant’s ambivalence reflects his underlying dilemma. If he accepts Schiller’s thesis, he seems to undermine moral purity and autonomy; but if he rejects it, he endorses a fanatical rigorism and monasticism which regards it as immoral even to want to do one’s duty.

While Kant never explicitly resolved the tension, he did have implicit within his ethics the resources to do so. The neo-Kantians are perfectly correct in their contention that Kant not only permits but requires some element of feeling and inclination in his account of moral action and virtue. That Kant could at least *allow for* the possibility of moral grace—of doing duty from inclination—is apparent when we consider three general points about his moral philosophy.

¶ First, there is nothing preventing Kant from following Schiller’s strategy of distinguishing between the reason for an action and the manner or style of its execution. Again, the reason for the action would be the principle which justifies it, or the motive for which it is done, while its manner of execution would be how it is done in specific circumstances; how it is done would involve *inter alia* the specific temper and attitude of the agent. It is obvious that one and the same action performed purely for the sake of duty can still be done with opposing attitudes and feelings; for example, both Bloggs and Jones want to do their duty by visiting a sick friend, but Bloggs does it resentfully while Jones does it happily. Provided Kant makes this distinction, there no danger to the purity of morals in admitting an inclination toward duty, for such an inclination concerns only the manner

<sup>29</sup> See the *Vorarbeiten zur Religionsschrift*, XXIII, 98–101. These pages seem to be a draft for a more extensive reply to Schiller; their content and tone are more critical.

rather than the motive for action; hence it does not involve a temptation, a conflicting reason for my conduct.

¶ Second, it is important to recall the reason Kant denies moral worth to benevolent feelings, and placed them on a footing with selfish inclinations. This is because he saw both as ‘gifts of nature’, as purely given and natural characteristics which involve no effort of will on the part of the agent. The premise behind his theory of moral worth is the famous opening proposition of the *Grundlegung*: that the good will alone has unconditional moral value (IV, 393). If the will alone is the source of moral merit, those agents who act from purely natural inclinations—whether selfish or benevolent—deserve no credit for their actions, because their inclinations do not arise from any effort of will. Yet, clearly, such an argument leaves open the possibility of crediting actions done from *moral* feelings and inclinations, for these are a component of virtue, and as such the product of a steady resolve of the will.

¶ Third, Kant distinguishes between desires and feelings that are natural and sensible and those that are acquired and rational. He first made such a distinction in the *Grundlegung* in explaining the role of benevolence and love in morals. Here he distinguishes between a *pathological* feeling, which is natural and given, and whose acquisition therefore cannot be made a duty, and a *practical* feeling, which is artificial and created, and whose acquisition can therefore be commanded or achieved through the will.<sup>30</sup> Such a distinction could easily resolve the tension in Kant’s reply to Schiller. While the argument about moral constraint would still apply to *pathological* inclinations and feelings, his insistence upon the aesthetic character of virtue would apply to *practical* inclinations and feelings. Kant himself came closest to seeing this point in the preface to his *Metaphysik der Sitten*, where he is explicit that someone can do their ‘bitter duty’ and yet still find themselves ‘in a state that could well be called happiness, a state of contentment and peace of soul in which virtue is its own reward’ (VI, 377–8). Such an admission does not undermine the purity of morals, he then argues, as long as we make a distinction between *pathological* and *moral* pleasure. While pathological pleasure is possible apart from the moral law and precedes it according to the order of nature, moral pleasure is acquired only by acting for the sake of the moral law and succeeds it according to the moral order (VI, 377–8).

All these points make it possible for Kant to *permit* Schiller’s concept of duty from inclination. It is important to see, however, that, for Kant, aesthetic character is not a pale possibility, a mere concession to Schiller, which he could tack onto his ethics as a kind of afterthought. Rather, it became a dire necessity for him, indeed an integral part of his doctrine, especially in the *Metaphysik der Sitten*.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See *Grundlegung*, IV, 399, and *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, V, 83.

<sup>31</sup> The role of aesthetic character is apparent in several respects in the *Metaphysik der Sitten*. First, in the emphasis upon the concept of moral pleasure or feeling (VI, 378, 399–400). Second, in the introduction of a ‘duty of humanity’, which consists in the obligation to develop our natural feelings so that they become moral virtues (VI, 456–7; §34–5). Third, in the addition of an Epicurean temperament

The reason for this is not hard to fathom. From the very beginning Kant had recognized that the demands of moral action require an agent to cultivate virtue, for it is only if an agent is virtuous that he or she has the strength of character to conquer temptation.<sup>32</sup> Kant increasingly realized, however, that the most powerful aid to, and the most reliable sign of, virtue is nothing less than its aesthetic character, that is, the inner contentment of moral character and the pleasure in acting for the sake of duty. The more a person felt pleasure in acting morally, the more likely he or she would live by, or constantly fulfill, the demands of the moral law.

Though the evidence is circumstantial,<sup>33</sup> it is very possible that Kant came to appreciate the value of aesthetic character under Schiller's influence. The imputation of monasticism, which Schiller saw as a danger in Kant's theory if it were driven to extremes, undoubtedly smarted Kant. Such a charge would have offended any *Aufklärer* of the late eighteenth century, who saw monasticism, along with enthusiasm and dogmatism, as one of the forces of darkness. But Kant had special reason to bristle, for such an accusation flew in the face of one of his most cherished values: moral autonomy. Sure enough, in his *Religionsschrift* he reacted sharply to the implications of the charge. Monasticism implies 'a slavish frame of mind' and 'a hidden hatred of the law', he wrote, because the agent saw the law as a hostile and alien force (VI, 24n). Kant stressed that he was not guilty of this charge, for monasticism was contrary to his central concept of moral autonomy.<sup>34</sup> This concept means, he insisted, that the moral agent is not only the subject but also the creator of the law. To avoid this misunderstanding of his theory, Kant began to stress the aesthetic dimension of moral life. For the concepts of *moral pleasure* and of *moral feeling* stress the satisfaction of the agent in recognizing his own powers of moral autonomy: the agent finds satisfaction in acting morally because he has achieved *self*-mastery over his inclinations and because he has acted according to *self*-imposed principles. Respect for the law consists not only in fear and self-abasement, when it strikes down sensible desire, but also in pleasure and self-elevation, when the agent realizes that he has a power of will to control his desires and to will the law.<sup>35</sup>

to ethical virtue, when Kant insists that the stoic ethic of self-denial and acquiescence must be supplemented by 'the ever cheerful heart, according to the idea of the virtuous Epicurus' (VI, 485).

<sup>32</sup> This point is well argued by Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom*, 107–20, and Sorrell, 'Kant's Good Will', 87–101. Both take issue with Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty', 1–22, who is intent on a sharper distinction between action and virtue.

<sup>33</sup> There is evidence that Kant has Schiller in mind in some passages of the *Metaphysik der Sitten*. Section §53 makes points similar to those in the footnote to the *Religionsschrift*; and the argument of the preface takes issue with a program of aesthetic education in a manner similar to the Vigilantius lectures, where Kant explicitly mentions Schiller (cf. VI, 376–7 & XXVII, 623). I do not mean to suggest that Kant had no doctrine of aesthetic character before his reply to Schiller. In the second *Kritik* Kant had already argued that practical love, which is a moral ideal, consists in a liking to do our duty (V, 83).

<sup>34</sup> See esp. Kant's reply to Schiller in the Vigilantius lectures, XXVII, 623–4.

<sup>35</sup> Kant had already stated as much in the second *Kritik*, V, 78–9; but there the emphasis is more upon the *fear* of the law rather than the *joy* in acting according to it. In the *Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant emphasizes the positive side of moral feeling, especially the idea of moral pleasure and the inner tranquility involved in the moral disposition.

## 5. A TRUCE VIOLATED

Now that we have examined Schiller's and Kant's positions in a little detail, it is easy to see that they are indeed very close to one another after all. Both stress that the sole motive for moral action must be the moral law, and both insist that morality not only permits but requires aesthetic character or grace. While Schiller uphold's Kant's purity thesis because he thinks that it is compatible with moral grace, Kant concedes Schiller's concept of grace, at least in substance if not in name, because he thinks that it is compatible with purity. Furthermore, both Kant and Schiller combine the purity thesis with moral grace in essentially the same way: by making grace an attribute of moral character and style rather than of moral actions and their motives.

Hence it was not simple self-deception, and still less just *politesse*, when Kant and Schiller reassured one another that they were at one on fundamental principles.<sup>36</sup> They were indeed agreed about some very basic points, not least about those that are so often thought to divide them. No doubt, though, other motives played a role in their expressions of amity. Kant and Schiller were eager to avoid a public dispute. Because he was so old and busy, Kant had no time for polemics; and Schiller felt himself no match for Kant's formidable dialectical skill. In any case, such a dispute would surely have been an embarrassing spectacle for both: Germany's greatest living dramatist locked in battle against its greatest living philosopher! This would cast a spotlight on both which would never give them any privacy or peace.

Despite all their points of agreement, Kant and Schiller had really only made a truce with one another. As in any truce, sources of conflict remained. If they stressed their common principles to one another, they expressed their reservations to others. Thus in his 1793 lectures on ethics—the so-called Vigilantius lectures—Kant did not hesitate to criticize Schiller openly and severely. As in his drafts for the *Religionsschrift*, Kant continued to argue that there cannot be grace in the fulfillment of duty, and he warned that the idea of aesthetic character could be detrimental to morality itself.<sup>37</sup> For his part, Schiller confessed to his friends that he had swept much under the carpet. Thus he wrote L. F. Huber in February 1795 that he was not satisfied with Kant's reply to *Anmut und Würde* in the *Religionsschrift* (XXVI, 144); he confessed to Jacobi in June 1795 that he was a Kantian only when he was defending Kant against misunderstandings, but that when he was developing his own views he was opposed to Kant (XXVII, 206); and, finally, he told Goethe in October 1795 that, though Kant much admired his *Ästhetische Briefe*, he had tried to refute him on several points in that work (XXVIII, 90).

<sup>36</sup> See Schiller to Kant, June 13, 1794, NA XXVII, 12–3; and Kant, *Religionsschrift*, VI, 23n.

<sup>37</sup> XXVIII, 490, 623–4. Yet here too the old ambivalence appears, since Kant also argues that 'we must couple virtue with graciousness' (707), and that we have a duty to make virtue conform to the rules of taste (706).

Schiller's confession to his friends shows that there were indeed basic differences between himself and Kant after all. To explain these differences, it is necessary to take a close look at Schiller's major work on ethics and aesthetics, his 1795 *Ästhetische Briefe*. It was in the course of writing this work that Schiller became more fully aware of some of his differences with Kant. As Schiller's confession to Goethe reveals, there is an implicit critique of Kant running throughout this work. Although Schiller continued to express his agreement with Kant in the *Briefe*,<sup>38</sup> he still took silent issue with him in several places. Because his departures from Kant are only implicit, it is necessary to make them explicit and to reconstruct them in some detail.

## 6. THE BREAK WITH KANT

The best way to come to terms with Schiller's break with Kant in the *Ästhetische Briefe* is to consider his implicit contrast between the moral and anthropological standpoints. It is clear from Schiller's exposition that this is a contrast between his own ethics and Kant's. While Kant's represents the narrow moral standpoint, Schiller's ethics champions the broader anthropological standpoint. The problem with the 'one-sided moral perspective' (*einseitigen moralischen Schätzung*), Schiller claims, is that it sacrifices individuality and sensibility for the sake of morality: they are either repressed or become means for the sake of moral ends. The value of the 'complete anthropological perspective' (*vollständigen anthropologischen Schätzung*), however, is that it incorporates individuality and sensibility into a more complete ethical ideal (316–17). They cease to be means to moral development and become ends in themselves. The distinction between these standpoints becomes clearer when Schiller contrasts the *moral* education of the Kantian standpoint with the *aesthetic* education of his own anthropological standpoint. While moral education cultivates the will to comply with rational norms, aesthetic education addresses the person as a whole, developing the greatest possible harmony of our rational and sensible powers (376–7n). On several occasions Schiller warns against the extremes of a moral education that represses feelings and desires, and which extinguishes individuality for the sake of compliance with universal rules (317, 348, 349–50n). He explains that a person can be in conflict with himself in two ways: as a savage whose emotions rule over his principles, or as a barbarian whose principles destroy his feelings (318). The purpose of a complete aesthetic education is to avoid both evils: it should free sensibility from the constraint of reason as well as reason from the constraint of sensibility (367, 376). An aesthetic education will not only increase the activity of reason, giving it the greatest possible independence from sensibility, but it will also cultivate the passivity of sensibility, giving it the widest

<sup>38</sup> Hence Schiller reaffirms the principles of Kant's moral philosophy (310, 6–15), and he says his differences with it concern its letter rather than its spirit (348n, 41–3).

exposure and sharpest sensitivity to all the stimuli of the world (349). The two fundamental aspects of human character, reason and sensibility, should be in an active interchange with one another, where each stimulates and limits the other (348, 352–3). In such an interchange sensibility is not simply subordinate to reason, as in moral education, but reason and sensibility are co-ordinate with one another, so that they both have equal rights; indeed, they are interchangeably subordinate to one another, reason to sensibility as much as sensibility to reason.

It should be clear that Schiller's ideal of human perfection in the *Briefe* is very far from Kant's ideal of the holy will. Schiller's ideal has sometimes been identified with Kant's, as if Kant and Schiller held the same goals but simply differ about the means of their realization.<sup>39</sup> There is some justification for this identification because Schiller's concept of moral grace shares a clear affinity with Kant's holy will: in both moral grace and the holy will the moral law ceases to be a constraint since a person acts immediately and by nature according to the moral law. Yet the affinity between these concepts really goes no further. Schiller's ideal of human perfection is a perfect harmony between reason and sensibility, where no faculty dominates over the other; because they have an intrinsic value, feelings and desires are not simply an instrument for the execution of moral ends. In Kant's ideal of the holy will, however, desire and feeling disappear entirely because a person has no sensibility but becomes completely rational, acting of necessity according to the moral law. Schiller's differences with Kant regarding his ethical ideals becomes fully apparent in Letter XIV when he states that the interchange between reason and sensibility provides 'the idea of our humanity', which is a goal that we should approach through infinite striving (352–3). In Letter XXIII he admits Kant's doctrine that the highest ideal of morality is a holy will; but he then adds that this shows only that the highest ideal of human perfection goes beyond morality (387n).

These differences between Kant's and Schiller's ethical ideals emerge especially clearly from Kant's own program of aesthetic education in *Metaphysik der Sitten* §§34–5.<sup>40</sup> That Kant formulated such a program is significant, not least because it shows that his concept of moral development is not simply one of restraining and repressing natural desires and feelings.<sup>41</sup> No less than Schiller, Kant too states that our natural feelings of sympathy should be fostered and cultivated so that they become an element of moral virtue and character. He goes so far as to advise visits to poor houses, so that people develop feelings of sympathy for those less fortunate than themselves. Nevertheless, Kant gives his program of aesthetic education a very different twist from that of Schiller. According to Kant, the purpose of

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Willy Rosalewski, *Schillers Ästhetik im Verhältnis zur Kantischen* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1912), 6, 11, 58.

<sup>40</sup> Kant does not describe his ideal as 'aesthetic education' but he does speak about the cultivation of 'aesthetic' feelings, and of the development of a *humanitas aesthetica*, which consists in our receptivity to the feeling of joy and sadness of others (VI, 456, 21, 30).

<sup>41</sup> See too Kant's critique of the stoical ethic in *Religion*, VI, 58, where he argues that it is not only futile but reprehensible to extirpate natural desires.

aesthetic education is strictly the development of moral character; according to Schiller, however, it is the development of the whole personality.

It is important to see that this basic difference between Kant and Schiller is not diminished by the fact that Kant too acknowledges something like a duty to develop our whole personality. In the *Metaphysik der Sitten* Kant explains in detail that perfection is one of our fundamental duties to ourselves, and that perfection includes the development of all our powers, which include powers of spirit (intellectual or rational), powers of soul (imagination and memory) and powers of the body (physical health and strength) (19; VI, 444–5). But this apparent similarity with Schiller evaporates, and their real differences re-emerge, as soon as we consider how Kant and Schiller would justify such a self-regarding duty. For Kant, the self-regarding duty to perfect myself is derived from the categorical imperative, the realm of morality alone; for Schiller, it is derived from the end of humanity, of which morality is only a part.

The differences between Kant's and Schiller's ethical ideals become even more apparent when we consider their diverging concepts of freedom. Both Kant and Schiller think that the purpose of an aesthetic education is to develop a person's autonomy, their powers to think and act for themselves apart from external authority. Yet there are several passages in the *Briefe* where Schiller gave the concept of freedom a very different meaning from Kant, and others where he implies that Kant's own concept is unduly narrow.<sup>42</sup> Famously, Kant understands freedom as *moral autonomy*, which consists in independence of the will from nature, and which is achieved by acting on the laws of practical reason. Schiller, however, sees freedom as *aesthetic harmony*, as acting according to the laws of one's whole nature, where both sensibility and rationality complement one another. True freedom arises, Schiller argues, only through the interchange between reason and sensibility, where each faculty both limits and stimulates the other. Such an interchange frees the whole person from constraint, because neither faculty dominates the other. Hence Schiller insists that freedom consists not only in independence from the constraint of sensibility and nature, as Kant saw it, but also in independence from the constraint of reason and moral law (365, 367, 373, 375). Nowhere are his differences with Kant more fundamental than when he implies that the Kantian concept of freedom is too narrow because it is compatible with a form of constraint: the domination of reason over sensibility.

All these differences between Kant's and Schiller's ethical ideals—their contrasting conceptions of freedom, of the ends of aesthetic education, and of the basis of self-regarding duties—permit the following generalization about the basic difference between them. *Kant subordinates humanity to morality whereas Schiller subordinates morality to humanity.* The relation of subordination here is not that of

<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., NA XX, 365, 5–6; 367, 30; 373, 17–20; 375, 23. In many passages of the *Briefe*, however, Schiller retains Kant's more narrow concept of freedom as moral autonomy. See, e.g., XX, 342, 6–7; 345, 25; 348, 6, 16, 19; 349, 10, 20; 352, 12; 353, 18; 354, 7; 356, 10.

a means to an end but of a part to a whole. As it stands, however, this generalization is very crude and tentative. We still have to pin down its precise meaning and the basic issue behind it.

## 7. THE MAIN STICKING POINT

Given this general difference between Kant and Schiller, it is tempting to interpret their dispute as a conflict between an ethics of duty and an ethics of perfection. When Schiller stresses the need to develop the whole personality, to realize all one's characteristic powers as a human being, he adopts some of the fundamental concepts and values of the ethics of perfection. He seems to be reviving the old perfectionist doctrine of Leibniz, Wolff and Mendelssohn, which had dominated ethics before Kant. Schiller's account of human perfection gives more emphasis to emotive development than his rationalist forbears, perhaps, but the basic value underpinning his ethics still seems to be the same: human perfection.

While there cannot be any doubt that, in some respects, Schiller has an ethics of perfection, it would be a serious mistake to interpret it along traditional lines. There are two problems with such an interpretation. First, Schiller himself explicitly rejects any ethics based upon the concept of perfection alone.<sup>43</sup> He denies that the concept of perfection provides a sufficient foundation of morality; furthermore, he affirms Kant's fundamental criticism of the ethics of perfection: that it is no better than hedonism in making morality into a means toward an end. Second, Schiller, no less than Kant, believes that the pre-eminent value in life is freedom; it is indeed the primacy of freedom in Kant's philosophy that attracts him to it in the first place.<sup>44</sup> Schiller sees clearly, however, that an ethics of perfection does not necessarily incorporate freedom because a person could achieve perfection through the laws of necessity alone.<sup>45</sup> There is nothing preventing the perfectionist from adopting Spinoza's concept of freedom: that which acts according to the necessity of its own nature alone. For Schiller, as for Kant, this was no better than 'the freedom of the turnspit'.

For these reasons, it would be misleading to describe the issue dividing Kant and Schiller in terms of the classic dispute between an ethics of duty and one of perfection. This is essentially a dispute about the foundation of morality, about the justification of moral obligation; but, as we have already seen, Schiller does not disagree with Kant about that foundation. He accepts Kant's claim that pure reason alone provides a sufficient foundation for the moral law, and he endorses his point that the concept of perfection involves a principle of heteronomy that undermines the autonomy and integrity of moral obligation.

<sup>43</sup> See *Anmut und Würde* XX, 285, and the first of the *Kallias Briefe*, the January 25, 1793 letter to Körner, XXVI, 175–6.

<sup>44</sup> See Schiller to Körner, February 18, 1793, XXVI, 191.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, February 23, 1793, XXVI, 210.

The most accurate formulation of the issue dividing Kant and Schiller is in terms of one of the oldest questions of ethics. Namely, 'What is the *summum bonum* or highest good?'. Of course, this question was central to the ethics of antiquity and the Middle Ages; but it had lost none of its vitality in late eighteenth-century Germany, where the vocation of man (*Bestimmung des Menschen*) was still a very popular topic.<sup>46</sup> To understand what is at stake with this question, we do best to return to the classical analysis of the concept of the highest good provided by Aristotle.<sup>47</sup> According to Aristotle, the highest good must satisfy two conditions: first, it must be *complete*, that is, it must be an end in itself, and so never a means to any higher end; second, it must be *self-sufficient*, that is, nothing can be added to it to make it better. In the second *Kritik* Kant himself follows a similar distinction. He maintains that the concept of the highest good is ambiguous: it can refer to either the *supreme* good—that unconditional good which is not good upon the condition of anything else—or the *perfect* good—that whole which is not part of a larger whole (V, 110).

Now, expressed in these terms, Schiller's central claim is that the highest good, both complete and sufficient, is the development of aesthetic character, the whole personality. If morality is an end in itself, a *supreme* good, it is still not the *perfect* good because there is something that can be added to it to make it better: namely, the development of the whole personality, the cultivation of sensibility and individuality as well as rationality. To be sure, Kant too does not think that morality alone is the perfect or self-sufficient good but only the supreme good; he maintains that the perfect good is happiness in accord with virtue (V, 110–1). Indeed, in the second *Kritik* and *Religionsschrift* he argues against stoicism that personal happiness—that deriving from our natural desires—is a necessary component of the highest good.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, Kant's concept of the highest good remains much more moralistic than Schiller's. For Kant stresses that happiness is to be apportioned according to *moral* virtue alone, and that virtue alone is the *supreme* good.<sup>49</sup> Hence, Schiller's fundamental disagreement with Kant ultimately concerns the role of virtue in the highest good, or the place of morality in the ends of life: Kant affirms and Schiller denies that morality is the sole supreme good.

What Schiller is trying to do in the *Ästhetische Briefe*, then, is to place Kantian morality in a broader perspective, so that it becomes only one of the ends of life. He fears that if virtue alone were taken as the supreme good, then it would lead to a narrow moralism which places all human worth in the performance of moral duties alone. But such a moralism would leave no room for two fundamental human values: first, the development of the senses as ends in themselves; and,

<sup>46</sup> See above, 1.2      <sup>47</sup> See *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7, 1097a1–1098a1.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. VI, 58n and V, 127.

<sup>49</sup> This claim, so central to Kant's moralistic world view, is explicitly affirmed in *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, V, 110. It is also implied by Kant's famous opening statement in the *Grundlegung* that the only conceivable unconditional good is a good will (IV, 393). See also the Collins' lectures, where Kant maintains that the final purpose of mankind is the achievement of *moral* perfection (XXVII, 470); and the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* §86, where he states that the highest good consists in 'the existence of rational beings under moral laws' (V, 444).

second, the realization of human individuality. If moral virtue is the sole supreme good, then sensibility has value only insofar as it is cultivated for moral ends; and if virtue consists in acting according to universal norms, then it gives no room for the development of individuality. Schiller believed that he could avoid these unwelcome consequences of moralism with his 'broader anthropological perspective', which would give equal weight to virtue, individuality, and sensibility in a single conception of the highest good. That single conception is the idea of a harmonious unity of opposites, which, for Schiller, went by the name of beauty.

Once we formulate Schiller's dispute with Kant in these terms, it is easy to see some of the disadvantages of Kant's position. It suffers from two serious difficulties. First, it is unduly moralistic, giving supreme value to morality alone in its conception of the highest good. This means that the charge of moralism against Kant still has its value, though it should be understood as a criticism not of his account of moral action but of his theory of the highest good. Second, Kant's account of the highest good as happiness in accord with virtue amounts to an attempt to revive and rationalize the traditional Christian view of providence. In this regard, Schiller proves himself to be much more resolutely secular and modern than Kant.<sup>50</sup> His conception of the highest good is entirely this-worldly and humanist.

## 8. A FINAL DIFFICULTY

This is not, however, the end of the story. If Kant's theory of the highest good has its difficulties so does Schiller's. His problems are indeed so severe that Kant's theory seems to be more attractive after all.

Any theory of the highest good that postulates two supreme goods immediately runs into problems whenever these goods conflict with one another. It then becomes necessary to choose one over the other, so that there is ultimately really only one supreme good after all. Schiller's theory seems to be a classic case in point, because he gives supreme value to both reason and sensibility, to both the demands of morality and those of sensibility. What are we to do, however, in those cases where these demands conflict? As Kant constantly reminds us, these conflicts are eternal and inevitable, so that it is not always possible to do our duty with grace. Sometimes it is necessary 'to grin and bear it', repressing not only selfish inclinations but even the kindest promptings of the heart. It seems that, in these cases, Schiller must admit with Kant that morality alone is the supreme good after all.

Schiller was acutely aware of this problem, and his answer to it is the concept of dignity which he develops in the second half of *Anmut und Würde*. No less than

<sup>50</sup> Schiller never explicitly examined Kant's concept of the highest good. Yet his attitude toward it can be inferred from his February 28, 1793 letter to Körner, where he sharply criticizes Kant's *Religionschrift* for propping up church orthodoxy (NA XXVI, 219). Schiller scorned the Christian faith in supernatural rewards for virtuous conduct on earth; but it was just this idea that Kant had defended with his concept of the highest good. On Schiller's attitude toward this aspect of Christian faith, see his poem 'Resignation', NA I, 168.

Kant, Schiller stresses that there are many cases in this life where the conflict between reason and sensibility, or duty and inclination, is insuperable because the self can do its duty only with the greatest suffering. In these cases we do not expect a person to do their duty with joy, and we would indeed become suspicious if they did so, because the demands of duty stretch *anyone* to their limits. For Schiller, these kinds of cases are especially evident in tragedy, where the self can do its duty only by the greatest personal self-sacrifice. He recognizes that in these extreme cases the commands of duty remain paramount (291), and so he implicitly admits Kant's point that there can be only one supreme good after all.

No sooner does Schiller make this admission, however, than he stresses that it holds only for the extreme case of tragedy. He insists that *the ideal of complete humanity* demands harmony rather than conflict, so that it is indeed incompatible with dignity (298). While dignity is sometimes required in a less than perfect world, grace alone represents the ideal for human nature (289, 298). Hence, Schiller's concession to Kant remains very limited. If he has to admit that morality alone is the supreme good in the extreme case of tragedy, he does not have to make this concession for our normal lives where duty usually does not demand such great sacrifice. As long as we are not so unfortunate, it is possible, and indeed desirable, to give equal value to the demands of morality, individuality and sensibility, so that they are all supreme goods. Here it is only necessary to recall that the concept of the highest good specifies only an *ideal life*, which by its very nature cannot be realized in all circumstances.<sup>51</sup>

Schiller's response to this difficulty is complicated by his further claim that human perfection demands that a person show *both* grace and dignity (300, 35–8). It then appears as if grace alone, and the unity of grace and dignity, is his ideal of humanity. The apparent contradiction disappears, however, if we consider that the unity of grace and dignity is still not the ideal of humanity or the highest good; rather, it is the best disposition for a person in the real world who has to deal with all kinds of contingencies.

If we accept Schiller's response to this difficulty, then we are finally in a position to appreciate his ethics as a whole. Schiller's great achievement in ethics lay in his preserving some of Kant's central insights within the framework of a broader humanism. Schiller upheld two of Kant's cardinal principles—that moral worth depends upon the will, and that reason must play a central role in the justification of norms—yet he did not take them to the extreme of a narrow moralism which sees virtue alone as the supreme good. His humanism never compromises Kant's rigorism; yet it also does not limit the end of life to morality alone. These features of Schiller's ethics should make him more attractive to those contemporary moral philosophers who are searching for a synthesis of Kant and Aristotle.<sup>52</sup> Whatever one thinks of that elusive ideal, it should be clear from the above that, at the very least, we need to rethink Schiller's famous dispute with Kant.

<sup>51</sup> See above, chap. 3.11.

<sup>52</sup> See the interesting collection of essays *Aristotle, Kant, and the Stoics*, ed. Stephen Engstrom and Jennifer Whiting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).