

# KANT AND SCHILLER ON PURE ETHICS: WHY PHILOSOPHERS SHOULD CONCERN THEMSELVES WITH GERMAN LITERATURE (AND VICE VERSA)<sup>1</sup>

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## 1 STATE-OF-THE ART

In his book *Kant's Impure Ethics*, Robert Louden has definitively invalidated the traditional interpretation of a narrowly purist reading of Kant's ethics, assessing «the numerous pitfalls» associated with the very notion of “empirical ethics” in Kantian philosophy, «with the aim of clarifying the meaning, role and status» of impure ethics and the importance of moral anthropology.<sup>3</sup>

A pivotal role in the discussion of Kant's pure ethics is played by the philosopher and poet Friedrich Schiller. Schiller's relationship to Kant's moral philosophy and, in particular, to its ethical purism has always been controversial: Schiller professed himself to be a Kantian but nevertheless criticized Kant's lack of anthropological awareness through his consideration of man as a moral agent. Over the years, different solutions to this apparent contradiction have been found according to the point of view of the field of scholarly

research concerned: whereas German Literature scholars saw in Schiller's criticisms the heritage of his medical education at the Stuttgart *Karlsschule*,<sup>4</sup> philosophers conceived his position as the beginning of an important process of the recovery of the sensuous,<sup>5</sup> or, an outcome of the recent rehabilitation of Kant's moral philosophy, as the starting point in a long tradition of misinterpretations.<sup>6</sup> In sum, both readings hold that Schiller did not endorse Kantian purism.

In spite, or perhaps precisely because, of this general agreement, Frederick Beiser has recently tried to free Schiller of any responsibility for the legend of Kant's “asceticism”, claiming that Schiller's aim as a philosopher was to improve, not refute, Kantian ethics through the concept of “inclination” (*Neigung*) insofar as 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».<sup>7</sup>

The reactions to this new insight have varied from moderate approvals<sup>8</sup> to subtle but incisive corrections.<sup>9</sup> Beiser's own reply does not seem to have solved every doubt,<sup>10</sup> since some of the latest studies maintain, though the renewal Kant-scholarship has undergone in recent decades, the image of Schiller as Kant's philosophical opponent from the moral standpoint.<sup>11</sup>

This essay aims to deal with this issue from a perspective which is in some ways new, since it addresses, first, Kant's own assessment of his pure ethics (§ 2), and second, the real extent to which Schiller endorsed it (§ 3), in order to show that there was in fact far more agreement between them than is usually admitted. Kant and Schiller undoubtedly did not propose the same ethical system, yet their systems were not completely antithetical. The final scope of this paper is, therefore, to prove that a true interdisciplinary approach would have saved two centuries of misinterpretations, since it would have shown Kant scholars that Schiller endorsed what one is accustomed to calling Kant's ethical purism, and to Schiller scholars that Kant was not the blind, biased moralist they persist in assuming he was (§ 4).

## 2 KANT'S ALLEGED PURISM

Kant's ethics is grounded in a comprehensive knowledge of the major theories of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and aims to overcome their aporias. By reflecting on the Wolffian system in the heterodox version of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten,<sup>12</sup> and on the British tradition of moral sense,<sup>13</sup> Kant developed the "purist" trait in his moral philosophy, whose first systematic appearance can symbolically be traced back to the year 1770. Both in the dissertation *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* and in a letter to Johann Heinrich

Lambert, Kant referred to moral philosophy as something to be considered from a "pure point of view", since it cannot be known but by the «pure Understanding [*intellectus purus*]» (MSI, AA 02: 396) and, as a «[...] pure moral wisdom, has not to contain any empirical principles». (Br, AA 10: 97). From that point on Kant rejected any empirical foundation of ethics and maintained the rational, conceptual or intellectual character of moral notions. Needless to say, this purism did not remain a vague claim for the necessity for a non-sensible moral theory but became more complex during the 1770s and was expounded in its entirety in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). In these works it is clear that "purism" includes two specific aspects, which are reciprocally related but not identical.

Explicitly, purism concerns moral law both a) as originating in pure practical reason and b) as a motivating force for the realization of its own demands. Therefore, two steps are necessary in order to analyse Kant's alleged purism.

a) First of all, Kant refers the legislative power in ethics to pure practical reason, which alone can preserve the objectivity of morals and avoid its contamination with egoism. Neither feelings nor rational concepts such as the search for perfection and the intention to follow the will of God can seriously be taken as authorities in this field. Feelings, emotions and drives are, from the "purist shift" in about 1770, unsuitable candidates as sources of necessary moral prescriptions, but the non-empirically founded concepts of "perfection" and "will of God" also lack all consistency: in both these cases, a man has indeed himself and his own utility in mind, because furtherance of his own talents and skills has

a value only in relation to «the advantages of life» they guarantee, and obedience to the will of God («if agreement with it has been taken as the object of the will without an antecedent practical principle independent of this idea») becomes a motive only with regard to «the happiness we expect» from it. (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 41; CPR, 37).

Happiness is a material principle of morality and leads to the «[...] direct opposite of the principle of morality», if it is made «the determining ground of the will». (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 25; CPR, 32). As a matter of fact, it leads the moral agent to follow hypothetical imperatives, whose formula is: «I ought to do something *because I will something else*», whereas the moral action is led by the categorical one, which rests on the opposite rule: «I ought to act in such or in such a way even though I have not willed anything else». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 441; GMM, 47).

Actions which conform to hypothetical imperatives therefore destroy the distinction between morality and ability/prudence, «[...] put motives to virtue and those to vice in one class and only teach us to calculate better». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 442; GMM, 48). In all these cases, the will shows heteronomy and stands in contrast to «[...] *the supreme principle of morality*», which is «autonomy». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 440; GMM, 47). Autonomy is realized when the will «[...] *is subject only to laws given by [it]self but still universal*» and therefore determines itself in the fullest sense of the expression». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 432; GMM, 40). «Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 440; GMM, 47).

As thus appears evident, “purism” in this sense means that the moral law comes

only from reason and not from feelings, conceptions of self-improvement or religious prescriptions.

b) Secondly, Kant refers the motivating power to pure moral law itself. The problem of moral motivation, i.e. the problem of how ethical norms can be effective, has been one of the most widely discussed questions in the Western philosophical tradition since Socrates but gained new relevance in eighteenth-century empirical psychology as a consequence of the discovery of the irresistible force exerted by obscure and confused representations, also defined as “unconscious”.<sup>14</sup> Johann Georg Sulzer devoted his psychological essays to this topic and found out that passions, emotions and drives often have a greater impact on human actions than reason does, which is why the sole knowledge of what is right does not guarantee that it will be effected. On the contrary, everyday experience shows that theoretical convictions nearly always lack necessary effectiveness and remain therefore useless.<sup>15</sup>

Kant was acquainted with Sulzer’s analysis and was well aware of the importance of the problem. In the *Groundwork* he says he had «a letter from the late excellent Sulzer in which he asks [him] what the cause might be that the teachings of virtue, however much they contain that is convincing to reason, accomplish so little». Kant informs us that «[...] [b]y trying to prepare a complete answer» he «delayed too long». (GMS, AA 04: 411n; GMM, 22f./n).<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, Kant seems to have comprehensively dealt with this problem in the 1770s, without, however, finding a solution. In his lessons, he claimed that «[...] no one can, nor ever will, understand the fact that the intellect must exercise a motivational force», since the mechanism by which «judgment» becomes an

«incentive which leads the will to the execution of the action» is the «philosopher's stone» for the moral philosopher. (KANT, V-Mo/Mron, AA 27: 1428). The «senses» are opposed to the «intellect» as far as the motivational drive to action is concerned, and it is hard to see whether and how the latter «[...] could teach the former what he has learned», since it lacks «motivational force». (KANT, V-Anth/Fried, AA 25: 487).

It is in no way surprising that it is the purism of his mature moral view which provided Kant with the answer to Sulzer's question. The reason why moral norms so rarely become effective is «[...] simply that the teachers themselves have not brought their concepts to purity, but, since they want to do too well by hunting everywhere for motives to moral goodness, in trying to make the medicine really strong they spoil it». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 411n.; GMM, 23n.). In Kant's view, these teachers try to lead to moral actions by involving the pathological side of human nature, i.e. by ascribing to feelings and desires a role in promoting the moral conduct, but in doing so they pervert the very nature of morality itself. For

[...] [i]f the determination of the will takes place *conformably* with the moral law but only by means of a feeling, of whatever kind, that has to be presupposed in order for the law to become a sufficient determining ground of the will, so that the action is not done for the sake of the law, then the action will contain *legality* indeed but not *morality*. (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 71; CPR, 62).

That is to say that the moral «[...] incentive of the human will (and of the will of every created rational being) can never be anything other than the moral law» itself which therefore must «*determine the will immediately*» without the cooperation of any other incentives such as «advantage» and

«sensible impulses». (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 72; CPR, 62f.). The eventual cooperation of such external incentives would only lead to «hypocrisy». (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 72; CPR, 62).

The moral law is not only an «[...] objective determining ground» but it is also a «subjective determining ground» for the action «[...] inasmuch as it has influence on the sensibility of the subject and effects a feeling conducive to the influence of the law upon the will». (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 75; CPR, 65). This feeling is not «pathologically» but «*practically effected*» because it does not exist prior to the law but derives from it and is «produced solely by reason». It «[...] does not serve for appraising actions and certainly not for grounding the objective moral law itself, but only as an incentive to make this law its maxim». (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 75f.; CPR, 65). This feeling is called by Kant «respect» (*Achtung*). «Immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called *respect*». (KANT, GMS, AA 04: 401n; GMM, 14n.). «Respect for the moral law is therefore the sole and also the undoubted moral incentive». (KANT, KpV, AA 05: 78; CPR, 67).<sup>17</sup>

As must be evident, «purism» in this sense means that the moral incentive stems only from reason and has nothing to do with empirical feelings, emotions and drives.

However, this does not mean that a moral action *must* be performed without, or even contrary to feeling, as if it could be moral only either against men's inclination or, if anything, when the latter is completely absent. A moral action can be accompanied by inclination but does not owe its moral quality to this eventual inclination. Since Paton's highly influential book in 1948, Kant-scholarship has become accustomed to speaking of Kant's «method of

isolation», whereby if we are to «[...] justify our contention that a good will – under human conditions – is one which acts for the sake of duty, we must first *isolate* actions done for the sake of duty and judge whether they possess the supreme worth which we have ascribed to a good will». (PATON, 1948, p. 47). In order to do this, we are compelled to distinguish actions for the sake of duty from those performed out of interest or following an immediate inclination. In Kant's view, egotistical actions are not likely to be confused with those performed for the sake of duty, whereas actions carried out following an immediate inclination are. This is why Kant insists on the necessity to separate duty from inclinations, feelings and drives. To be explicit, this is a rhetorical strategy which is used in order to permit readers to understand what Kant wishes to say, but not an assessment of what *must* be. It is a method of exposition, not an exposition of what is moral and what is not. Following Paton, Kant-scholarship has until today embraced the view that «a lack of inclination» is not «crucial to acting from duty» (BARON, 1995, p. 147)<sup>18</sup>, and has gone even further by claiming that Kant not only permits but even demands the participation of feelings in order to attain virtue.<sup>19</sup>

This would appear fairly clear. Unfortunately, Schiller scholars have not noticed this new approach in Kant studies.

### 3 SCHILLER ON PURISM

Schiller began reading Kant's moral philosophy between the end of 1791 and the start of 1792: he ordered the *Critique of Practical Reason* on 28<sup>th</sup> November, 1791, and focused his attention on Kantian philosophy almost exclusively until 1795.<sup>20</sup> In 1793, he devoted several considerations to Kantian

ethics, wherein he explicitly professed himself to be a Kantian.

On 8<sup>th</sup> February, he wrote to his close friend Christian Gottfried Körner that «[...] practical reason abstracts from every knowledge and refers only to determinations of the will, to interior actions», because «[...] practical reason and determination of the will out of pure reason are the same thing». The «[...] form of practical reason is the immediate connection of the will with representations of reason, i.e., the *exclusion of any external* motives, since a will which is not determined by the sole form of practical reason is determined from outside in a material and heteronomous way». To accomplish a «moral action» means therefore «to be self-determined, autonomous». Thus, «[...] a rational being has to act out of *pure reason*, if he aims to show self-determination». (NA, XXVI, 181f.). On 18<sup>th</sup> February, Schiller said that «[...] no mortal has spoken greater words than these Kantian ones, which are the content of his whole philosophy: Be self-determining». (NA, XXVI, 191). In the letter of 3<sup>rd</sup> December to Prince von Augustenburg, Schiller explained his Kantian *credo*: Schiller said about himself that he thought «[...] in a wholly *Kantian* way in the chief point of ethics», namely in attributing moral worth only to those «[...] actions to which we are determined exclusively by respect [*Achtung*] for the law of reason and not by any drives [*Antriebe*], however refined they might be, or whatever impressive names they might bear». Schiller claimed he shared «with the most rigid moralists» the conviction «[...] that virtue must simply rest on itself and must not refer to any other purpose but itself»: he «[...] fully subscribe[d] in this aspect to the principles of Kant» and believed that «[...]



good is [...] what happens merely because it is good». (NA, XXVI, 322).

From February to December, Schiller wrote some philosophical essays dealing directly with Kant's moral philosophy. In *On Grace and Dignity*, the morality of an action does not rely on «[...] the conformity of acts to the law but rather only on the conformity of intentions to duty». The «approval of sensibility» cannot «[...] guarantee the conformity of the will to duty», which is why the «[...] participation of an inclination in a free action does not prove anything about the pure conformity of this action to duty». (NA, XX, 283). The «drive toward happiness» may «not assert any blind power over human being», but it nevertheless «wants to have its voice in moral decisions, and thus it damages the purity of the will, which ought to follow only the law and never its drives», since «freedom of spirit» is nothing less than «domination over the impulses through moral force». (NA, XX, 282, 294). In *On the Necessary Limitations in the Use of Beauty of Forms* (published in 1795 but written in 1793), Schiller insisted on similar Kantian assertions by claiming that «[...] respect is a feeling that can only be felt for the law and for what corresponds to it», which «requires absolute obedience». (NA, XXI, 24). In *The Moral Utility of Aesthetic Manners* (published in 1796 but written in 1793), he said that «[...] the morality of an interior action depends upon the immediate determination of the will by the law of reason». (NA, XXI, 29).

In 1794, Schiller confirmed his philosophical position by commenting on a review of his early poem *Resignation* (published in 1786). During his first stay in Swabia since he fled from there in his youth, Schiller read the comment of the Stuttgart banker Gottlieb Heinrich Rapp on the above-

mentioned poem and wrote a short essay where he explained his moral convictions, especially in relationship to religion. Virtue must not be accomplished because of our hope to be rewarded «in the afterlife», since virtue has «inner necessity». «Our moral duties» compel us «[...] not in the way a contract would do but rather absolutely» and must not derive from the expectation of «future benefits». (NA, XXII, 178).<sup>21</sup>

In short, Schiller endorsed Kant's purity thesis in its both legislative and motivational aspect and must have been particularly interested in Kant's posthumous answer to Sulzer, since he himself had been interested in Sulzer's psychology and moral philosophy.<sup>22</sup> So, Schiller rejected all religious foundation of ethics and sustained Kant's view of pure practical reason as a legislating faculty and of moral law as a motivating force. In Schiller's view, therefore, the moral agent must accomplish his actions because of their being intrinsically good, i.e., because of their responding to moral law, without thinking of any reward and without needing a further, non-rational incentive since moral law provides him with a sufficient one. Moral law from the perspective of the subject is called "respect" which is the only moral incentive *qua* practical feeling. No other feeling can serve as an incentive to a free moral action.

Even «love», which is an «ennobled affection» and the most «fruitful» one «in impressions which correspond to the true dignity of man», is only a source of self-deception since we think that we are acting selflessly (and thus supposedly morally) while we are, on the contrary, merely following our self-interest. To prove this assertion, Schiller supposes that «a loved object [...] is unhappy, and unhappy because of us, and that it depends only on ourselves to make it

happy by sacrificing a few moral scruples» . Numerous false questions thus arise:

Shall we let this loved being suffer for the pleasure of keeping our conscience pure? Is this resistance permitted by this generous, devoted affection, always ready to forget itself for the benefit of its object? I grant it is going against conscience to have recourse to this immoral means to solace the being we love; but can we be said to love if in presence of this being and of its sorrow we continue to think of ourselves? Are we not more taken up with ourselves than with it, since we prefer to see it unhappy rather than consent to be so ourselves by the reproaches of our conscience? (NA, XXI, 24).

Schiller defined these as «the sophisms» through which love can make conscience an object of contempt because of its supposed selfishness and lead us to see «[...] moral dignity as a *component of our happiness*». (NA, XXI, 25). In no way surprisingly, «Love» is conceived of as «at the same time the most generous and the most egotistical thing in nature» since on the one hand «it receives nothing and gives all», but on the other hand «[...] it seeks and enjoys in its subject always and exclusively itself». (NA, XX, 304). If one thinks of the fact that Schiller based his early ethics on love, one becomes aware of the grade of Schiller's agreement with Kant.<sup>23</sup>

In face of the evidence of this conclusion, it seems at least strange that many scholars have supported, and still support, the idea that Schiller was totally critical of Kant's moral philosophy. Schiller is supposed to have rejected Kant's «[...] separation of acting morally from acting from inclination» in order to restore to «[...] actions done from natural inclination rather than from duty» their moral worth; in doing so, Schiller, however, is said to have included notions Kant's ethics could not «[...] accommodate, although Schiller was inclined to think that it should».

(SCHAPER, 1979, p. 114f.). Moreover, one can, unfortunately, note the survival of some old misunderstandings regarding Kant himself, which in turn determine a grave misunderstanding of Schiller's own view: from a Kantian perspective, «[...] an action accomplished out of duty and *against* inclination» would be «[...] evaluated as morally better than that accomplished out of duty but according to inclination». (MEIER, 2011, p. 50f.).

Yet these scholars to some degree quite rightly saw Schiller as Kant's opponent in ethical matters. In fact, there are some passages in Schiller's above-cited texts, above all in *On Grace and Dignity*, which *seem* to (but, in reality, do not) contradict the «purist view» of Schiller proposed in this paper.

Schiller himself claims that, despite his agreement with the rigorist perspective in the «[...] field of pure reason and in moral legislation», he aims to embrace the cause of the «latitudinarians» in the «[...] realm of phenomena and in the effective execution of moral duty». (NA, XX, 283). However puzzling such an assertion can be, there is a very simple solution to the apparent contradiction which arises concerning Schiller's parallel assessment of «respect» as the unique moral incentive. With his attempt to reevaluate the sensible aspects of human nature insofar as moral agency is concerned, Schiller is not willing to supplement respect with other emotional incentives, but he is aiming to outline a theory of virtue as something relating to the moral agent rather than to the moral action. Inclinations and feelings do not play any role in determining the (im)moral quality of a single action, but only in determining the moral character of the person accomplishing it. «The moral perfection of man» depends precisely upon the «share of his inclination

in his moral acting» since «[...] man is not designed to perform single moral actions, but to be a moral being». This means that «[...] virtue, and not virtues, is prescribed for him, and virtue is nothing but “an inclination to duty”». (NA, XX, 283).<sup>24</sup>

Schiller is trying to show here that, although a single action can be, or rather, *is* morally worthy only if it is accomplished for the sake of duty and therefore without any sensible motivation, the human being performing it accomplishes many moral actions during his lifetime and must therefore develop a constant disposition to act morally with pleasure, since «[...] one does not have a good opinion of a person if he can trust the voice of his feelings so little that he is forced on every occasion to judge them first by moral law». (NA, XX, 287).<sup>25</sup>

Kant himself agreed with Schiller in 1794 by seeing in the «[...] slavish frame of mind [...] a hidden *hatred* of the law, whereas a heart joyous in the *compliance* with its duty [...] is the sign of genuineness in virtuous disposition». (KANT, RGV, AA 06: 23n; RBMR, 49n). There is no question that in his *Vigilantius* lectures of 1793-1794 on the metaphysics of morals Kant is far less conciliating than in the second edition of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, since he maintains that «[...] every obligation is forthwith associated with a moral constraint» (which Schiller does not question at all) and that «[...] [it] is contrary to the nature of duty to *enjoy* having duties incumbent upon one». It is rather «[...] necessary [...] that men's impulses should make him disinclined to fulfil the moral laws, and that these impulses should be overcome only through the authority of the latter, without it being possible to say that these laws demand respect in the manner of painful or despotic commands». Therefore,

Schiller is wrong «in his *Thalia*», insofar as he claims «that such fulfilment also has a certain *charm* about it», that is «a charm that attracts us to fulfilling it». (KANT, V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 490; LE, 259). The only way man has to «[...] find pleasure in virtue and the contemplation of it» is there when «[...] we have already become equipped to fulfil duties, and it is thus easy for us to follow the prescriptions of reason». (KANT, V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 490; LE, 260). Kant says, «Strict duties are incompatible with love» (again like Schiller himself), and with this assessment he criticizes Schiller for having questioned «[...] whether it is detrimental and blameworthy to couple man's moral worth directly with his inclinations in the determining of his dutiful behaviour», furthermore claiming that «[...] it would be a repulsive, crude, Carthusian morality, to wish to establish the basis of one's actions merely upon strict respect for the law». (KANT, V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 623; LE, 365). Of course, duty can «never» guarantee graciousness, yet «[...] we can lend to virtue a vesture of graciousness» in «the outer appearance of the disposition» as we «[...] endeavour not to act in contravention of the laws of seemliness». (KANT, V-MS/Vigil, AA 27: 707; LE, 432).

To sum up, Kant in no way excludes pleasure and joy from his moral theories, and the passages in which he takes issue with Schiller's proposal address problems Schiller himself looked at in a strictly Kantian way (e.g. the value of love and the cogency exerted by reason over impulses). Not by chance, the core of Kant's later ethics is far more similar to Schiller's and has been, again not by chance, interpreted at least in part as a silent response to the latter: in 1797, Kant stressed the necessity to have a «*cheerful*» frame of mind in «practising virtue» since «[...] what is not



done with pleasure but merely as compulsory service has no inner worth for one who attends his duty in this way». (KANT, MS, AA 06: 484; MM, 227).<sup>26</sup> In 1798, Kant confirmed these views and claimed that

[no] matter how insignificant [the] laws of refined humanities may seem, especially if one compares them to pure moral laws, nevertheless, anything that promotes sociability, even if it consists only in pleasing maxims or manners, is a garment that dresses virtue to advantage, a garment which is also to be recommended in a serious respect. (KANT, Anth, AA 07: 282; APPV, 182).

The example of the «[...] *anchorite's mortification of the flesh*» may not be a casual one: his attitude is in the end «[...] a distorted form [...] of virtue which does not make virtue inviting; rather, being forsaken by the graces», he can make «no claim to humanity». (KANT, Anth, AA 07: 282; APPV, 182).

Despite all this, Kant scholars unfortunately did not notice the consistency of Schiller's ethical proposal and its similarity (which is no coincidence) with that of the late Kant.

#### 4 A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The reasons why scholars do not usually concern themselves with others' research fields are fully comprehensible since the present academic system presupposes a high degree of specialization and hence quite frequently leads to neglect extra-disciplinary studies, however closely related to one's own interests they might be. In the case presented in this paper, both Kantian scholars and Schiller experts were mistaken in thinking that they could not discover anything new in the "others' author": had the latter read Kant's works on ethics, they would have presumably noted that Kant ended up by accepting

feelings and emotions in moral life; had the former dealt with Schiller without prejudice, they would have probably recognised that Schiller is not (or at least did not intend to be) the starting point in a long tradition of misinterpretations. In this way, two myths could have been dispelled much earlier, that of Kant as a one-sided, rigorist and ascetic moral philosopher, and that of Schiller as mere amateur in philosophy, whose naiveties and inconsistencies should be eliminated. For example, we are told, regarding Kant, that Schiller's treatment of his concepts is more like «[...] an attempt to persuade the stylised figures or an antique vase to step down and begin living», and, regarding Schiller, that «[from] the point of view of the professional philosopher» his «[...] complex distortions and misunderstandings of his mentor are deplorable», although certainly «*creative*». (SCHAPER, 1979, p. 99, p. 117).

Unfortunately, neither Kant experts nor Schiller scholars have seriously committed themselves to reading the author of the "others", whereas they both continued to look only at "their own", taking his words for granted without any further reflection. Thus, philosophers have chosen just some expressions from the second edition of *Religion between the Boundaries of Mere Reason* and *Vigilantius-Lectures on the Metaphysics of Morals* in order to establish that Schiller's aim was to undermine the purity of the will, and vice versa, Schiller scholars have extrapolated some phrases from *On Grace and Dignity* and taken them as proof that Schiller either did not understand Kant (because as a poet he could not!) or did not endorse his theory. In the latter case, he is said to have continued pretending to be a follower of Kant exclusively because of the theoretical atmosphere of that period, which was dominated by Kant.

From this point of view, Schiller's allegedly apparent endorsement of Kant's philosophy should be seen as an intentionally strategic «self-presentation [*Selbstinszenierung*]» due to his wish to find an audience, in spite of profoundly diverse convictions on the relationship between emotions and reason. (MEIER, 2011, p. 50f.).

Fortunately (and this has been long due), the tide seems to be on the turn: after Paul Guyer's well-balanced interpretation of Schiller's essay *On Grace and Dignity* in 1993 (which, however, did not lead to any further enquiry),<sup>27</sup> and Frederick Beiser's programmatic book and article in 2005 and 2007 respectively (which instead did), the consistency of Schiller's proposal within a Kantian framework seems to have been taken into serious account. In 2006, although without any reference to Beiser (probably for chronological reasons), Otfried Höffe stated that Schiller's theory of grace rests on «[...] an incorporation of the respect for the moral law which is not alien to Kantian philosophy». (HÖFFE, 2006, p. 17). In 2008, Anne Margaret Baxley suggested moreover that, whether Beiser be right or wrong in his «[...] reconstruction of Schiller's account of inclination in the virtuous person», i.e., in his (in my view persuasive) project to free Schiller of any accusation of dilettantism and rough criticism of Kant, his interpretation merits in any case «[...] careful consideration, especially by Kantians interested in according cultivated feelings and inclinations a prominent role in a rationalist moral psychology in which duty alone is the sufficient motive for moral action». (BAXLEY, 2008, p. 8).<sup>28</sup> In 2012 Katerina Deligiorgi saw in Schiller «[...] one of the earliest and most perspicacious readers of Kant» and said that Schiller's criticisms, despite his own «modesty», were «wide-

ranging». Most of all, Schiller's dealing with feelings «[...] provides a useful foil for Kant's own treatment of emotions, in *Metaphysics of Morals*, the *Anthropology*, the *Religion*». (DELIGIORGI, 2012, p. 142–144).

So, whether one is convinced about the compatibility of Kant's and Schiller's account of moral action and virtue or not, there is something which has to be acknowledged: the missed opportunity described here should not be repeated.

**ABSTRACT:** This essay deals with Kant's and Schiller's ethical views in order to show that there was far more agreement between them than is usually admitted. Kant and Schiller did not propose the same ethical system, yet their convictions were not completely antithetical, especially regarding the issue of purism and emotions. Striking, Schiller can be rather considered as the first supporter of the so-called 'method of isolation' which was elaborated by Herbert J. Paton in the 1940s and which renewed the interest in Kantian ethics in the second half of the twentieth century. I suggest that the reason of the misunderstanding of Schiller's pivotal role is the high degree of specialization of the academic system which, on the one hand, led (and still leads some of) the Schiller experts to see in Kant the philosophical personification of an abstract and one-sided rejection of feelings and, on the other hand, gave to Kant scholars the occasion to maintain the prejudice according to which Schiller is the starting point in a long tradition of misinterpretations. The final scope of this paper is, therefore, to prove that a true interdisciplinary approach is the only solution.

**KEYWORDS:** Kant. Schiller. Moral Philosophy. Emotions. Feelings. Purism. Virtue. Interdisciplinary Approach.

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## NOTES

1 This paper was written during a two-month Visiting Fellowship at the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies of the School of Advanced Study/University of London.

2 Dr. Laura Anna Macor studied Philosophy at the Scuola Normale Superiore (Pisa), the Pisa University and the Padua University. She has been Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies of the School of Advanced Study/University of London and Alexander von Humboldt-Fellow at the Katholische Universität Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. Currently, she is a Senior Postdoctoral Fellow at the Philosophy Department of the Padua University.

3 Cf. Loudon (2000, p. viii).

4 Cf. Riedel (1995, p. 5).

5 Cf. Barnouw (1972).

6 Cf. Paton (1948, p. 47); Allison (1990, p. 110); Sullivan (1989, p. 336); Herman (1993, p. 2); Baron (1995, p. 147, p. 206); Wood (1999, p. 11, p. 28f.; Loudon (2000, p. 77, p. 203); Baron (2006, p. 23).

7 Cf. Beiser (2005, p. 177).

8 Cf. Bishop (2007); Feger (2008).

9 Cf. Baxley (2008).

10 Cf. Beiser (2008).

11 Cf. Baxley (2010, p. 85–97); Koukou (2011); Meier (2011).

12 See on this topic especially: Schwaiger (1999); Schwaiger (2011).

13 This is a theme thoroughly analysed, but for a brief presentation I refer to Bacin (2006, p. 4f., p. 16–19).

14 Cf. Gosling (1990); Schwaiger (2007); Giordanetti/Pozzo/Sgarbi (2012).

15 Cf. Riedel (1994); Giordanetti (2008); Macor (2011a, p. 31–48).

16 Some scholars think that Kant is referring to Sulzer's letter of the 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1770 (KANT, Br, AA 10: 111f.). On this point see Klemme (2012, p. 98–104).

17 In relation to this key-notion in Kant's philosophy see Yamatsuta (2012); Schadow (2012).

18 Cf. further Allison (1990); Sullivan (1989); Loudon (2000).

19 Cf. Bacin (2006); Loudon (2006); Betzler (2008).

20 Cf. NA, XXVI, 112.

21 Schiller distanced himself from religious ethics not only in the above-mentioned poem *Resignation* but also in the unfinished novel *Philosophical Letters* (published in 1786), where he became aware of the fact that the hope for a divine reward resp. the fear of a divine punishment leads to the very contrary of morality. In the *Philosophical Dialogue* of the *Ghost-Seer* (1789) he therefore tried to give a fully worldly and non-egotistical account of morality. On all these aspects see Riedel (1985, p. 239–248); Riedel (1996); Macor (2010, p. 59–68).



22 Cf. Riedel (1993/2006); Hinderer (2003); Macor (2010, p. 101–127).

23 Schiller saw the inadequacy of love as a moral principle already in his early writings, i.e., before he started reading Kant: in *The Robbers* (1781) he revealed the egotistical core of the ethics of love by letting both Karl and Franz Moor react in a vindictive way to the supposed lack of love by their father; in his 14<sup>th</sup> April 1783 letter to Reinwald he defined love as «a happy illusion» (NA, XXIII, 79); in the *Philosophical Letters* love became just another name for interested virtue. In all these cases, altruistic love was irreversibly undermined. To all this I may refer to my own studies: Macor (2010, p. 57–71); Macor (2011b).

24 For a more detailed treatment of Schiller's insistence on the value of emotions cf. Deligiorgi 2006; Acosta López 2008; Macor 2013.

25 The merit of having definitively explained Schiller's intentions in the essay *On Grace and Dignity* and having defined Schiller's criticisms as an attempt «to complete» «Kant's moral theory» rather than «to correct» it, is owed to Beiser (2005, p. 81; see also p. 80–85, p. 176–179). However, it must be noted that Beiser sometimes seems to confuse the role of feelings in promoting virtue with the one they would play in promoting the realization of a moral action: on the one hand he asserts that Schiller uses the term “inclination” (*Neigung*) only referring «to some *disposition*, which consists in the manner or style of action» and which therefore 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» (177); on the other hand he says that love can be for Schiller «the most powerful *stimulus* or *incentive* for following the moral law» since it gives us «more energy and motivation to act on moral principle» (84). As I have tried to demonstrate, these two assertions contradict each other from a Kantian perspective, and not by chance does Kant himself take issue with this kind of moral theory, since the presence of «contributing motives [*mitwirkende Motive*]» is to him «the death of all morality» (KANT, TP, AA 08: 285; TP, 68). Nevertheless, it is today a very vexatious question whether moral “over-determined actions” are allowed within a Kantian framework, since they could eventually pertain not to the realm of the so-called “perfect duty” but to that of “imperfect duties”, cf. Baron 2006.

26 On this extremely discussed topic in Kant see Loudon (2006). For Kant's theses of 1797 as a silent response to Schiller, cf. Piché (2000, p. 118–120); Beiser (2005, p. 182).

27 Cf. Guyer (1993, p. 351, p. 354): «[...] it is by no means clear whether Schiller's conception of grace is even intended as a critique of Kant's rejection of moral sentiment from our requirement of moral worth», «[the] principle, and ultimately even the language, of Schiller's argument is in fact the same of that of Kant's».

28 Baxley does not seem to fully endorse Beiser's view since she maintains that Schiller «[...] is wedded to the view that inclination plays a role in motivating the virtuous person», thereby finally rejecting «Kant's purity thesis, according to which duty alone is the proper motive for moral action». For «[...] one would be hard pressed to deny that there are passages

in *On Grace and Dignity* supporting the idea that Schiller treats inclination as a moral motive in the person with full virtue», although «no passage strictly requires it», Baxley (2008, p. 7).

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