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Grace as Guide to Morals? Schiller's Aesthetic Turn in Ethics

Our philosophical moral vocabulary expresses a predilection for depth: in trying to get the right gauge of a situation, we are asked to consider intentions, feelings, motives, reasons for action. This kind of philosophical probing matches familiar habits of moral reflection. In judging whether an action is good or right we seek to get behind appearances to make sure we are not deceived, that we have got the basic elements right. Teasing out what remains hidden from inspection can be very unsatisfactory. Kant warned that our motives can be mysterious to ourselves. The eighteenth-century cult of sincerity can also be seen as expressive of the desire to unravel the mysteriousness of others. More optimistically, we find the same concern in contemporary arguments that align rationality with the ability to detect the true dispositions of others.¹ It is therefore surprising to encounter a perspective that urges us to focus on what we ordinarily train ourselves to mistrust, or at least set aside in our moral considerations, namely appearances. This, however, is what Schiller argues in his essay *On Grace and Dignity*.² Taking as central the concept of grace (*Anmut*), he develops an account that focuses on the moral value of things such as movement, facial expression, and sound of voice. The aim of this essay is to show how this initially perplexing proposition can be understood as a useful corrective to our ingrained habits of thought.

The key to understanding Schiller's readiness to grant moral significance to appearances is the concept of grace. Grace is a 'personal quality' that is related to beauty because we see it immediately, without probing into hidden depths, and because we are affected by it

directly just as we are affected by beauty. Schiller distinguishes between beauty and grace arguing that the former is 'fixed' on a person's looks, whereas grace only appears in those 'voluntary movements ... which are an expression of moral feelings' (*GD* 171, 254). It is this presumed link to the subject's moral feelings that renders grace morally significant. When we are in the presence of grace, Schiller suggests, there is nothing further for us to investigate for what we see is the outcome of a coincidence of the inner and outer person:

The frame of mind that is best suited to the fulfilment of man's moral destiny must find the most favourable expression in man's outer appearance. In other words, his ethical accomplishment must be revealed in grace (*GD* 193, 277).

Although such remarks place us in better position to understand why external appearances matter for Schiller, our initial puzzlement may well turn to plain disbelief, for without further argument his conviction that the disposition of the soul finds - or must find - an advantageous external expression can seem nothing more than a comforting hope. One of the tasks of this essay is to examine the connections Schiller establishes between inner and outer person and the deeper issues that are raised by his vindication of appearance, the theoretical as well as practical implications of the moral vision encapsulated in the concept of grace. But there is a further obstacle to our understanding of grace, namely its absence from contemporary moral vocabulary. Although there have been recent attempts, notably by Colin McGinn, to discuss the moral resonance of certain aesthetic terms and the proximity of certain aesthetic and moral judgements, the notion of grace itself appears more at home in the eighteenth century than in ours.³ Therefore, a

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further task of this essay is to examine whether it is possible to relate Schiller's eighteenth-century concerns to our own.

1. Moral psychology: the importance of inclination.

Schiller's central argument in *On Grace and Dignity* is widely recognised as one of the 'classical objections'⁴ to Kant's conception of moral agency. The difficulty lies in articulating the precise nature of this objection. On one, typical reconstruction, we are told that the task Schiller sets himself is 'to correct the unduly harsh picture that Kant paints of the moral life by emphasising the proper role in this life of the sensuous, emotive side of human nature'.⁵ While it is true to say that Schiller seeks to defend a model of agency that takes into account elements that are excluded from Kant's picture, it is not clear exactly what these elements are or what role they are meant to play. Clarifying this issue will help us to gain a better understanding of the concept of grace.

Schiller's fondness for disjunctive formulations creates an initial impression of clarity that dissipates on closer analysis. Here is an example: 'Either man suppresses the demands of his sensuous nature, in order to behave conformably with the superior demands of his rational nature; or else, he does the opposite and subjects the rational part of his being to the sensuous part, that is to the sheer forces of natural necessity that rule all appearances alike' (*GD* 195, 280). This description of the pulling and pushing of the soul in different directions creates a potent image of moral excess, as Schiller goes on to associate the subjugation of sensuous nature with moral severity and the surrender to natural demands with moral laxity. Note, however, Schiller's uncertainty about the basic terms of his diagnosis. He speaks both of 'rational nature', that is, of reason as a natural force competing with other natural forces, and of a 'rational part' of one's being, which

suggests the presence of a supernatural force issuing unconditional commands. Similarly, he presents nature both as the 'sensuous part' of humanity, the domain of emotions, desires, and affects - what we may call 'inner nature' - and, more austere, as the realm of appearances ordered conformably with causal necessity ('the sheer forces of natural necessity that rule all appearances alike'). It could be argued that he uses these oppositions simply for rhetorical effect, to make a general and easily graspable point about the oppressive character of reason.⁶ Submitting Schiller's argument to close examination should enable us to move beyond the simplistic and rather uninformative opposition between reason and nature, and to reveal some of the deeper concerns that motivate his criticism of Kant.

Schiller praises 'the immortal author of the Critique' for restoring 'healthy reason' to moral philosophy (*GD* 198, 282). This turns out to be an ambiguous compliment, for Schiller quickly identifies Kant's restoration of reason as problematic. In particular, he criticises Kant's treatment of inclination and pleasure: 'in the manner in which the principles of the philosopher are ordinarily presented by himself and also by others, inclination is a very dubious companion to moral sense, and pleasure a suspect accessory to moral determinations' (*GD* 198, 282). What, then, does Schiller find so objectionable in Kant's treatment of inclination and of pleasure? Some of Schiller's remarks suggest that the problem is the ineffectiveness of moral commands that are unsupported by inclination.⁷ 'Pleasure and pain', he claims, 'are the only springs which set the instincts in motion', therefore, obedience to reason too must become 'an object of inclination' (*GD* 282, 198). The idea of rational inclination accords with the locution 'rational nature' we

encountered earlier. Were Schiller to pursue this argument consistently, it would signal a quite radical departure from Kant's moral psychology. Schiller pursues this path in the *Aesthetic Letters*, where he remarks that Kant's moral theory can be put into practice only once it touches the domain of the 'heart' and 'feeling' (*AE* 5, 310).⁸ The contrast with Kant's view of agency is worth emphasizing. On Kant's account, human beings are fully capable of acting on laws that are independent of nature and 'have their ground in reason alone'.⁹ Were Schiller to abandon this position, he would also have to abandon the idea that reason is of itself practical. There is no indication in *On Grace and Dignity* that he is prepared to do this. Furthermore, despite remarks such as those we have quoted, he shows little interest in presenting an alternative, empiricist model of agency. His chief concern is with what he perceives to be the severity, rather than the ineffectiveness, of Kantian ethics and portrays reason as a powerfully constraining force, comparable to a monarchy 'where strict surveillance of the prince holds in check all free movement' (*GD* 197, 282).

One way of interpreting Schiller's concerns about reason's strict rule is in terms of the incompatibility between morality and happiness. This interpretation is suggested by his vivid descriptions of moral struggle:

[The moral agent] pushes away all that is sensuous in him and only through this separation from matter does he attain a feeling of his rational freedom. But because sensuous nature puts up an obstinate and vigorous resistance, he must exercise considerable force and great effort, in order to contain his desires and to reduce to silence the energetic voice of instinct (*GD* 196, 280).

It is not right, Schiller concludes, that man should 'sacrifice his sensuous part, not even for the sake of the purest manifestations of the divine in him', the triumph of the one should not 'be founded on the ruins of the other' (*GD* 199, 284). Confronted with passages such as these, it is tempting to cast the problem in dualistic terms and to formulate Schiller's argument in terms of the unremitting opposition between harsh moral commands and powerful but unfulfilled desires. This is not the best way of reconstructing Schiller's criticism of Kant's ethics. For one thing, the disinclined agent can find himself in the state of frustration, discontent, even wretchedness that Schiller depicts, when confronted with *any* kind of rule, indeed anything that presents itself with the force of necessity. Further, it can be argued –along with Kant - that unhappiness is not a necessary companion to virtue. When he responded to Schiller's essay, in the second edition of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Kant vigorously denied that duty should be performed with a heavy heart and insisted that the 'temperament' of virtue is 'joyous' not 'fear-ridden and dejected'.¹⁰ Repeatedly, Kant makes the general point that happiness and morality are not incompatible and further reminds his readers of the pleasures that arise from doing the right thing and from awareness of the rational determination of the will.¹¹ At the same time, he also makes clear that only the idea of duty carries strict necessity and it alone captures the binding and categorical nature of the commands of morality. A joyous temperament is desirable, but cannot be viewed as obligating in the same way. If Schiller's point in depicting the struggles of the moral agent is that Kant's ethics unleashes reason and desire as powerfully divisive forces, then it is easy to minimize its potency simply by acknowledging that such struggles are neither an exclusive nor a necessary feature of a morality of duty.

There is a different way of considering the role of inclinations, however, that does not depend on a strict opposition between morality and happiness. It is important to note that Schiller introduces his critical argument by expressing admiration for Kant's conception of the task of moral philosophy, his vindication, namely, of an *autonomous* moral ground in reason. He further concedes that in order 'to be altogether sure that inclination has not interfered with the demonstration of the will, it is preferable to see it as at war rather than in accord with the law of reason ...In this respect, I believe I am in perfect agreement with the rigorists in morals' (*GD* 198-9, 282-3). These remarks indicate that Schiller does not favour a eudaimonistic outlook and that he is, furthermore, prepared to grant what we may call epistemic value to the experience of acting in opposition to inclination.¹² The problem, he observes, is that when reading Kant, it is easy to confuse this epistemic advantage for a moral one and to identify duty with the suppression of inclination. Kant proposes the idea of duty with a harshness 'that could easily tempt a feeble mind to seek for moral perfection in the sombre paths of an ascetic and monastic life' (*GD* 200, 284). If, as Schiller admits, this is a misreading of Kant, how much weight should we place on this criticism? One of the points Schiller raises is about the temptations of asceticism; this, he states clearly, is a misinterpretation to which feeble minds are prone. He also, however, raises a rather different point about the presentation of the concept of duty, which cannot be readily dismissed, for it implies a weakness in Kant's formulation. This suggests a different way of looking at the opposition between the moral law and our sensuous nature. This division, we now learn, occurs because the moral law is identified with duty, and it is the result of this identification that leaves inclinations out of the moral

picture. If we look beneath the oppositional rhetoric Schiller employs to convey his argument, we can see that his principal concern is Kant's identification of moral law and duty.

The reason Schiller considers this to be a weakness is because it results in a view of moral agency that cannot integrate inclinations. What we need to establish is why the integration of inclinations into the moral account matters; in short, what is their moral value?

Marcia Baron's essay, 'Kantian Ethics', seeks to correct certain persistent misrepresentations of the concept of duty. One of these is the idea that a duty-based ethics fosters 'rigidity and moral complacency'.¹³ To illustrate such complacency, Baron cites an extract from Flannery O'Connor's, 'The Geranium', in which a dutiful daughter takes her father to live with her and her family. Her conception of what is required of her in attending to her father's needs extends to include the social duties of conversation: 'Sometimes when the daughter and Old Dudley were alone in the apartment, she would sit down and talk to him. First she had to think of something to say. Usually it gave out before what she considered was the proper time to get up and do something else, so he would have to say something. He always tried to think of something he hadn't said before. She never listened the second time'.¹⁴ The spare prose and short sentences convey very well the misery of these stunted conversational efforts. Yet it is difficult to fault the daughter's behaviour from a strictly moral perspective. She does her duty: she is 'seeing that her father spent his last years with his family and not in a decayed boarding

house'. Baron observes that the person who is 'dominated by thoughts of duty will be insensitive'.¹⁵ This may be true, but then sensitivity is not and cannot be itself a duty. If we value the capacity to attend to the particulars of a situation, to respond to the moods and interests and concerns of another human being, then we need to think differently about moral psychology and not exclusively in terms of obligation. This is central to Schiller's insistence that inclination should be part of the moral picture. Schiller is not saying that duty is destructive of affective bonds, but rather that a shape of life in which all that is left is duty is dreary. This thumbnail sketch of the dutiful daughter does not show her to be angry, bitter, or resentful; she does not have to do battle with contrary inclinations. She is neither sorrowful nor joyful. She merely acts in accordance to, and, for all we know, out of, duty. But this 'merely' stands for an impoverished moral life.

A second example comes from Rae Langton's discussion of the relation between Kant and Maria Herbert. Langton uses Herbert's letters to develop an internal criticism of certain features of Kantian ethics. It is the inner landscape that Herbert's letters reveal that concerns us here. Her first letter asks for Kant's advice on whether full honesty is advisable in all contexts, including romantic friendship. The second letter describes how the friendship initially suffered as a result of her frank confession, but also her subsequent loss of interest in the man's renewed offers of affection: 'My vision is clear now. I feel a vast emptiness extends inside me and all around me –so that I almost find myself to be superfluous, unnecessary. Nothing attracts me. I'm tormented by a boredom that makes life intolerable. Don't think me arrogant for saying this but the demands of morality are too easy for me'.¹⁶ Herbert's letter grants us a rare insight into a moral life in

the process of being drained of life. As Langton comments, this is a desolate moral landscape; the letter is ‘chilling in its clarity, chilling in its nihilism’.¹⁷ Herbert states explicitly that she has no desires or inclinations – ‘nothing attracts me’. This absence of inclination, which renders morality ‘too easy’, describes a process of disengagement from the world, a withering away of the attachments of self and society. The void of inclination does not necessarily fill with a more vivid impression of moral personality, but can lead to a depletion of the self and unbearable boredom.

A final example is less extreme, but does serve as a complement to the previous two. It comes from Peter Railton’s discussion of a state that he calls ‘alienation’.¹⁸ Railton gives the example of John, a model husband who, upon being congratulated for the exquisite care he takes of his wife, replies: ‘I’ve always thought that people should help each other when they’re in a specially good position to do so. I know Anne better than everyone else does, so I know better what she wants and needs. Besides, I have such affection for her that it’s no great burden’.¹⁹ Railton also tells the story of Helen, who having been a loyal friend to Lisa, accepts the latter’s thanks with words to the effect that friendship is a reciprocal relation and that ‘this is what friends are for’.²⁰ Neither Helen nor John is portrayed as a specifically Kantian agent. They are designed rather made to represent a broad category of agents who possess a capacity successfully to disengage themselves from the particulars of the situation in which they find themselves. John and Helen are of course constructs, but as such, they convey highly effectively the spookiness of the perfectly deliberative self. Railton traces our uneasiness with John and Helen to the ‘estrangement between their affections and their rational, deliberative selves; an abstract

and universalising point of view that mediates their responses to others and to their own sentiments'.²¹ For these two individuals, inclinations pose no problem because they are kept at a tidy distance, thoroughly mediated and perfectly groomed by the deliberative self.

Schiller's warning against a morality that excludes inclination is a warning against opting for a kind of life that is 'like a drawing whose hard strokes exemplify what the rule demands' (*GD* 203, 287). In each of our examples the problem can be put in terms of the role of inclinations. The mute or absent inclinations of the first two examples illustrate the problem of diminishing moral life to a mere outline. This is also the case for the final example in which inclinations are trained to do the agent's bidding, but at the cost of his or her detachment from personal concerns and commitments - what Railton calls alienation, and Schiller loss of spontaneity. Schiller is often thought to be advocating precisely an ideal of harmony achieved through the training of inclination.²² Although he does argue for a state in which 'reason and the senses, duty and inclination are in harmony' (*GD* 197, 282), harmony cannot be the result of training because an important feature of Schiller's positive proposals concerns the capacity to act spontaneously. The ruin of inclination can also come about through over-grooming.

2. The soul and its society: the importance of harmony

Schiller's central argument, then, is that the richer conception of moral life that can be glimpsed in Kant's own writings cannot be sustained through reference to duty alone, that is, by focusing on what alone is obligating for us. Schiller's solution is to emphasise the contribution of inclinations and to suggest that only if we attribute moral value to them can we sustain this richer conception. The way to achieve this, he claims, is by establishing harmony between inclination and duty. Grace holds the key to understanding Schiller's proposal.

When Schiller first introduces the concept of grace, he says very little about the issues of moral psychology that have concerned us so far. His principal task is first to distinguish and then to establish relations between beauty, grace, and virtue. Grace, he argues, is powerfully attractive; indeed beauty only 'exercises its appeal' through grace (*GD* 169, 252). Whilst beauty is a natural gift, however, grace is 'an expression of moral feelings' (*GD* 171, 254) and thus a personal '*merit*' that 'honours those who possess it' (*GD* 181, 264). Schiller presses this point further by arguing that grace cannot be predicated of physical nature, it belongs exclusively to the human form provided we consider human beings as moral rather than as purely natural creatures. Grace, he specifies, 'can only be met with in voluntary movements' (*GD* 171, 254). Its appearance in someone's gestures, facial expression, tone of voice, or general demeanour, makes grace a 'kind of moveable beauty' and thus not 'the exclusive privilege of the beautiful' (*GD* 169, 252). At the same time, grace must be distinguished from virtue, which can be acquired through training.

'Common sense', Schiller argues, 'considers ease to be the principal feature of grace' (*GD* 195, 280). Not only is obvious effort contrary to grace, but the deliberate imitation of graceful behaviour, once the artifice is detected, ceases to charm us. Whilst grace is not pure nature, it charms us precisely because it appears as something involuntary, not contrived, and hence as a visible manifestation of the person's soul: 'as soon as we observe that grace is artificial, our heart suddenly closes... Spirit suddenly becomes matter, and the heavenly Juno is but a shape in the clouds' (*GD* 186, 270). Schiller's descriptive account of grace stands in sharp contrast to his probing of the soul and its struggles, which we examined previously. It is precisely by remaining resolutely on the surface of things, by focusing on the phenomenon of grace - its charm, effortlessness, ease, spontaneous movement - that Schiller conveys his conception of harmony. Some ideas expressed in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* will help clarify this claim.

Halfway through the book, the young Wilhelm writes a letter to his friend Werner to explain why he has decided to become an actor. This letter touches upon issues that are directly relevant to our topic. Wilhelm explains to his friend that his aim in life has always been to cultivate, or educate (*ausbilden*) himself. He adds that had he been a nobleman he would not need to strive for this, but because he is a bourgeois he must 'make his own way' in the world.²³ It is in this contrast between bourgeois and nobleman that the theme of appearance emerges. 'In Germany', Wilhelm continues, 'a certain generalised and, so to speak, personal culture is only possible for the nobleman. A bourgeois can achieve great merit and at most cultivate his spirit; his personality, however, will be lost, try as he may'. The nobleman's demeanour when he goes about

ordinary things has 'a certain imposing grace', while with serious and important matters he deals with 'a kind of charming light-heartedness'. This equanimity is linked to the concept of appearance: 'Whereas the nobleman gives everything through the presentation of his person, the bourgeois gives nothing through his personality and is not supposed to do so. The former may and should "appear to be"; the latter must only "be"'. Here we have a series of links: culture, personality, graceful demeanour, appearance. These interconnections, Wilhelm suggests, are the product of a harmonious development of one's nature: 'The bourgeois must develop specific skills to make himself useful, and it is taken for granted beforehand that his nature is not and should not possess harmony, because in order to make himself useful in one way, he must neglect everything else'.²⁴ The contrast is one between striving to shape one's identity, to find a place in the world, to achieve something and be judged for one's achievement, in short to *be* someone, and a more nebulous and loosely defined set of qualities that bespeak a lack of effort but also a knack for getting things right, an unproblematic but honourable and attractive 'appearance'. Finally, Wilhelm confesses: 'I have an irresistible propensity for precisely this harmonious development of my nature denied me by my birth'.²⁵

Wilhelm is critically concerned with giving shape to his personality. He argues that this is a bourgeois concern, because the notion that one shapes oneself and thus becomes who one is does not arise typically for someone who is born into a role and a nexus of relations that determine his or her identity. We can detect in Wilhelm's search for self-definition what Robert Pippin defines as the characteristically modern ambition to establish 'what is truly mine', 'a compelling norm, wholly unto oneself, in a wholly self-

legislated, self-authorized way'.²⁶ What is interesting about Wilhelm's interpretation of this goal, however, is that he wants to pursue it in a way that appears to go against it: by appealing, that is, to pre-modern ideals of belonging, to roles and structures that are not self-chosen, but inherited, given, and accepted as such. There is a structural paradox to the framing of this goal, to which he is alert when he admits that he seeks to achieve precisely what is denied him by birth, and, by implication, only obtainable by birth.

Closer examination of the content of Wilhelm's aspirations should enable us to circumvent this paradox. The noble ideal he describes is precisely that, an ideal. Its characteristics include a harmonious personality, ease in the performance of one's tasks, and consideration for the appearance of things. So there is more to it than the privileges of birth; though a noble birth may turn out to be a necessary condition for the flourishing of these characteristics, it is not presented here as a necessary ingredient of the ideal. To gain a better sense of Wilhelm's aspiration, it is useful to think about what these characteristics are intended to oppose. In announcing his attraction for the noble ideal, Wilhelm repudiates the bourgeois ideal, which is essentially one of effort and application: the bourgeois sets himself tasks and pursues them, finds what he is good at and applies himself to it, formulates goals and strives to achieve them; in the process he shapes himself and his world. In a different context, Ivan Nagel describes the historical emergence of the individual who 'by an act of clenched will, subdues an indifferent or unfavourable outer world' and whose ethic 'transfigures sour drudgery into the solipsistic ecstasies of duty and discipline'.²⁷ Looking at Wilhelm's hopes in this broader context, we see the beginning of a different sensibility emerging, one that takes on the bourgeois –

or, as Pippin would say, modern - challenge of self-determination, while seeking to get away from its requirements of struggle and confrontation.

If we return now to Schiller's text, with Wilhelm's letter in mind, we can begin to see certain affinities in the shapes of life both describe. First, there are certain clear parallels between noble and graceful behaviour, such as the capacity to appear in certain ways and to do so without effort. Secondly, both are presented as worthy objects of aspiration. The content of this aspiration is the achievement of harmony, by which we are given to understand a kind of fit among different expressions of oneself, of one's desires, talents, aspirations, but also a fit between self and environing world. Harmony is what is visible in the ease and charm of appearance. But if it is an object of aspiration, we are entitled to ask, how it is to be realised. For Wilhelm, the problem is that he seeks to achieve a shape of life that by his own admission is granted rather than achieved. This is not the question of birth, which we addressed earlier, but rather a question of whether a task-like, and hence bourgeois, approach is suitable to the pursuit of Wilhelm's noble ideal. A similar problem arises for the reader who is attracted by Schiller's idea of grace. Insofar as grace is the visible imprint of our moral personality it is, as Schiller says, a merit. Yet, the exercise of the will that we ordinarily presuppose when we judge something to be meritorious spoils grace. Grace must appear natural or it is no longer grace. Goethe's solution in the novel is given through Wilhelm's theatrical vocation: the self Wilhelm seeks he can find only in the theatre, by literally assuming a role and acting out a given personality. Schiller's solution is given through his aesthetic turn in ethics.

Schiller's aim is to formulate a coherent moral account that allows for a positive conception of the role of inclinations. The question is how we are to understand this role. We know that the view he seeks to correct is that morality is a matter of mastering contrary inclinations. It is plausible to think that he is sympathetic to the view – expressed by Kant in his post-*Groundwork* writings – that appropriately cultivated inclinations can support righteous actions. But the cultivated inclinations view is not entirely satisfactory either. As we saw in our earlier examples of the deliberative self, the point of cultivation is that it safeguards the appropriateness of inclination, its adequacy to the ideal pursued (the kind of person we seek to be, the character we seek to shape), and thus safeguards that ideal from disruptive forces. Schiller invites us to consider inclinations not as potentially disruptive, because irrational and mute in their uncultivated state, but as potentially valuable companions in our moral life. His insistence on the value of spontaneity – the ease, effortlessness, and charming naturalness of grace – suggests what a positive conception of inclination might look and feel like. This is not to say that Schiller prioritizes spontaneity over reason. He consistently draws attention to the failures of the 'ochlocracy' of inclinations.²⁸ Nor does he think that inclinations unfailingly attend our every thought. He concedes that there are cases of uncertainty and indecision, in which we should advert to pure reason and orientate ourselves according to its commands. But he adds that we admire more those who 'trust themselves to be guided by the voice of instinct with a certain confidence that they are not in danger of being led astray' (*GD* 202, 287). Trust in this context is another word for harmony: grace is the outward imprint of confident *trust* in the deliverances of one's inclination and thus bespeaks a state in which 'man is in accord with himself' (*GD* 195, 280). Schiller's

descriptive account of grace turns out to be highly informative about his conception of harmony or man's 'accord with himself', since the relation between duty and inclination this accord describes is just that confident trust that is made visible in grace.

The Kantian model of morality that Schiller seeks to correct is powerfully and explicitly prescriptive. It would be disappointing if Schiller only gave us the lineaments of an alternative shape of life without any account of how it is to be lived. Though very eloquent about the consequences of an absence of harmony, he is remarkably reticent about the path to its achievement. On reflection, it is not difficult to see why: if the aim is not to groom inclination so as to appear in a certain way, that is, under the perfect direction and jurisdiction of the deliberative self, then an element of passivity, of not trying, must be admitted as part of the notion of inner harmony. Grace is a moral possibility for us only if we let go the burden (and perhaps illusion) of the heroic – or, on Wilhelm's account, prosaic – perspective of moral world-shaping. But there is another obstacle to the pursuit of grace. Grace describes not merely the inner state of the subject, but also an inter-subjective relation: it is recognised by others who are delighted by it and attracted to it. Less obviously, but in a similar fashion, the agent who seeks to align his actions in accordance with the moral law also places himself in relation to others in a certain way. The difference is that in the latter case the emphasis is on the deliberative process, on the reflective and psychological capacities of the individual, who then delivers his decision to the world through his action. The distance or separation from the world that is needed for this deliberative process has its mirror-image in the inter-subjective fit described by grace. Although this is an understated concern in *On Grace*

and Dignity, the link between soul and society is unmistakable: inner harmony has as its correlate a harmonious, unforced relation to the enviroing world. There is, in other words, a social dimension to Schiller's insistent and dramatic descriptions of the divided self. Harmony describes also a non-agonistic relation to the social world. We are now in position to recognise the full magnitude of the task: to attain harmony, we need not only a certain trust in inclinations, the element of passivity that cannot be forced, but a certain trust in the world in which we find ourselves. This is perhaps the greatest difficulty confronting Schiller's ideal, for this is a world without guarantees that our trust is well-placed, that our inter-subjective relations are in good order, or that our intentions will successfully be recognised in our actions.

3. Metaphysics of inner and outer: the importance of appearance

Schiller's concept of grace has been shown to depend on a 'thick' conception of agency with distinctive subjective and inter-subjective aspects. The obscurity of the psychological mechanisms that produce the form of harmony that is visible in grace can, retrospectively, be seen as integral to Schiller's aesthetic turn: the reconciliation of inclination and duty is precisely what we witness, and what charms us, when we are in the presence of grace.²⁹ The problem is that Schiller gives us no guidance about what we should do, that is, how we should order our soul or place ourselves within our world in order to achieve this state.

Taking grace as the aim of our strivings is performatively anomalous, because grace is antithetical to effortful exertion. Moreover, even when striving is expertly camouflaged and takes the form of careful imitation, as soon as we discover this, we cease to be charmed by the performance. This amounts to saying that grace itself disappears: what we see is the performance of grace, not grace itself. These features, which render impossible a command of the type: 'be graceful!', also render impossible the command: 'be harmonious!'. Everything Schiller says about the perfect inner accord with oneself, the reconciliation of inclination and duty, the fit between self and world, the very vocabulary of trust he uses in this context, bespeak precisely an antithesis of effort. The question is whether a different way can be found to articulate the normative pull of grace and hence of the conception of agency it expresses without issuing a duty-like command. We have already considered effortlessness and ease as positive glosses on the role of

inclination and hence of how the graceful agent has inclination on her side, so to speak. But inclinations also enter in the inter-subjective aspect of grace: central to Schiller's analysis of grace is that we are charmed by it, just as we are attracted to beauty. In the proximity of grace and beauty Schiller finds an aesthetic solution to the problem of prescription. To be charmed by grace is not to be graceful: it is, however, to experience a compelling force that has moral significance without having the form of a moral imperative. There is no need for a command because the attraction to grace, which is an attraction to harmony, is itself a compelling force. But what is it that we are attracted to? What is it that we find compelling? All we have to go by is a graceful gesture or expression, out of which Schiller pieces together a self, a shape of life, a model of agency. But apart from Schiller's assurance that this is a morally relevant self (and hence a shape of life and a model of agency), we also need an argument to support this link between moral quality and grace, and, more generally, between inner states and outward expressions of such states.

Only if the moral status of grace is secured can we view our attraction to it as an attraction to a moral quality. Schiller's vindication of the moral value of appearances rests on his account of the connection of inner self and outer appearance. What is then this connection? The argument Schiller presents at this juncture concerns what he calls 'sympathetic movements'. He uses this term to describe movements that attend a person's actions: 'when a person speaks, we also see his eyes, his face, his hands - often the whole person speaks to us - and it is not rare that this mimic part of the conversation is the most eloquent part' (*GD* 183, 266). Sympathetic movements are not purely

instinctive nor strictly speaking, involuntary: 'it is what happens when something involuntary mingles with the voluntary act' (*GD* 183, 266). This account has clear application to grace. Grace appears when 'the mind finds an outer expression of its will and feelings in sensuous nature, so that nature aligns itself perfectly with the will and gives the most eloquent expression of feeling' (*GD* 194, 279). Schiller's account of sympathetic movement is not widely discussed in the literature. One notable exception is Jeffrey Gauthier who sees Schiller's notion of sympathetic movement as part of a 'theory of action'. Distinguishing between instinctive, voluntary and sympathetic movement, Gauthier argues that the latter are 'habitual and thus involuntary, but nevertheless possess the capacity to express the will since they are "concomitant" with its aims'.³⁰ Sympathetic movements are thus seen as uniquely endowed with the capacity to 'express the inner intention of the agent, and so to act as the vehicle of character and will'.³¹

Despite Gauthier's hardening of Schiller's distinctions for the purpose of producing a 'theory of action', his interpretation is not implausible. It makes, however, for an unconvincing theory. If we take it as a piece of empirical psychology, it leaves unanswered precisely the question we ask of it, namely to know how exactly different moral dispositions map onto movement, facial expression and the like. To baptise a movement 'sympathetic' is no more than to attribute to it a co-operative character. If, on the other hand, this is an exercise in transcendental psychology, then we are no further with it than we are with the Kantian position concerning the ultimate inscrutability of the interaction between the noumenal and phenomenal worlds. There is an alternative interpretation of Schiller's argument that fits better with what he says and also serves

better his purposes. His account of sympathetic movement should be seen not in terms of psychology, but metaphysics. What Schiller is writing about is not a theory of motion but a theory of appearances. Looking first at a passage in Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, and then to an early essay by Iris Murdoch should help clarify this point.

It seems that the better we understand Schiller's argument, the further we move away from Kant. Schiller's aesthetic turn reveals itself to have profound implications as to how we shape our aspirations and how we experience their normative pull. The appeal of grace is clearly very different from the respect, indeed 'awe', which accompanies our awareness of the moral law. In fact, our present questioning of the moral status of grace is indicative of the effort it takes us to think about the proximity of aesthetics and ethics. It is therefore useful to remember that Kant attempts to do this in the *Metaphysics of Morals* where he discusses the possibility of an 'aesthetic of morals'. Such an aesthetic, he argues, would treat of the feelings that accompany the constraining power of the moral law, such as 'disgust, horror, etc., which make moral aversion sensible'.³² Kant further considers the association of grace with virtue and welcomes manifestations of 'agreeableness, tolerance, mutual love, and respect (affability and propriety, *humanitas aethetica et decorum*)'.³³ However, even while bringing to the attention of his audience the importance of aesthetic moral features, Kant speaks of them as a 'beautiful illusion resembling virtue', and sharply distinguishes between truth, that is, real virtue, and beautiful appearances that approximate it but are not identical to it.³⁴ The crucial element in Schiller's aesthetic turn is the value he places on appearances. Schiller is not simply asking that we recognise the aesthetic element of morality (our attraction to grace), or the

moral element of aesthetic pleasure (grace bespeaks a moral personality). Rather he claims that appearances possess cognitive primacy: a person's countenance, their behaviour, the shape they give to their actions and interactions with others, are not deceptive illusions but a field rich with moral *knowledge*.

Schiller's aesthetic turn is of a piece with the normative content of the ethics of grace: his criticism of the reductive conception of agency he finds in obligation-based ethics has its counter-part in the expansion of the domain of moral phenomena he seeks to bring to our attention. Finally then, his response to what he considers unsatisfactory in the Kantian picture takes the form of a vindication of appearances, rather than a search for the true inner self.³⁵ A similar vindication can be found in Iris Murdoch's early essay, 'Vision and Choice in Morality', in which she attempts to show the limitations of what she calls the 'modern' view of the moral life as a 'series of overt choices, which take place in a series of specifiable situations'.³⁶ To counteract this reductive tendency, Murdoch draws attention to what she calls the 'texture of a man's being'. This quality, she argues, 'is shown by their mode of speech or silence, their choice of words ...in short the configurations of their thought which show continually in their reactions and conversation'.³⁷ The concept of a 'texture of being' is particularly useful in the present context because it captures the range of phenomena that Schiller describes when he talks about sympathetic movements. It also captures the idea that each movement is not an isolated fragment but forms part of a whole, what Murdoch calls 'a total vision of life', or, as Schiller expresses it, 'the destiny of man is not to accomplish isolated moral acts but to be a moral being' (*GD* 199, 283).

Let us now piece together these references to see what we have learned about Schiller's position. Schiller writes of the eloquence of appearances, of looks, hands, faces. These external features speak to us only if we attend to them. We could ignore them, train ourselves to doubt them, and, having put them aside, search for the feelings, dispositions of the will, or the reasons hidden behind them. But he suggests that this effort will be misspent, since we will have deprived ourselves of the very knowledge we desire. It is worth citing once again the relevant passages: 'the manner in which [man] appears depends upon the manner in which he feels and wills' (*GD* 179, 262); and 'man can show that he is a moral agent only through his acts' (*GD* 189, 272). What Schiller is saying is simply that reasons, feelings and desires are the sort of things that cannot fail to appear. This is not to claim that appearances are infallible, but that our deceptions and disappointments are also made visible just as harmony is made visible. To think of sympathetic movement in terms of the 'texture of being' helps us to reconsider our suspicion that appearances are not morally significant and thus it helps us think about what the basic elements of the moral picture are.

¹ David Gauthier, *Morals By Agreement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.355.

² *On Grace and Dignity* appeared in 1793 in *Neue Thalia*. For Schiller's works, references to the English editions are as follows: *On Grace and Dignity* (abbreviated as *GD*), in *Essays Aesthetical and Philosophical* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1910); *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (abbreviated as *AE*) trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). Translations have been altered for consistency. After the coma, references are given to the collected edition of Schiller's works in German under the general editorship of Lieselotte Blumenthal and Benno von Wiese, *Schillers Werke Nationalausgabe* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1943-). *On Grace and Dignity* is in volume XXb, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* in volume XX.

³ Colin McGinn, *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), esp. pp. 93f. In her discussion of McGinn's account of moral beauty, Sara Bernal argues that 'we do not tend to think of the virtuous life as one of pleasure, but rather as one of hard effort and restraint'; Sara Bernal, 'Virtue and Beauty: Remarks on McGinn's Aesthetic Theory of Value', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 3:38 (1998), pp.307-324, here p.309. She suggests that McGinn's account be refined so that it conforms with 'our common conceptions of virtue'. Perhaps, however, it is the latter that are in need of revision.

⁴ Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.180

⁵ Allison, 181. Similar interpretations can be found in Dieter Henrich, 'Das Prinzip der kantischen ethik', *Philosophische Rundschau* 2 (1954-5), pp.29-34 and 'Beauty and Freedom: Schiller's Struggle with Kant's Aesthetics' in Ted Cohen and Paul Guyer (eds.), *Essays in Kant's Aesthetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); Andreas Wildt, *Autonomie und Anerkennung: Hegels Moralitätskritik im Lichte seiner Fichte-Rezeption* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982); Gerold Prauss, *Kant über Freiheit und Autonomie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983); and more recently, in Sabine Roehr, 'Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller', *Journal of the History of Ideas* (2003), pp.119-126.

⁶ That Schiller is primarily a dramatist and poet, needs of course to be taken into account as a number of commentators urge. See, Eva Schaper, 'Schiller's Kant: a Chapter in the History of Creative Misunderstanding', in *Studies in Kant's Aesthetics*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1979); Lesley Sharpe, *Friedrich Schiller: Drama, Thought and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Martha Woodmansee, 'Aesthetic Autonomy as a Weapon in Cultural Politics', in *The Author, Art, and the Market: Rereading the History of Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.57-86. Subjecting Schiller's argument to conceptual analysis, however, is both appropriate and fruitful. On this, see also, Jeffrey A. Gauthier, 'Schiller's Critique of Kant's Moral Psychology: Reconciling Practical reason and an Ethics of Virtue', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 27:4 (1997), pp.513-544.

⁷ The so-called motivational problem in Kant's moral philosophy is central to contemporary debates. Focusing on Kant's claim that we act out of respect for the moral law, critics argue that the notion of respect fails adequately to explain our motivation for being moral. Paul Guyer provides an attempted solution involving an unorthodox

interpretation of Kant's conception of freedom, in 'Kant's Morality of Law and Morality of Freedom', in *Kant and Critique: New Essays in Honour of W. H. Werkmeister*, R. M. Dancy (ed.), (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1993), pp. 43-90. Others address the difficulties that arise from narrowly deontological interpretations. The most sustained attempt has been offered by Barbara Herman in *The Practice of Moral Judgement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), see, esp. 'Leaving Deontology Behind', pp. 208-240. See also Robert B. Loudon, 'Kant's Virtue Ethics', in *Philosophy* 61 (1986), pp. 473-489, K. Simmons, 'Kant on Moral Worth', in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 6 (1989), pp.85-100, and Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) and in 'The Normativity of Instrumental Reason', in Garrett Cullity and Berys Gaut, eds., *Ethics and Practical Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

⁸ The remark about the necessity of involvement of 'heart' and 'feeling' in the *Aesthetic Letters* introduces what is effectively an empiricist model of psychology predicated on the idea the 'drives' (*Trieben*) that move human beings to action (see especially *AE* 17f, 315f, *AE* 49f, 330f). The likely influence of Schiller's early medical training in developing the model of the drives in the *Aesthetic Letters* is discussed in K. Dewhurst and N. Reeves (eds.), *Friedrich Schiller: Medicine, Psychology, Literature* (Oxford: Sandford Publications, 1978).

⁹ *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H.J. Paton (London:Unwin Hyman, 1989), p. 113, VI 452. References to Kant's works are given to the specified English translations followed by volume and page number of the *Akademie* edition.

¹⁰ Kant writes: 'Now if one asks, What is the *aesthetic character*, the temperament, so to speak, of *virtue*, whether courageous and hence *joyous* or fear-ridden and dejected, an

answer is hardly necessary. This latter slavish frame of mind can never occur without a hidden *hatred* of the law. And a heart which is happy in the *performance* of its duty (not merely complacent in the *recognition* of thereof) is a mark of genuineness of the virtuous disposition', *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans., T. M. Greene and H. H. Hudson (Harper and Row: New York, 1960), p.19, VI:23-24.

¹¹ 'The determination of the will directly by reason alone is the ground of a feeling of pleasure', Kant writes, 'but we must, nevertheless, be on guard against degrading and deforming the real and authentic incentive, the law itself, by awarding spurious praise to the moral ground of determination as incentive as though it were based on feelings of particular joys', *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans., L. White Beck (Macmillan: New York, 1962), p.121, V:117-8. Earlier in the *Critique*, Kant writes: 'this distinction of the principle of happiness from that of morality is not for this reason an opposition between them, and pure practical reason does not require that we should renounce the claims to happiness', *Critique of Practical Reason*, p.96, V:93. Kant further elaborates on the relation between happiness and virtue in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, and goes as far as to claim that 'to associate graces with virtue... is itself a duty of virtue', *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.265, V:473. For a detailed account of moral feeling and of its various expressions, agreeable or otherwise, see John Silber's Introduction to the English translation of *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone: 'The Ethical Significance of Kant's Religion'*, pp.lxxix-cxxxiv, and esp. pp.cvi-cxi. Kant acknowledges that moral feelings, such as the love of virtue, play an important role in the task of *becoming* moral; see, *Critique of Practical Reason* pp.158-161, V:154-157, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* pp. 42-4,

VI:47-9. An analysis of the systematic place of the notion of 'moral character' in Kant's work can be found in Monique Castillo, *Kant: l'invention critique* (Paris: Vrin, 1997), Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and G. Felicitas Munzel, *Kant's Conception of Moral Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

¹² Schiller's argument here is a precursor of contemporary interpretations of moral worth; see, Barbara Herman, 'On the Value of Acting from the Motive of Duty', in *The Practice of Moral Judgement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp.1-22.

¹³ Marcia Baron, 'Kantian ethics', in M. W. Baron, P. Pettit, M. Slote, *Three Methods of Ethics*, (Blackwell: Oxford, 1996), p.51. While Baron convincingly identifies a number of popular misconceptions, she wrongly numbers among them the idea that 'as long as one does one's duty, one has done all that can morally be expected of one' (Baron, p.51). The foundation of Kant's ethics is the idea of what we can reasonably expect of each other and this is precisely duty. The smiling disposition, interest based on inclination etc, can be fostered but not form part of our reasonable *expectations* of each other.

¹⁴ Cited in Baron, p. 51.

¹⁵ Baron, p. 52.

¹⁶ Rae Langton, 'Duty and Desolation', *Philosophy* 67:262 (1992), p. 493.

¹⁷ Langton, p. 494.

¹⁸ Peter Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality', originally in *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13:2 (1984), reprinted in Samuel Scheffler *Consequentialism and its Critics*, (OUP: Oxford, 1988), p. 94.

¹⁹ Railton, p. 94.

²⁰ Railton, p.95.

²¹ Railton, p.96. Railton's description of alienation in terms of a divided psyche and absence of spontaneity is very Schillerian, Railton, p.97.

²² See Allison, pp.180ff, Prauss, pp.240-308, and Wildt, pp.158-162.

²³ Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (München: Wilhelm Goldmann, 1959), p. 233. Goethe begun the work in 1777, under the title *Wilhelm Meisters theatralische Sendung*, but it was not until 1794, under Schiller's influence, that he took it up again, revised it and gave it its current form.

²⁴ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, p. 234.

²⁵ Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister*, p. 335.

²⁶ Robert B. Pippin, *Idealism as Modernism. Hegelian Variations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.7.

²⁷ Ivan Nagel, *Autonomy and Mercy. Reflections on Mozart's Operas* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 35. Nagel is discussing here the *Magic Flute*, which had its premiere on 30 September 1791. 'Happiness in Mozart's *buffa*', he writes, 'means ultimately only that someone's wishes and hopes are fulfilled –and never that self-exertion is rewarded ...The happiness of *buffa*, however, is Mediterranean, not because of dreamy atmospherics, but because in those regions, far away from Luther and Kant, the individual and society never saw themselves as opposites', p.35.

²⁸ Schiller compares the rule of natural drives to 'a wild ochlocracy' (*GD* 197, 282) and argues that 'where pure nature reigns humanity disappears' (*GD* 195, 280).

²⁹ It is only when considering harmony in connection to grace that appearances are treated as morally significant. Schiller's discussion of harmony as a goal in itself, in the

Aesthetic Letters, involves a technical, but not altogether successful, account of transcendental psychology; see my *Kant and the Culture of Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2005), pp. 133-157.

³⁰ Jeffrey Gauthier, p. 533.

³¹ Jeffrey Gauthier, p. 534.

³² *Metaphysics of Morals* p.207, V:406.

³³ *Metaphysics of Morals*, p.265, V:474.

³⁴ *Metaphysics of Morals* p.265, V:473

³⁵ Schiller's turn to appearances contrasts with the direction taken by many post-Kantian thinkers (Reinhold, Jacobi, and especially Fichte and Schelling) who sought a way out of Kant's epistemic restriction on knowledge of appearances. The topic is treated in detail in Robert Pippin's 'Avoiding German Idealism: Kant, Hegel and the Reflective Judgment Problem' in *Idealism As Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 129-153. The moral problems and ultimately dead-ends of this move are clearly laid out in Christoph Menke 'Innere Natur und soziale Normativität: die Idee der Selbstverwicklichung', in Hans Joas und Klaus Wiegandt eds., *Forum für Verantwortung: Die kulturellen Werte Europas* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag 2005), pp. 304-352.

³⁶ Iris Murdoch, Symposium: 'Vision and Choice in Morality', Aristotelian Society, *Dreams and Self-Knowledge*, Suppl.Vol. XXX (London: Harrison and Sons, 1956), pp. 32-58, here p.34.

³⁷ Murdoch, 'Vision and Choice in Morality', p.39