

The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of
Friedrich Schiller

Antonino Falduto • Tim Mehigan
Editors

The Palgrave
Handbook on the
Philosophy of Friedrich
Schiller

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PREFACE

I.

Long considered a marginal figure in the history of philosophy, Friedrich Schiller has returned to the forefront of philosophical debates. There are many reasons for such a return. For one thing, the progress of philosophy itself in recent decades has opened the door to a variety of new approaches and perspectives. With the waning of the division between “analytic” and “continental” approaches in philosophy of late has come a readiness to reconsider the value to philosophy of all such oppositions. In the deeper, ancestral split between philosophy and its “other” imaginative literature, glossed since time immemorial as the “ancient quarrel”, attempts to maintain the ground of philosophy solely with reference to the primacy of reason, or, which is nearly the same thing, the analytical path of logic in “the space of reasons” (Sellars), increasingly seem unconvincing. Issues of greater moment such as a looming climate disaster and biodiversity catastrophe have crowded into the space of reasons in an era of the post-modern, even if only as a backdrop, to upset once settled accommodations of thought. Philosophy, like all other branches of knowledge in the last few decades, has been obliged to reconsider its origins, its nature, and its purpose at a time of unprecedented global change.

But if philosophy itself has responded to great change at its margins, there has also been change in the internal discussion relating to one of the signature philosophers of the modern period, Immanuel Kant—a figure of supreme importance for Schiller. The need to appraise Kant’s legacy properly, a task once limited to the Kantian “revival” in the German-speaking world in the last few decades of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, was registered as a new concern in Anglo-American philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century. As this interest in Kant grew in the wake of inquiries undertaken by Strawson, Sellars, Allison, Ameriks, and Guyer, among others, so did the interest in those coevals considered important for both the transmission of Kant’s critical philosophy and its revision. In stages, then, light was dispersed retrospectively over a cast of gifted interpreters and expositors of

Kant's legacy, some of whom engaged with Kant directly in the last few years of his life. Among these "gifted interpreters" who engaged directly with Kant and—a rare thing—who also drew a response from Kant himself (in the second edition of Kant's treatise *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*) was Friedrich Schiller, outwardly a poet rather than a philosopher, but a thinker, nevertheless, who had received philosophical training in his youth. The appearance in 1790 of Kant's third Critique, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, precipitated a profound engagement on the part of Schiller with Kant's moral and aesthetic thought. Though the philosophical results of this engagement are confined to an intense five-year period from the early 1790s of fevered reading and prolific production of insights, a large proportion of which was to find its way into print during Schiller's lifetime, it is also the case that Schiller, much like the philosopher K. L. Reinhold, Schiller's colleague at the University of Jena, undertook a protracted reckoning with Kant, but also drew on inspiration derived before this period from a variety of philosophical sources and traditions. It is to this process of evolution of Schiller as a thinker that the present undertaking aims to draw attention. The claim of this volume is that Schiller's thought in his Kantian period was to bring into view an independent project—one whose outlines are consistent with positions he adopts in his earlier thought and creative writings. The essays gathered in this volume seek to bring forward for discussion and assessment the status of this independent project.

A further reason for the present undertaking may be found in the fact alluded to above that Schiller's contribution to philosophical debates has not always received the attention it clearly merits. When Schiller's role in the history of philosophy is recorded, his theoretical suggestions are apt to be confined to the field of aesthetics and to his relation to Kant. Notwithstanding two extant handbooks published in German devoted to Schiller's life and work in general (Koopmann 1998; Luserke-Jaqui 2005), a handbook on the *philosophy* of Friedrich Schiller outright, whether composed in English or any other language, is still lacking. With *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, we aim to make good this desideratum as well as to draw scholarly attention to Schiller's philosophy in new ways. Part of this latter ambition flows from a comprehensive discussion of a range of topics and topic areas that Schiller's writings enriched ranging from education and philosophical anthropology through to aesthetic and moral theory. It also consists in refreshing acquaintance with Schiller's biography and intellectual background insofar as it advanced what we wish to call in this volume his "philosophy".

II.

Friedrich Schiller's rise to become one of the leading writers and thinkers of his age could not have been foretold from his beginnings. Though an intellectually precocious child, Schiller was no scion of a wealthy aristocratic family. Nevertheless, perhaps on the strength of his father's service in the Seven Years' War, the young Schiller came to the attention of Karl Eugen, Archduke of the

Duchy of Württemberg, who had established a military academy in his own name, the “Karlsschule”. Despite the school’s conservative credentials, Schiller received a liberal education there and looked destined early on to enter the law. That he changed tack and moved into the medical sciences is only partly explained by the ministrations of the Archduke, who took a close interest in the pupils under his dominion. The shift in orientation Schiller underwent during his schooling can also be put down to wide-ranging, sometimes opposed, interests that were to become characteristic of the attitude he would strike in the world. These interests were revealed in the first decade of his career as a dramatist, for example, in the tension between the counterposed attractions of idealism and materialism, or, during his middle years as a professor at the University of Jena when most of his important aesthetic writings were composed, between the drive to rational intellectualism and an equally powerful pull towards physical sensation, or, finally, during his last years in Jena and Weimar, in the distinction he noted between the “naïve” poetic genius of his friend Goethe and his own attachment to philosophical “sentimentality”. These apparent opposites, though consistent with the reach of an expansive intellect, were also to lead Schiller into intellectual isolation, and for a time, until a sympathetic benefactor stepped forward, relative penury. In his maturity Schiller’s divergent interests meant that he was neither wholly a political opponent of a waning feudal aristocracy, nor unreservedly a denizen of an emerging artistic community, nor even thoroughly an elder statesman in the manner of Goethe presiding over a new literature at a moment of its greatest early flourishing as a world language. Schiller’s interests leant towards all these things, and yet he was also none of them singly. Schiller’s contributions to his society, since they spoke to contrasting features of his character and intellectual bearing all at once, are unique in European letters. His importance can be understood as Beethoven understood it in his own day—as inspiration for a new type of sensibility and a new conception of living. A progressive spirit in the same vein as Schiller, Beethoven memorialised this importance in the final movement of his Ninth Symphony by making Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” into an anthem for the new age to come.

Given the significance of Schiller the man—a significance fully appreciated by Schiller’s coevals Goethe and Beethoven no less than the great Scottish critic Thomas Carlyle, who released a life of Schiller soon after his death (Carlyle 1899)—it seems surprising that Schiller’s reputation as a thinker was to face major obstacles. In the German setting, these obstacles can be put down to the difficulty his aesthetic theory faced in gaining a proper hearing next to Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy, in the light of whose brilliance it could seem a pale shadow. In the Anglophone setting, where Kant’s philosophy was obliged to face its own hurdles, the situation presents somewhat differently. This is due to problems attaching to the reception of aesthetic theory in this setting as much as it had to do with the style and quality of Schiller’s thinking. Nevertheless, it must also be said that Schiller’s reputation was understood in English-speaking countries from the outset to be due to poetic more than philosophical considerations, indeed that Schiller’s philosophy, such as it was

taken to be, could appear secondary in view of the monumental achievement of his dramatic writing and his poetry. That Schiller's aesthetic writings largely (though by no means exclusively) emerged during an intense period of focus in his Jena years on Kant's third *Critique* in particular was disposed to excite little attention when measured against turbulent dramas such as *The Robbers*, *Fiesco*, *Intrigue and Love* and *Don Carlos*—works in which Schiller's reputation as a progressive thinker in the vein of the Enlightenment was secured. And yet it is also the case that the later dramatic work from *Wallenstein* and *Maria Stuart* through to *William Tell* would not have been possible without the “silent” half-decade in which Schiller clarified his intentions within the domain of aesthetics in areas relating to tragedy and the function of the sublime as well as in foundational areas of meta-theory dedicated to the justification and defence of aesthetic “truth”. It is to insights arising from a period of focus on Kantian philosophy that the towering achievement of the late dramas owe their resonance and profundity.

Be that as it may, it is also the case that the reception of Schiller's aesthetic theory in the Anglophone domain was delayed for reasons pertaining to the understanding of aestheticism itself. For one thing, as the philosopher Dewey pointed out in *Art as Experience* as early as 1934, there is “no word in the English language that unambiguously includes what is signified by the two words ‘artistic’ and ‘esthetic’ [*sic.*]” (Dewey 2005: 48). As Dewey observes, “there is a certain verbal awkwardness in that we are compelled sometimes to use the term ‘esthetic’ to cover the entire field and sometimes to limit it to the receiving perceptual aspect of the whole operation” (*ibid.*). The halfway house that has long been obtained in English is that the term “artistic” tends to stand for the productive dimensions of aesthetic activity, whereas “aesthetic” is more frequently taken to denote its receptive dimensions. The modification to these linguistic circumstances observable today is that the word “creative” has stepped forward to augment the meaning of “artistic” just adumbrated. The consequence of the use of both terms, however, is that the productive dimensions of the aesthetic in the Anglophone setting are freighted towards art and discourses of art, thereby undercutting the ambition of aesthetics to issue any kind of knowledge claim. In today's intellectual debates, where views about the existence of “two cultures” of art and science have enjoyed a certain prestige, particularly in the wake of C. P. Snow (Snow 1959), aesthetics can look like an internal preoccupation of the “culture” of art and not, as Schiller intended, long before such a proposal about the organisation of fields of endeavour was vented, a concern for knowledge (*Wissenschaft*) as such. Thus, if Schiller's intentions are to be followed, one must strip away the glasses of today which are not naturally suited to appraising many of the claims he advances. Only then can one appreciate the consciously allusive use of the term *ästhetisch* in his Kantian writings, which depends on reciprocal relations running between aesthetic productivity and receptivity. That Schiller's aesthetics necessarily encompasses both productive and receptive aspects bulks large, for example, in the *Kallias Letters*, where an objective claim arising from beauty as “freedom in

appearance” is made, or in the essay *On Grace and Dignity*, where an aesthetic attitude bound up with a productive bearing (grace) is argued alongside an attitude consistent with a receptive or suffering bearing (dignity).

A direct result of these circumstances in the Anglophone context is that Kant’s aesthetic theory has fared rather better than Schiller’s, and not just because of the philosophical eminence of the former. For, if aesthetics is held not to be independently productive of moral thinking, but only illustrative of it, as Kant suggests in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and if “perception and enjoyment” represents a default reading of the term “aesthetic” in English, as Dewey maintains (Dewey 2005: 48), it is surely the case that Schiller’s argument in the *Aesthetic Letters* that the “aesthetic condition” is capable of carrying out moral work in its own right will not be immediately evident and, rather more seriously, could even be regarded as philosophically incoherent. So long, then, as a productively determined or enabled aesthetics makes no decisive inroads into ethical theory, as is the case with Kant’s moral theory, claims that art has the capacity to make an independent contribution to morals are likely to fall on deaf ears.

And yet it is precisely these kinds of claims with which Schiller’s “philosophy” is associated and, equally, by which it stands and falls. In the tradition that claims such as these inaugurated, the aesthetic and the ethical have often been considered of a piece. This proximity of the ethical and the aesthetical animated the Romantic thought of poetic thinkers after Schiller from Hölderlin, Schelling, Hegel, and Nietzsche in the nineteenth century through to Thomas Mann, Rilke, Robert Musil, and Paul Celan in the twentieth century. For many of these poets and thinkers, Schiller was a talisman. Schiller’s thought was also of interest to the neo-Kantians in the second half of the nineteenth century and has had an impact along various lines of development since then through to the critical theory and post-structural thought of our own day. For many reasons, then, a volume dedicated to bringing together the most current and valuable research on Schiller’s philosophy in the interests of assessing the currency of this philosophy and the rich intellectual heritage it brought about is a worthy ambition. Such is the purpose of *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*.

III.

The volume is organised into six parts and seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of the dominant contours of Schiller’s theoretical work, with essays dealing, respectively, with Schiller’s biography and intellectual development (*PART I. Biographical and Historical Background*); with overviews of Schiller’s philosophically relevant writings, in which each single text by Schiller is treated per se (*PART II. Schiller’s Theoretical Writings*); with overviews of Schiller’s contribution to the topics of philosophical anthropology, aesthetics, morals, political theory, philosophy of history, and pedagogy (*PART III. Schiller’s Philosophical Topics*); with the relevance of his theorising activity in the context of his literary work (*PART IV. The Relevance of Schiller’s Philosophical Thought*

in the Context of His Entire Work); with his relation to Kant and the Kantian tradition (*PART V. Kant, the Kantian Tradition, and Schiller*); and, finally, with his legacy in the history of thought, in particular in relation to German idealism, the Romantics, the neo-Kantians, Alexander von Humboldt, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and Critical Theory (*PART VI. Schiller's Philosophical Legacy*).

A special feature of this volume is the interpenetration of literary and philosophical perspectives and approaches, which represents a novelty in Schiller's scholarship and, more generally, in the wider field of scholarly philosophy dedicated to men and women of letters who are, at the same time, thinkers and poets. Up till now, as discussed above, Schiller has mainly been valued as a literary figure, which is to say, whose principal contributions have been understood to be to the field of imaginative literature. In resistance to this tendency, *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller* treats the literary approach alongside the philosophical approach so that a comprehensive picture of Schiller's significance for modern thought can come into view.

In assembling this volume—a project which was conceived by the editors after a chance meeting at a conference several years ago—we would like to acknowledge and thank the 32 leading scholars whose coming together made this project possible. Working with and within this team of distinguished scholars, who responded cheerfully to every demand and deadline, was a pleasure from the beginning. An immediate measure of the visibility of Schiller's philosophy today, indeed, can be witnessed in the impressively broad range of expertise represented in the work of these scholars, in the far-reaching discussions linking specialists from Germany and other European countries with their counterparts in the Anglophone domain, and finally, in the partnership of two editors—communicating almost daily over a period measured in years rather than months—based respectively in the University of Ferrara in Italy and the University of Queensland in Australia.

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