

TRANSLATION

KALLIAS, or, On the Beautiful

(1793)

Friedrich Schiller

IN A LETTER to his friend Christian Gottfried Körner on December 21, 1792, Friedrich Schiller first indicated his intention to advance his own theory of beauty in a work to be entitled *Kallias or, On the Beautiful*. Between January 25 and February 28, 1793, Schiller and Körner engaged in a dialogue on the subject in the form of an exchange of letters.

Schiller had read Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* in March 1791 and during the winter of 1792-93 gave a series of lectures on aesthetics at Jena University. The *Kallias* letters thus culminated a period of intensive study by Schiller of various theories of beauty and prepared the way for his writing *On Grace and Dignity*, which he began in May of 1793, and the letters *On the Aesthetical Education of Man*, which were written in the late autumn/winter of the same year.

In the *Kallias* letters, Schiller writes that there are four theories of beauty: (1) the sensuous-subjective theory of Edmund Burke among others, which incorrectly derives beauty merely from physical causes, and confuses that which is sensuously pleasant with the beautiful; (2) the rational-objective theory of Baumgarten, Mendelssohn, and others, which incorrectly defines logical perfection, i.e., proportionality, regularity, etc., as the cause of beauty; (3) the subjective-rational theory of Kant, which correctly distinguishes between the logical and the beautiful, but which, as Schiller says, "seems to me to miss fully the concept of beauty"; and finally (4) the sensuous-objective theory, which Schiller himself advances.

In Schiller's theory, proportionality, regularity, etc., do not cause beauty, but rather are merely the material of the beautiful. What constitutes beauty is not the sensuous perfection of an object, an action, or a character, but rather the freedom with which its sensuous perfection is expressed. For this reason, Schiller writes: "I am at least convinced, that beauty is only the form of a form and that that, which one calls its matter, must by all means be a formed matter. Perfection is the form of a matter; beauty, on the other hand, is the form of this perfection; which stands thus to beauty as matter to form."

Therefore, for Schiller, freedom is the immediate ground of beauty, and technique merely mediately the condition of beauty. Only if the perfect is presented with freedom, is it transformed into the beautiful.

The following passage is excerpted from the section of Schiller's letter to Körner of February 23, 1793, which is entitled, "Freedom in the appearance is one with beauty." This translation is taken from Friedrich Schiller, *Poet of Freedom*, Vol. II (Schiller Institute, Washington, D.C., 1988), pp. 512-19.

An object is perfect, when everything manifold in it accords with the unity of its concept; it is beautiful, when its perfection appears as nature. The beauty increases, when the perfection becomes more complex and the nature suffers nothing thereby; for the task of freedom becomes more difficult with the increasing number of compounds and its fortunate resolution, therefore, even more astonishing.

Regularity, order, proportion, perfection—properties, in which one so long believed to have found beauty—have nothing to do with the same at all. However, where order, proportion, etc. belong to the *nature* of a thing, as with everything organic, there they are also by this itself inviolable; but not on account of themselves, but rather because they are inseparable from the nature of the thing. A grave violation of proportion is ugly, but not because observation of proportion is beauty. Not at all, but rather because it is a violation of nature, therefore indicates heteronomy. I observe in general, that the whole error of those, who sought beauty in proportion or in perfection derives therefrom: they found, that the violation of the same made the object ugly; from which they drew the conclusion against all logic, that beauty is contained in the exact observation of these properties. But all these properties make merely the *material* of the beautiful, which can change in any object; they can belong to the truth, which also is only the material of beauty. The form of the beautiful is only a free utterance of the truth, of regularity, of perfection.

We call a building perfect, when all the parts of the same are arranged according to the concept and the purpose of the whole and its *form* has been purely determined through its *idea*. We name it beautiful, however, when we need not take this idea as help, in order to understand the form, when it seems to spring forth voluntarily and unintentionally from itself and all parts to be confined through themselves. A building can for this reason (to speak parenthetically) never be an entirely free art work and never achieve an ideal of beauty, because it at the least is impossible, in respect to a building, which needs steps, doors, chimneys, windows, and ovens, to suffice without help of a concept and therefore to conceal heteronomy. Therefore only that beauty of art can be completely pure, whose origin is found in nature itself.

A vessel is beautiful, when it, without contradicting its concept, looks like a free play of nature. The handle to a vessel is merely there due to the use, therefore through a concept; however, should the vessel be beautiful, then this handle must spring forth therefrom so unforced and voluntarily, that one forgets its determination. However, if it goes off in a right angle, if the wide

belly narrows suddenly to a narrow neck and the like, then would this abrupt change of direction destroy all appearance of voluntariness, and the autonomy of appearance would disappear.

When indeed does one say, that a person is beautifully clothed? When neither the clothing through the body, nor the body through the clothing, suffers anything in respect to its freedom; when it looks, as if it had to change nothing with the body and yet fulfills its purpose to the completest. Beauty, or rather taste, regards all things as a *self-end* and by no means tolerates, that one serve the other as means, or bear the yoke. In the aesthetical world, every natural being is a free citizen, who has equal rights with the most noble, and may *not once be compelled for the sake of the whole*, but rather must absolutely *consent* to everything. In the aesthetical world, which is entirely different than the most perfect Platonic republic, even the coat, which I carry on my body, demands respect from me for its freedom, and desires from me, like an ashamed servant, that I let no one notice, that it *serves* me. For that reason, however, it also promises me reciprocally, to employ its freedom so modestly, that mine suffers nothing thereby; and when both keep their word, so will the whole world say, that I be beautifully dressed. If the coat *strains*, on the other hand, then do we both, the coat and I, lose our freedom. For this reason do all *quite tight* and *quite loose* kinds of clothing have equally little beauty; for not considering, that both limit the freedom of movements, so the body in tight clothing shows its figure only at the expense of the clothes, and with loose clothing the coat conceals the figure of the body, in that it blows itself up with its own figure and diminishes its master to its mere bearer.

A birch tree, a spruce, a poplar is beautiful, when it climbs slenderly aloft; an oak, when it grows crooked; the reason is, because the latter, left to itself, loves the crooked, the former, on the contrary, loves the direct course. If the oak show itself slender and the birch bent, then are they both not beautiful, because their directions betray alien influence, heteronomy. If the poplar, on the contrary, be bent by the wind, then we find this beautiful again because it expresses its freedom through its swaying movement.

Which tree will the painter like most to seek out, in order to use it in a landscape? Certainly that one, which makes use of the freedom, which is permitted it with all the technique of its construction—which does not act slavishly in accordance to its neighbor, but rather, even with some boldness, ventures something, steps out of its order, turns willfully hither and thither, even when it must right here cause a breach, there disarrange something through its stormy interference. To that one, on

the other hand, which always perseveres in the same direction, even when its species allows it far more freedom, whose branches remain in rank and file, as if they were pulled by a string, will he pass over with indifference.

In respect to any great composition, it is necessary that the individual be limited, in order to let the whole take effect. If this limitation of the individual at the same time be an effect of its freedom, i.e., if it set this limit itself, then the composition is beautiful. Beauty is through itself subdued power; limitation out of power.

A landscape is beautifully composed, when all individual parts, of which it consists, so play into one another, that each sets its own limits, and the whole is therefore the result of the freedom of the individual. Everything in a landscape should be referred to the whole, and everything individual should seem nevertheless to stand only under its own rule, to follow its own will. It is, however, impossible, that the agreement to a whole require no sacrifice on the part of the individual, since the collision of freedom is unavoidable.

The mountain may want, therefore, to cast a shadow on many things, which one wants to have lighted; buildings will limit the natural freedom, curb the view; the branches will be burdensome neighbors. Men, animals, clouds want to move, for the freedom of the living expresses itself only in action. The river will accept in its course no law from the bank, but rather follow its own; in short: each individual desires to have its will. Where, however, remains now the harmony of the whole, when each concerns itself only for itself? Just therefrom does it follow, that each out of inner freedom directly prescribes itself the limitation, which the other needs, in order to express *its* freedom. A tree in the foreground could cover a beautiful part in the hinter-

ground; to *compel* it, that it not do that, would be to violate its freedom and betray bungling. What, therefore, does the intelligent artist do? He lets that branch of the tree, which threatens to cover the hinterground, *of its own weight* sink down and thereby make room voluntarily for the rear prospect; and so the tree accomplishes the will of the artist, in that it merely follows its own.

A versification is beautiful, when each individual verse gives itself its length and brevity, its movement and points of rest, each rhyme offers itself out of inner necessity and yet comes as called—briefly, when no word takes notice of the other, no verse of the other, merely seems to be there, on account of itself and yet everything

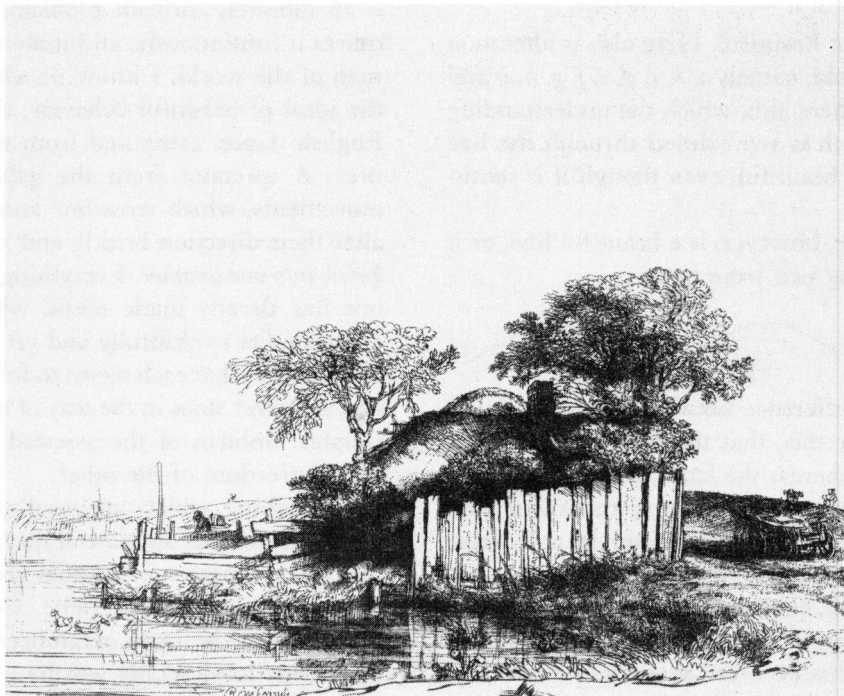
so turns out, as if it were agreed upon.

Why is the naive beautiful? Because the nature therein asserts its right over affectation and disguise. When Virgil wants to let us cast a glance into the heart of Dido and wants to show us, how far it has come with her love, so would he have been able to say this quite well as story teller in his own name; but then this presentation would also not have been beautiful. However, when he lets

us make this discovery through Dido herself, without her having the intention, so as to act uprightly toward us (see the discussion between Anna and Dido at the beginning of Book Four), then we name this truly beautiful; for it is nature itself, which gives away the secret.

A mode of teaching is good, where one advances from the known to the unknown; it is beautiful, when it is Socratic, i.e., when it asks the same truths from within the head and heart of the listener. With the first, its convictions are *demande*d from the understanding formally; with the second, they are *entice*d from it.

Why is the wavy line held to be the most beautiful? I have especially tested my theory in respect to this most simple of all aesthetical tasks, and I hold this demonstra-

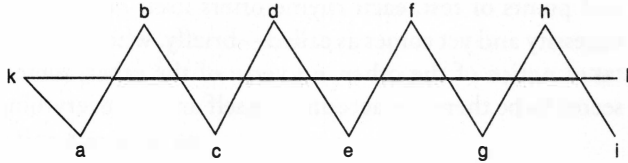


Rijksmuseum-Stichting, Amsterdam

Rembrandt van Rijn, "Cottage with a White Palming."

tion for this reason to be crucial, because with this simple task no deception can take place through incidental causes.

A wavy line, the followers of Baumgarten can say, is for this reason the most beautiful, because it is sensuously perfect. It is a line, which always changes its direction (multiplicity) and always returns again to the same direction (unity). Were it, however, beautiful from no better ground, then the following line would also have to be so:



which certainly is not beautiful. Here also is alteration of direction; a manifold, namely *a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i*; and unity of direction is here also, which the understanding thinks into and which is represented through the line *KL*. This line is not beautiful, even though it is sensuously perfect.

The following line, however, is a beautiful line, or it could surely be, if my pen were better.



Now the entire difference between this second and the former is merely this, that the former changes its direction abruptly, whereas the latter, unnoticeably; the difference of their effects upon the aesthetical feeling must therefore be grounded in this single observable difference of their properties. What, however, is a suddenly altered direction, other than one violently altered? Nature loves no jump. If we see it make one, then it shows, that violence has occurred to it. On the contrary, only that movement appears voluntary, to which one can assign no determined point, in which it changed its direction. And this is the case with a wavy line, which is distinguished from the above portrayed merely through its *freedom*.

I could accumulate sufficient further examples, in order to show, that all that we call beautiful, gains this predicate merely through the freedom in its technique. But in respect to the proof advanced, it may by now be enough. Because *beauty* therefore adheres to no material, but rather consists merely in the treatment; however everything, which represents the sense, can appear technical or not technical, free or not free: so it follows therefrom, that the region of the beautiful extends quite far, because reason in everything, which sensuousness and understanding immediately represent to it, can and must ask about freedom. For this reason, the realm of

taste is a realm of freedom—the beautiful world of sense is the happiest symbol, of how the moral one shall be, and every beautiful natural being outside of me is a happy citizen, who calls out to me: Be free as I.

Therefore, we are disturbed by every forcing trace of the despotic hand of man in a free region of nature; therefore, by all compulsion of the dancing instructor in the walk and in the posture; therefore, by each affectation in customs and manners; therefore, by any roughness in behavior; therefore, by each offense to natural freedom in constitutions, habits, and laws.

It is striking, how good fashion (beauty of behavior) is developed from my concept of beauty. The first law of good fashion is: *Spare others' freedom*. The second: *Show freedom yourself*. The punctual fulfillment of both is an infinitely difficult problem, but good fashion requires it continuously, and it alone makes the complete man of the world. I know no more suitable image for the ideal of beautiful behavior, than a well performed English dance, composed from many complicated figures. A spectator from the gallery sees innumerable movements, which cross one another most vividly and alter their direction briskly and playfully and yet *never knock into one another*. Everything is so ordered, that the one has already made room, when the other arrives; everyone fits so skillfully and yet again so artlessly into one another, that each seems to follow only his own head and yet never steps in the way of the other. It is the most suitable emblem of the asserted self-freedom and the spared freedom of the other.

Everything, which one usually calls *harshness*, is nothing other than the opposite of the *free*. It is this harshness, that often deprives intellectual greatness, often even the moral of its *aesthetical* value. Good fashion does not forgive even the most magnificent merit this *brutality*, and virtue itself is only worthy of love through beauty. However, a character, an action, is not beautiful, if it show the sensuousness of man, whom it befits, under the compulsion of the law, or constrain the sensuousness of the spectator. In this case they will merely instill *respect*, but not *favor*, not inclination; mere respect abases him, who feels it. Hence Caesar pleases us far more than Cato, Cimon more than Phocion, Thomas Jones far more than Grandison. Hence it follows, that often merely *emotional* actions please us more than purely moral ones, because they show voluntariness, because they are achieved through nature (the emotional state), not through the categorical reason against the interest of nature—hence may it be, that the mild virtues please us more than the heroic, the womanly so often more than the manly; for the womanly character, even the most perfect, can never act other than from inclination.

—translated by William F. Wertz, Jr.