III.

Anthropology, Nature and History in the Late Enlightenment.

The Case of Friedrich Schiller

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I.

In 1794 Wilhelm von Humboldt who had just moved to Jena, decided to take a course in comparative anatomy at the university. Accompanied by Goethe, the two trudged to class every morning in order to penetrate the secrets of human anatomy. Humboldt was fascinated by the subject and studied it for two years, dissecting at least two cadavers and reflecting thereby on the relationship between mind and body. These endeavors Humboldt explained in a letter to his close friend Friedrich August Wolf were essential to his larger plan of study: »Ich habe angefangen hier Anatomie bei Loder zu hören, und das raubt mir den ganzen Vormittag von 9 Uhr an. So leid es mir indeß auch manchmal um diese Stunden thut, so sehr interessirt mich doch das Studium, und auf dem Wege, den ich einmal eingeschlagen hatte, war es mir unentbehrlieh.«¹ The path he had chosen to follow was a study of anthropology, though it later branched out to history, linguistics and aesthetics. He also assured Wolf that in these endeavors, he was in close contact with Friedrich Schiller who had encouraged him to strike out in this direction. What Schiller was encouraging his young disciple and admirer was to trace his own footsteps, for the young Schiller had also begun his intellectual career studying medicine, not as a means to carve out a simple career – to become a mere *Brotgelehrter* – but in order to enhance his understanding of humanity. Only

¹ *Die Jugendbriefe Alexander von Humboldt*, eds Jahn and F. Lange (Berlin, 1973), I, 429
recently has Schiller's youthful interest in medicine and anthropology been studied;\textsuperscript{2} but the vital role both disciplines played in the whole corpus of Schiller's thought is often still overlooked. For Schiller and Humboldt, anthropology, in the broadest sense of the word, was the study of humanity founded upon a deep recognition of the natural driving forces [\textit{Triebe} and \textit{Kräfte}] that defined human life and activity. Its major task was to capture the characteristics of a people or a period.

Schiller's and Humboldt's endeavors reflected the intense interest in this newly named field which characterized the late German Enlightenment. This subject signified, despite its many variations, an attempt to create a new science of humanity that broke the boundaries of traditionally constituted disciplines. It aspired, as Schiller said on many occasions though in different contexts, to abandon the dictates of a narrow \textit{Brotstudium} for a science guided by the philosophic spirit. This philosophic spirit was not defined by a set of dogmatic categories—it was not philosophy in its traditional meaning as being constituted by a coherent system of organized knowledge based upon self-evident logical premises. Rather, it was an approach to the world of phenomena that sought to uncover internal connections, \textit{innere Zusammenhänge}, not immediately apparent to the naked eye.

In this endeavor, anthropology was conceived as a mode of analysis with definite analogues to that of the natural sciences. Nature not only served as the grand analogy for the understanding of humanity, both were conceived as being conjoined. To understand nature was to understand human nature. Within the whole anthropological movement there was an attempt to blend the natural and humanistic sciences, to dissolve the crass contradictions between the world of phenomena and that of human actions and intentions. Both were perceived to follow »natural« paths; hence the necessity, as Humboldt explained, to begin such a study with the study of the laws of living nature.

The correlation between nature and human actions and intentions could only be maintained if the mechanistic dualism between mind and body, established in the late seventeenth-century philosophies of Descartes, Leibniz and Newton, was obliterated. Anthropology, in all its late Enlightenment forms, was posited upon the desire to dissolve the traditional mind-body dualism. Matter and spirit were to be recombined, allowing thereby insights into the workings of nature to illuminate those of human activity and insights gleaned from observations in human nature to be transferred to nature.

\textsuperscript{2} A pioneering work dealing with Schiller's medical training was published by Kenneth Dewhurst and Nigel Reeves, \textit{Friedrich Schiller: Medicine, Psychology and Literature with the first English edition of his complete Medical and Psychological Writings} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978). The most important book on Schiller's early anthropological thought is: Wolfgang Riedel, \textit{Die Anthropologie des jungen Schiller: Zur Ideengeschichte der medizinischen Schriften und der »Philosophischen Briefe,«} (Würzburg, 1985).