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## II. The Aesthetical Education of Man

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259TH BIRTHDAY OF SCHILLER

# The Deep Moral Crisis of the West: Why We Need a Renaissance of Classical Culture!

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Nov. 10—It is typical of the short-sighted thinking of our time, that the Federation of German Industries (BDI) worries that there is a “systemic competition” between “our model of the open market economy and China’s state-controlled economy,” adding that while opportunities for commercial exchanges should indeed be taken, dependence on the Chinese market should be reduced.

Because of that same short-sighted thinking, even medium-term opportunities are being completely ignored. This obviously also has an effect on the human qualities of the future workforce, i.e., today’s children and adolescents. Viewed from this standpoint, the West is in a deep cultural crisis that is precisely the result of those “Western values” that supposedly make us so superior to other cultures.

### Western Society Is Disintegrating

The gunfight which left thirteen dead and many injured in a bar in Thousand Oaks, California, where Ian David Long, a veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, ran amok, is just the latest example in an endless nightmare in the U.S., in which there is a new incident almost daily. In 2015 there were 209 mass shootings, 346 in 2017, and over 300 so far this year—now there are even people who have lived through, and barely escaped, two such horror situations.

The liberal media are quick to find alleged culprits: the National Rifle Association (NRA), and the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which stipulates the right to bear arms. But this explanation does not account for all the other forms of expression of this brutality, especially among increasingly younger children. One example is the case of a 15-year-old in Florida, who strangled his mother because he disliked her criticism of his grades, and then transported her body in a wheelbarrow to a van, drove her to a nearby church

where she was buried under a fire pit. Then, with the help of two friends, he staged a burglary and, in his own words, made a “Grammy-winning call to 911.”

These acts of brutality are not confined to the American side of the Atlantic. In Berlin, a ten-year-old was recently raped by another ten-year-old, who had announced it in advance, on a school trip. Two eleven-year-olds held the victim, while two uninvolved students looked on.

Of course, there have always been shocking cases of criminal behavior, but no one can deny that the unimpeded access for even young children to all forms of violence and pornography on the Internet, accompanied by the lack of an education that would develop their inner moral judgment, has led to a catastrophic increase of brutality.

The result is a completely degraded image of man, especially of women and of sexuality. A substantial proportion of future generations have a very negative prospect for their creative potential, considering the not insignificant phenomenon of excessive exposure to video games creating autistic-like social behavior.

The German Association for Education and Training (Verband Bildung und Erziehung, VBE) recently commissioned a survey by the Forsa Institute for Social Research and Statistical Analysis, on the views of parents and teachers regarding values education in Germany, “in view of the brutalization of manners, and current events such as in Chemnitz recently” (where, in August, a stabbing precipitated a far-right-linked riot and more violence). Over 90 percent of both the parents and teachers emphasized that values education was very important to them, but that implementation is lacking. Other surveys have shown that violence against teachers has reached a terrifying level. Teachers are increasingly being abused, threatened and attacked, and

surveys show that “the tone in society is becoming rougher, language has been brutalized, conflicts escalate more often and faster, [and] authorities are no longer recognized.” This is a “phenomenon of society as a whole” and by no means predominately among people with a migrant background.

Whether it is veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder from deployments in the Middle East (in the U.S., a veteran commits suicide every 65 minutes) or the virtual experience of video game violence or so-called entertainment—we see in both cases that the threshold to using violence, up to the killing of another human being, is being dangerously lowered. And although this trend has long been evident, in a society that attaches so much importance to its “liberal values” of “anything goes”—nothing has been done to stop the plunge into boundless decadence.

### China, by Contrast

In stark contrast, the Chinese government has recently banned hip-hop music and trivial quiz shows, because the songs’ lyrics conveyed a degrading image of women, and the quiz shows hindered the audience’s creativity. More important, President Xi Jinping recently emphasized in a letter to eight professors of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the extraordinary importance of aesthetical education for the healthy growth of China’s youth, both physically and mentally. Aesthetical education, he wrote, plays a crucial role in the development of a more beautiful mind; it fills the students with love, and promotes the creation of great works of art.

In China, the importance of aesthetical education goes back to Confucius, but equally in modern history, eminent scholars and educators have devoted themselves to the use of this method with the goal of the moral ennoblement of students.

One of the founders of modern aesthetics, Wang Guowei, a scholar at the Qinghua Institute for Chinese Studies, dedicated himself to researching the causes of misery among the people, which he understood to stem from desire. Covetousness makes people unhappy; it drives them to want to have things, and this could lead to compulsive behavior, while the loss of the desired objects could lead to inner unhappiness and external social evil. Is there a way to defeat this covetousness? Yes, said Wang Guowei, and that is Beauty.

The former president of Beijing University, Cai Yuanpei, writing on May 10, 1919, had come to a similar view: “I believe that the root of our country’s problem lies in so many short-sighted people, who want quick

success or quick money without any higher moral thinking. The only remedy is aesthetical education.”

In the same philosophical tradition, Zhu Guangqian wrote in his book, *Aesthetics Explained*, that the problems of society stem from the fact that the hearts of most people are bad. To purify the hearts of men, one must cultivate the mind and the soul, and set higher and purer goals than the desire to get rich or have nice clothes or a high government position. To purify a person’s mind, you must first beautify their lives.

### Aesthetical Education Heals

The entire work of Friedrich Schiller was dedicated to this task: the ennoblement of man through aesthetical education. But above all, in his *Aesthetical Letters*, which he wrote in response to the total brutality of the French Revolution by the Jacobin terror, he was concerned with the question of where the ennoblement of man could come from, once governments become corrupt and the masses become brutalized. Great classical art is uniquely capable of achieving it, he said, because it possesses the infallible key to the highest stirrings of the human soul and can marshal the highest ideal of humanity. In his preface to his play, *The Bride of Messina*, Schiller stated that great classical art arouses in the human soul a power that remains in effect, even when the experience of the work of art has already come to an end.

If the West carries on with its culture of “anything goes,” then it is already clear who will win the “systemic competition” of which the BDI speaks, because China is doing a great deal to bring its 5,000-year-old culture to as many of its citizens as possible, and Xi Jinping personally advocates the spread of Confucian philosophy into all the pores of society.

We in the West certainly have a huge problem, because, since the paradigm shift brought about by the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the Frankfurt School, and the ’68ers, we have had several generations that consciously oppose the ideals of our classical humanist tradition. Nevertheless, it will only be possible to overcome the cultural and moral crisis when we return to the ideals of Nicholas of Cusa, Leibniz, Lessing, Schiller and Humboldt, and Bach and Beethoven—to name but a few—and convey their works, among other great works of classical art, to present and future generations.

You, dear reader, can find no better way to celebrate the 259th birthday of Friedrich Schiller than to join the Schiller Institute.

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