

# The Black Death: ‘A Distant Mirror’

In 1978, the president of the U.S. Historical Association, Barbara Tuchman, wrote the book ‘*A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*,’ in which she demonstrated that our times have many parallels to that era.

The Black Death of that period, which lasted from 1348 to 1350, in which half the population between Iceland and India died, was the most devastating event in reported history. The Black Death was only a culmination, however, because already, in the decades before, and in the fifty years afterwards, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse had actually turned into seven: you had horrible epidemics, war, high taxes, robbery, mismanagement, riots, upheaval, schisms in the Church, and superstition. All of these occurred before the Black Death, and afterwards.

You had horrible economic chaos, moral decay, low productivity, laziness, fanatical pleasure-seeking, extravagance, luxury, dissipation, religious hysteria, greed, stinginess, and so forth.

This was a time of suffering, when nobody had a feeling of certainty about the future. And the fact that it took fifty years for the world to recover, gives you an inkling that Lyndon LaRouche is right when he says that it will take at least two generations to recover, if we collapse at this point.

The Black Death occurred in the context of the Hundred Years’ War between England and France. In October 1347, two ships, with dead and dying men, arrived from Genoa, into the port of Messina, Sicily. These people had strange swellings the size of an egg in the armpits and in the groin. Soon, tumors and black spots covered all of their bodies, and they died within five days. As the epidemic spread, people died in three days, or in one day, and all cities were covered with a horrible smell of foulness.

**T**wo kinds of transmission occurred: one, through body contact, the other through aerial transmission; and it was the combination of these two, which increased the speed of infection. No treatment was known, and that made it all the more horrible. From January 1348, the plague spread via Marseilles to France, from there, to Turin, to North Africa, to Italy, Switzerland, Hungary, and eventually to all of Europe. And in each region, the plague remained for four to six months, and then disappeared, sometimes reappearing later. The mortality rate varied—it was one-fifth of the people in some places, nine-tenths in others—but probably thirty million, half of the people in Europe, died.

In Avignon, 400 people *per* day died. One simple cemetery had to bury 11,000 corpses in six weeks, and the continuous procession of burials inspired the imagination of artists. When the cemeteries were filled up, the corpses were thrown into rivers, or into large holes. And eventually, people died more quickly than the healthy ones could bury them. The corpses would lie stinking in the streets. Soon,

## Lessons of Universal History

there were no coffins left, and the corpses were placed under the earth so badly, because people didn’t have time, that dogs would pull them out. No church bells would ring any more. There was no more weeping, because everybody expected death. Many believed that this was the end of time.

In 1349 in Paris, you had 800 victims daily, eventually killing half the population. In Pisa, 500 daily; Vienna, 600 daily; Florence, four-fifths of the people died. In Venice, Hamburg, and Bremen, two-thirds of all people died.

**Y**ou had an accumulation of banking collapses, failed harvests, riots, anarchy; thus, the epidemic was only the culmination of a series of catastrophes. Through the combination of horrors, human feelings became so numbed, that a chronicler wrote, “people die without sadness, they marry without joy.”

Fathers left their children to die, women left their husbands, and brothers left each other, since they believed the transmission of the Black Death would occur through looks and breath. Nobody buried the dead, not for money, nor for friendship. The epidemics did not lead to solidarity. Each tried to escape death on his own. Even the priests refused to take confessions. Parents abandoned their children, children left their parents to die. Boccaccio wrote, “The Black Death froze the hearts of the people.”

The rich tried to isolate themselves in their castles, and, naturally, the poor died the most, because of their poor hygienic conditions. In rural areas, persons dropped dead in the streets and the fields, and the survivors fell into apathy. They didn’t bring in the harvest, the cattle died unattended, or ran around until they also died in streets and corners. Many times, the bodies were so poisonous, that the birds and the wolves did not touch them.

There was a complete collapse of labor power needed for the harvest, for food and seed for the next year. Everyone had a horror of the future, and people were just turning insane and hopeless. Men and women wandered around in madness. Lawlessness and moral decay began to spread, because the survivors said, “Let’s get the maximum out of life while we can.”

Ignorance concerning the origins of the disease increased the feeling of horror, and you had every form of superstition and scapegoating: witches were burned, Jews were killed, and there were bands of Flagellants attempting to appease God.

This can happen in America. This can happen all over the world. It’s already happening in Africa. *How do we get Americans out of the virtual reality, and wake them up to the fact that we are maybe days, maybe weeks, maybe months away from this becoming the fate of mankind as a whole? How do we get ourselves in shape, to measure up to the unique historical responsibility we have?*

—H.ZL

# Why Are We Still Barbarians?

Friedrich Schiller on  
‘The Aesthetical  
Education of Man’

by Helga Zepp LaRouche



**We are in a dying culture, which is dying exactly because of the poor judgment of the majority of people. Do you want to consult with them about what they think?**

**No, you are in the position of a doctor, and you have to treat your patient, which is the general population, who has cancer. Should you say, ‘Oh, you sweet little cancer. I sympathize with you?’ No, you have to be very clinical, very polemical, and treat the patient to get rid of the cancer.**

**Now, what is the problem with the miseducated emotions of Americans? Why is the population so dull? Why have they lost the capacity for compassion?**

Over two hundred years ago, Friedrich Schiller asked the question, “Why is it that we are still barbarians?” In “The Aesthetical Education of Man,” which was a series of letters he wrote in 1793 to the Duke Christian of Schleswig-Holstein Augustenburg, after the Jacobin Terror had taken over the French Revolution, he said the following:

The edifice of the natural state is wavering, its brittle foundations are cracking, and there seems to be a *physical* possibility to put the Law upon the throne, to finally honor man as an end unto himself and to make true freedom into the foundation of a political union. *Vain hope! The moral possibility is lacking*, and the generous moment finds an unresponsive people.

This is what we are faced with today. We have the possibility to create a just, new world economic order. All the ingredients are there. We can end the misery of oligarchism, we can have a cultural renaissance

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Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, ‘Furious Folly,’ from ‘The Disparates (Proverbios),’ c.1819.

right now. But, do we have the *moral possibility*? Do we have a perceptive people?

Therefore, Schiller says, it is urgent that we investigate the reasons for this *subjective* failure. Why are we still barbarians?

Schiller says, first, that this is caused by the separation of theoretical reason from the emotions and the character of the people, because people have the rational part of themselves, on the one hand, and on the other, the emotions. (When he says “reason,” he refers to the concept of reason of the Enlightenment, which dominated the Eighteenth century at that point.) He said the only way out of the political crisis, is to have a completeness of character overcome the disjoined society. He came to the conclusion that any improvement in the political conditions, would only be possible by ennobling the individual people—that is, the subjective factor.

Certainly, that’s true. You can have votes, you can have changing majorities—but, if the people remain the same, there is no change. That’s why there is really not that big a difference between the Democratic and the Republican parties. I mean, perhaps President Clinton is completely different as an individual, but if you take the D.N.C. and the Republican leadership, they’re pretty much the same.

So, how to enoble the fragmented human being, toward a completeness of character? Schiller says Art has a special role in this improvement, because

Art has to take leave of reality, and elevate itself above want, with honest boldness, for Art is a daughter of Freedom, and it will receive its prescriptions from the necessity of the mind and not from urgent need. Now, however, need rules, and sunken humanity bends under its tyrannical yoke. *Utility is the great idol of the time*, to which all powers should be enslaved and all talents should pay homage. Upon this coarse balance, the intellectual merit of Art has no weight, and deprived of all encouragement, it disappears from the noisy market of the century.

Schiller calls utilitarianism “the yoke of mankind.” But, isn’t that what rules society today? That people are only looked at for their particular usefulness—that they have this advantage, and that advantage—but they are not cared for, for their soul.

*Helga Zepp LaRouche is the founder of the Schiller Institute. This article is excerpted from “How Aesthetical Education Determines the Moral Character,” a keynote presentation to the Schiller Institute Labor Day Conference held in Washington, D.C. on Aug. 31, 1997. The full text appeared in ‘The New Federalist,’ Sept. 15, 1997.*

Now, Schiller asks, From where should this change come?

In the lower and in the most numerous classes, the most crude and lawless types proliferate, which unleash themselves, once the bonds of civil society have been loosened, and, with unbridled rage, hurry towards their bestial satisfaction.

That is the Mob. This is people who just live it up, people who go to rock concerts, people who just let the “inner sow” run out, as the we say in German, who just let their emotions go wild.

So, the masses are brutalized, they’re banal, they’re stupefied, and the elites are degenerated. Where, then, should the change come from? Schiller says, that the fact that the elites are degenerated, is even more disgusting: because the more noble, is the more horrible, in its destruction.

Against that, Schiller proposes the following idea:

Every individual man, one can say, carries by predisposition and destiny, a purely ideal man within himself. To agree with that immutable unity in all his adorations, is the great task of his existence.

Now, that’s quite something. Schiller says here, that the meaning of life is, that man has to be a genius, and a beautiful soul. Man has to educate his soul to the highest levels of reason, so that he can blindly trust all of his impulses, because, for him, reason and passion, necessity and freedom, have become one.

This is what Schiller calls a *Beautiful Soul*, a person who has eliminated all low and evil impulses, so that the highest level of reason is always in coherence with what he wants, because his emotions are elevated, and his emotions are noble. It’s the ideal of the Good Samaritan, the person who *never* considers, “What is the advantage? What do I get out of it, if I help this poor person?” But instead, the person who just forgets about himself, helps, and then goes back to his activity.

## ‘The Heart of the People’

Instead of expressing humanity in his nature, the problem is that man becomes merely an expression of his business, of his science. Nowadays, a person is valued only according to utilitarian criteria; for example, either because he has a good memory—he runs around like a dictionary—or has mechanical talent. And Schiller says,

The abstract thinker often has a cold heart, and the businessman, a narrow one. But can it be the purpose of man

*to fail himself*, for the sake of some other purpose?

Can you fail in the reason for which you live, because of any predicate you may perform? It must therefore be wrong, that development of the particular capacities of a person, makes it necessary to sacrifice the whole; or, even if the law of nature thrusts in that direction, we must nevertheless be capable of restoring, by means of a higher Art, this wholeness of our nature, which art has destroyed. And the way to do that, Schiller says, is that “the heart of the people has to be opened.”

Therefore, Schiller makes what I think is one of the most incredible statements:

The development of the capacity of feeling is therefore the most urgent requirement of the time, not only because it becomes a means to make improved understanding effective in life, but just because it awakens this improvement of understanding. The ennoblement of the character must issue from a different source, free of political corruption. And the only place where the ennoblement of the soul can come from, is Classical Art and Science, because only these two have an absolute immunity against the arbitrariness of man. The artist, if he really deserves the name, must not serve the spirit of his time. He must be guided by universal truth, and must not make his time happy with his appearance, but must purify it terribly, like the son of Agamemnon.

Therefore, people have to relive the creative act of discovery in great art, and in science. Schiller was also aware that some people say, “I don’t want to do that”—that there are always people who close themselves to the efficacy of beautiful art. And he says,

I don’t speak of them, the people who despise the Graces, only because they have never been favored by them. Those who know no other standard of value than

the work it takes to obtain something, and the profit they can lay their hands on—how should they be capable of doing justice to the quiet work of aesthetic taste upon the outer and inner human being, and how should they not lose sight of the fundamental advantages of beautiful culture, in the sight of its incidental disadvantages? The human being who lacks form, despises all grace, as if it were bribery, all elegance of manners, as if it were a disguise, all delicacy of greatness of behavior, as exaggeration and affectation.

Now, I remember a period at the end of the 1970’s, where we had some people (who fortunately left our organization), who told me that if men deal with Classi-



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Friedrich Schiller recites at the court of Weimar.

cal music, they must be homosexuals. Schiller had an inkling that such people exist.

Now, Art, Schiller says,

*is* capable of fulfilling this task of ennobling the people, because it addresses itself to the emotional capacities which are in the area of sensuality, but must not be based upon the sensuous experience, as is thought.

There has to be a test, whether what one experiences as beautiful, *is* beautiful. Because, this is not a question of mere opinion. On that point, Schiller completely differed from the Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant had the idea, expressed in his *Critique of Judgment*, that whatever in my opinion I think is beautiful, *is* beautiful. And your opinion of what is beautiful, may be com-

pletely different; that this is arbitrary. And also, that it is good if you don't see any plan of the artist, in a work of art.

And Schiller was very angry against that. He said, there has to be such a test. And he proceeded to write what he called a "Legislation for the Aesthetic World." He says, there must be a notion of Beauty which is derived from pure *Reason*, and such a notion can be demonstrated:

[It] must be sought in an abstraction—because it cannot be derived from any concretely given example, but, instead, this abstract notion must justify and guide our judgment of each concrete case—and this abstract notion must be capable of demonstration out of the possibility of sensuously reasoning nature. In a word: it must be demonstrable that *beauty is a necessary condition of mankind*.

Wow! I mean, here you have one of the most incredible statements, which I absolutely believe to be true. *We will not get out of this crisis, if people don't accept that.* Now, think about America. The problem with American cities, for example, is not the suburban sprawl and the strip malls, which everywhere look alike; the problem is the lack of beauty.

What Schiller discusses here, is a completely new

point of departure for initiating political change. He says,

We must therefore elevate ourselves to the pure notion of humanity, and since experience demonstrates to us only particular circumstances of particular people, but never humanity as such, we must discover that which is Absolute and Lasting out of these individual and changeable forms of appearances, and, by casting away all of the fortuitous limits, seek to empower ourselves with the necessary conditions of our existence.

Then he proceeds, in the first ten Letters of the "Aesthetical Letters," with the discussion of the need for an aesthetical education. Then, in Letters 11-27, he establishes what this aesthetic reason is. And I can only encourage you to please read this.

## The Aesthetical Condition

Schiller now introduces the following notions: material instinct, form instinct, and play instinct. I can assure you, these notions have absolutely nothing to do with Freud. You have to eliminate whatever meaning you may have attached to the word "instinct," or drive, and listen to what Schiller says:

## America Needs Beautiful Cities!

If you have children who can not grow up with beautiful cathedrals, with beautiful art, painting, classical music, *you are depriving them of the most important thing*, and I think we need a mass movement in America, fighting for beautiful cities.

This lack of beauty is one of our biggest problems, and I asked my husband Lyndon LaRouche about it. I said, "Look, there is no question that the American Revolution was a watershed in history, because it was the first republican constitution. There is no question. But why did it not go along with a Classical Renaissance?" Because in Europe, you still had the Weimar Classic in Germany, for example, and it would have been relatively easy, especially



Florence, Italy.

given the large influx of people from the European continent.

And Lyn said, "Well, it was exactly because the American Constitution, the American System, was such a threat to the British Empire, that the British concentrated their efforts to destroy American culture all the more ferociously than they did, let's say, in the case of Germany, which politically represented much less of a danger to the British Empire at that time, because Germany was only three hundred baronies, and not unified."

Nevertheless, *you have to remedy that.* What wasn't done two hundred years ago, you have to create now. Because humanity can not exist without Beauty. And it also can not exist without a rational notion of Beauty, and that is the notion of Aesthetic Reason. —H.Z.L

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The material instinct is the capability of man to encompass a growing richness of phenomena, to have a continuous openness of the mind.

And further:

However laudable our principles be, how can we be just, kind, and human toward others, if this capacity is missing, to be able to assimilate foreign natures in our own, appropriate foreign situations, and make foreign emotions into our own?

If you can not take the suffering of the people in Zaire and other countries in Africa, or among the North Koreans, or whatever other place in the world, into your own; if you can not repeat what these people feel; if you can not go through the emotional torture the majority of mankind right now is living through; then, you don't get it! What Schiller is talking about here, is not an abstract question. It's the ability to take "foreign natures" into your heart. Schiller says,

But this capacity is suppressed in the education we receive, as well as in that we provide ourselves, to the extent that one seeks to break the power of desires and make the character firm by means of principles. Since it takes some effort to remain true to one's principles amidst the excitement of emotion, one grasps upon the more comfortable means of procuring security for character, by blunting the emotions; for it is obviously infinitely easier to be calm in the face of a disarmed opponent, than to prevail over a courageous and robust adversary.

Therefore, Schiller says, the material instinct, the ability to take other persons, other emotions into your heart, should not be suppressed.

This is not the only thing you have to do, however. You have to *countersteer* it, by what Schiller calls the "form instinct." Now, this does not mean the artistic forming of a sculpture, or anything like that. What Schiller means by form instinct, signifies "the lawful inner development, by means of which we participate in our species, that which leads to ennobling ourselves up to the ideal person in ourselves."

Man seems to be torn between these two vectors of personality. Either people have a wealth of emotions, where they have a danger of losing the relationship to the species (people who are emotional volcanoes); or, you have the ordering power of reason, which, many times, is too quick to sacrifice the multiplicity of phenomena—which Schiller says "leads to a sterility in scientific thinking" (people who are too quick to give something a name). I have found the latter in the United States, much more than in Europe. You say something, and then peo-

ple say, "yes." They put a label on it, and they *suffocate* the preconscious mentation, the capability of building hypothesis, by putting a corset on it.

Schiller says, it's very difficult to say which causes more damage: uncontrolled emotions, or the precipitous imposition of a structure. "Both must be realized," he says, "to the extreme. You must carry your emotions to the extreme, and to the extreme you must give them form and shape. And it is only this condition of utmost tension which gives you real human freedom." This is what Schiller calls the "play drive," or the "aesthetical condition":

There are cases, however, where man has this double experience simultaneously, where he is at once aware of his freedom, and perceives his thinking, where he senses himself as material, and also comes to know himself as a spirit; then, in these cases, and only in these cases, he would have a complete vision of his humanity. And the object which provided him this vision, would become a symbol for him of his fulfilled destiny, since this is only to be attained in the totality of time, and it would serve him as a representation of the infinite.

This is what Lyndon LaRouche is talking about, when he talks about the "simultaneity of eternity." Schiller says, "This is the only condition from which the creative act is possible," this creative tension. The creative act is therefore the key to the actual infinite, and the play drive, according to Schiller, "is aimed at suspending time within time, at reconciling the Becoming with the Absolute Being, change with identity."

Schiller says that what is required, is the *aesthetic supersession of duty*. You do not want your sour, grim-faced Kantian, who says, "I do my duty, I'm moral, but I suffer, and I'll make you pay for it." This is not what Schiller is talking about. He says, that the person who is noble, has the sense that there is something higher than fulfilling your duty, because what you *can do* voluntarily, is what you *should do*, according to reason. And so, Schiller says,

This occurs in creative play. Man plays only where he is man in the fullest sense of the word, and he is only fully man where he plays.

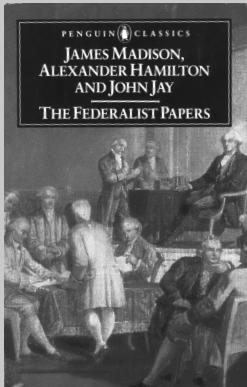
## The Problem of Leisure

How, then, do we educate the barbarians? Schiller says, you have to catch them off guard:

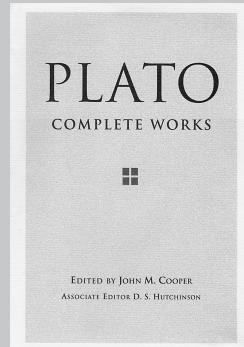
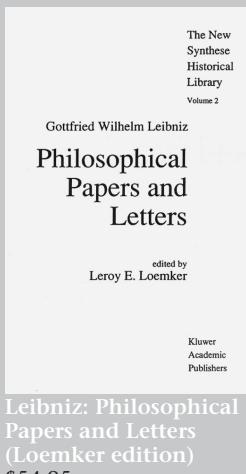
Chase away what is arbitrary, the frivolity, the crudeness from their pleasures, and in that way you shall banish

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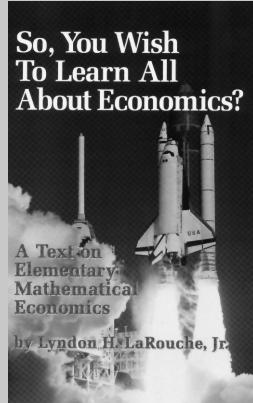
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Friedrich Schiller (left) wrote his dramas to elevate the moral character of the audience. Below: King Philip II confronts his son Don Carlos and the Marquis of Posa, in a climactic scene from the play "Don Carlos."



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these, unnoticed, from their deeds and finally their beliefs. Wherever you find them, surround them with noble, with grand, with brilliant forms, surround them with symbols of what is excellent, until the appearance vanquishes reality, and Art vanquishes Nature.

That is very simple, when you have great performances of drama, tragedy, opera, concerts, song recitals. It's very easy to do that, because then people are elevated in their leisure.

But, in the past thirty years, since the paradigm shift went into full swing, increasingly, people have regarded pleasures and entertainment as the opposite. There would be people who were relatively okay in their business lives, but then they would go to the disco, or they would go to the bar, or to the country music place, or whatever else, and they would turn into *lower* forms. They would fall for the sex-rock-drug counterculture.

The problem is *leisure*. What do you do in your leisure? No one can tell me he doesn't have time to concentrate on all of this, because if you eliminate banality from your leisure, and you fill your leisure with great, ennobling art, you will have done more for your soul, than if you pray a hundred *Pater Nosters*, I'm sure. Because great art sets free a positive power in the

audience, and it is through great art that one learns to "suspend time within time," and you access the divine, that which makes you in the image of God, when you celebrate the greatness of God the Creator, and that which makes you creative in doing that.

It's not some murmuring of some prayers, which makes you devout—it is by becoming the most beautiful you possibly could become. It's the talents you receive: don't bury them, enrich them! Give them to future generations.

Therefore, it is through great art that, as Schiller says, the *Becoming* becomes the *Absolute Being*, and the individual overcomes his fragmentation, and then can return to the political arena for his state-forming activity, in a completely new fashion.

When you participate in the creative art of the artist, at least in that moment you are elevated, and experience the simultaneity of calmness and movement, the intense effort and the relaxed harmony at once. It's the moment of creative suspense, and, in that moment, you participate in the divine. Schiller says,

One can not say, therefore, that those people are wrong, who proclaim the aesthetic condition to be the most fertile with respect to knowledge and morality. They are quite correct, for a disposition of mind which comprehends the entirety of humanity in itself, must necessarily include each particular expression of it, as potential. Only the aesthetic disposition leads to the unlimited.

And therefore, Schiller says, in Letter 23, "There is no other way to make the sensuous person reasonable, than to first make him aesthetical."

This is an incredible idea, and I'm absolutely certain that that is the way to change the subjective factor—that the way out of today's political crisis will depend upon making people aesthetical in this sense.