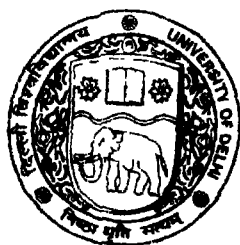


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GOETHE

THE THINKER

Karl Viëtor

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge·Massachusetts

1950

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to *Alice Beatrice*

Preface

Were our knowledge of Goethe's writings confined to his productions as an imaginative author, that knowledge would not be complete. Together with the poet and the author, the investigator demands our attention. The nineteenth century undervalued—indeed, well-nigh forgot—Goethe's achievement as a research worker, but in our day a lively interest in his scientific writings has been reawakened. If, as is usual in research, their results have been left behind, their methods have lost but little of their significance. Above all, the way in which Goethe observed nature must be of the highest interest to us simply because it is so different from that which obtains in our own period.

The second and more extensive portion of my study undertakes something which, so far as I know, has never before been attempted in quite this way. Without undue systematization, it tries to offer the reader an orderly presentation of Goethe's philosophic thought. From the gigantic mass of his reflections, his notions, and his perceptions, I have chosen the most significant passages for treatment in their ideal relationship. It is my hope that the reader will find as I do that a unique treasure trove of genuine wisdom is thus offered to us.

I am deeply indebted to Professor Bavard Quincy Morgan for undertaking the translation—certainly no light task. The tireless assistance of my dear wife has been of inestimable value in bringing this book to its conclusion. Helpful also has been the aid given me by my good friends, Tilly Edinger, George Jaffé, and Howard Mumford Jones, to whom I am heartily grateful.

Karl Viëtor

Cambridge, 1950

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UNIVERSAL GENIUS

Universal Genius

IF ANY ONE OF THE TITANS IN THE REALM OF LITERATURE CAN BE SAID TO SHOW ALL-EMBRACING GREATNESS OF MIND, that Titan is Goethe. Qualities of many kinds must come together in order to realize the most precious thing there is, namely, an individual of whom "universality" can be predicated: talent, character, and, finally, a supreme endowment, that of being able to grasp and understand the world and men. It is not often that life brings forth a phenomenon like that. For what is universality? It will not do to conceive of it as a multiplicity of particular aptitudes and skills. Many minor talents added together constitute at most a jack-of-all-trades, a dilettante. And if a poet also has a talent for painting, or a painter can also write poetry, that is not enough to produce an all-embracing mind. True universality does not issue from specific aptitudes. It is an extraordinary scale according to which the entire personality is ordered—a something which endows with a special character everything that that personality does. One may say that universality is a supreme goal to which man can attain, a supreme standpoint which affords a view of the entire breadth and depth of life. Words or sentences coined by Goethe, whether they be observations which are beautifully formulated in verse, or reflections cast into epigrammatic form—they are such that the truth which appears in them bears the stamp of absolute validity. This truth always strikes us with the force of that which is immediately evident.

Seeking the origin of this force, we discover that we are dealing with a man who is able to see the individual phenomenon as a part of the totality of life, to grasp the Singular in its relation to the Universal, and who in this way gives to everything a new significance.

It is only thus that we learn to know the true place of the individual phenomenon, and its proper function in the great Order of things. Unsuspected relationships are revealed, and unknown connections are indicated. It is the part of the analytic scientist to explore and to know the detailed record, the myriads of empiric data. But what I have termed the universal mind has the power of forming conceptions and visions of the great connections of life, of drawing a picture of the ordering of the world, a picture of the Cosmos. To achieve this supreme synthesis demands more than mere knowledge: an imagination is called for which has enough realism to avoid degenerating into fantastic speculation. Such a mind attains to understanding on a plane which can only be accessible to wholly productive thinkers. These are the ones to whom we must appeal when we seek answers to the highest and most important questions involving mankind, answers which are to be sure purely human and which can therefore be fallible, but which are great enough to heighten our own imaginative power. "The highest achievement of the mind is to evoke mind."¹

It is above all in Goethe's literary works that his knowledge of life and of the world finds expression. We must seek his wisdom primarily in the images and symbols of his lyrics, in the figures of his dramas and narrative works. But along with these writings, which are productive in the most specific sense of the word, there are others: critical essays, and brief, fragmentary remarks. The total of the experiences which flooded in upon Goethe in the course of his long life was so tremendous as to exceed even the power of a genius to raise them all by means of a formative process into the sphere of art. Around the core of his productive achievement, his purely artistic work, there lies a broad belt of philosophic, critical, and scientific writings. They resemble the ring of gardens and houses which surrounded the precinct of the Greek temple. It is the temple itself, however, which forms the center of the community, and which we must mount in order to obtain a comprehensive view of the whole.

All the works of Goethe's middle and late period are richly shot through with reflections and maxims—utterances of philosophic type. In his letters, too, and in the conversations which have been reported

¹ Die höchste Wirkung des Geistes ist, den Geist hervor/urufen (JA 33:233.)

to us, one can find a rich harvest. Again and again experts have been induced to collect and order these utterances, and to present such an anthology as a sort of compendium of wisdom, or as a book of secular edification. But no matter how one may arrange this material, it will not crystallize into a philosophic *system*. It is true that there is hardly a phenomenon of life, hardly a problem of human existence, as to which one could not quote one or more of Goethe's utterances. He was, as Wilhelm von Humboldt said, "not one jot less of a philosophizing and brooding nature" than Schiller, who has always been considered the prototype of the philosophic poet. But Goethe's thoughts, insights, and reflections do not find their inner connection in the artificial unity of an Order constructed by reason: their connection lies only in the natural unity of the person whose name was Goethe, a unity which was always one and the same as to the way in which it received the changing phenomena of life, and in its productive reactions to them.

So I split myself, Beloveds,
Yet remain the same forever.²

This inner consistency in his thinking, which has its basis in the unity of his person, and which gives coherence to all his various utterances even when they present themselves as creations of the moment, permits us to treat Goethe's philosophic argumentation as if it were the product of an effort that was undertaken systematically. That is the nature of the procedure in this book. I hope the attempt will not be thought too bold. In my presentation, those utterances must in all cases be accorded the greatest importance which may properly be regarded as the maturest results of Goethe's thinking. Deviations and nuances had to be brought into balance—above all such differences as follow of necessity from the fact that, as the years pass, even the most positive views cannot be held fast without change. So long as the mind is active, it will not cease to register new experiences and give productive responses to them. The form of presentation chosen here refrains from affixing to each chapter an account of the genesis of Goethe's views. This book does not intend to offer a history of his philosophic development, but a classified

² Und so spalt' ich mich, ihr Lieben, / Und bin immerfort der Eine. (JA 4:99.)

presentation and interpretation of the results of his speculations: not a depiction of his struggle with problems, but the yield of that struggle, his wisdom.

For his own part, Goethe found inadequate such an understanding of the world and of life as was to be gained by means of feeling and intuitive reason, that is, in the manner which is the natural one for the artist and the poet. As a mature man he began to approach Nature by means of precise observation, and to study her in her individual phenomena, as the methodically working scientist is wont to do. Goethe devoted a great part of his life to the passionate study of Nature; it was above all the organic phenomena which attracted him. In the totality of his *Works* the writings which resulted from these studies occupy an impressive amount of space, and he himself regarded the scientific part of his intellectual existence as not less important than the artistic one. It was not strange that the children of an age which saw poetry and science as determined enemies of each other should be startled when a great poet also laid claim to being a natural scientist in the full sense of the term, not merely one of those dilettanti who in the pursuit of a hobby manage to attain some respectable but isolated achievements in particular fields. But must not an intellectual double life of this kind have created a sensation in any age? What great artist apart from Leonardo da Vinci has been at the same time a scientist of rank?

The public was taken aback, for in keeping with its desire to see itself served well and with uniformity it demands of everyone that like the cobbler he stick to his last, and this requirement makes sense, too. For he who wishes to achieve excellence—which is infinite in every direction—should not attempt it on a diversity of roads, as God and Nature may well be allowed to do. Hence the people wish that a talent which has become prominent in a given field, and whose manner and style are generally approved and beloved, should not withdraw from its own area, to say nothing of leaping over into one that is far removed from the first. If a man dares to try, it earns him no thanks, indeed, even if he is successful, the people give him no special applause.³

³ Das Publikum stutzte: denn nach seinem Wunsch sich gut und gleichförmig bedient zu sehen verlangt es an jeden, dass er in seinem Fache bleibe, und dieses Ansinnen hat auch guten Grund: denn wer das Vortreffliche leisten will, welches nach allen Seiten hin unendlich ist, soll es nicht, wie Gott und Natur wohl tun dürfen, auf mancherlei Wegen versuchen. Daher will man, dass ein Talent, das sich in einem gewissen Feld hervortat, dessen Art und Weise allgemein anerkannt und beliebt ist, aus seinem Kreise sich nicht entferne, oder wohl gar in einen weit abgelegenen hinüberspringe. Wagt es einer, so weiss man ihm keinen Dank, ja man gewährt ihm, wenn er es auch recht macht, keinen besondern Beifall. (WA II:6:134.)

This is exactly the way in which the people of Goethe's day treated him, and down to our time wonderment at the strange duality of his intellectual existence has not ceased, still less the controversy over the significance of his scientific production. That his labors really were "scientific" in the proper sense of the word, as to their goals, their methods, and their execution, and not mere sportive dilettantism, that at least is recognized today, and fully acknowledged. Men have come to realize that he was right when he insisted that his labors in the fields of anatomy, of biology, and of optics, with respect both to their manner and their results, relied not upon "momentary inspiration" but upon a "consistent endeavor." Goethe has his place in the history of science as well as in the history of *belles-lettres*. One who wishes to know all of him must also know that part of his intellectual achievement which was realized in the field of exact science. His scientific endeavor was the other road, the methodical one, on which he sought to approach world phenomena and the secrets of the creative deity.

It is plain enough to see that a religious urge impelled him to his research. But another need was likewise active in it, one which pertains to the psychology of a great poet. The restless subjectivity of his artistic drive required something stable and objective as complementary opposite. "Since this drive is incessant, it must turn outward to avoid consuming itself for lack of substance."⁴ In his scientific work (so he says himself) the objects themselves were not of primary concern. What was more important was that this work offered him the incomparable opportunity of employing the autonomous actuality of Nature as a check on the truth of his visionary insights, and of transforming his imaginative anticipations into objective apperceptions.

⁴ Da dieser Trieb rastlos ist, so muss er, um sich nicht stofflos selbst zu verzehren, sich nach aussen wenden . . . (JA 25:277.)

THE STUDENT OF NATURE

Contemplative Cognition

RELIGION, ART, AND SCIENCE, SAYS GOETHE, SATISFY A THREEFOLD, FUNDAMENTAL NEED IN MAN: TO WORSHIP, TO PRODUCE, AND TO CONTEMPLATE. OF science he says that it should "contemplate" (*schauen*). He avoids the more abstract word *erkennen*, "recognize." In so doing he designates as the correct behavior, as the one best suited to its object, that toward which he himself was impelled by the special organization of his own nature. "Contemplation" is not the passive process of becoming aware; both recognition and comprehension are included in it, but in such a manner that the way to an insight into the object goes through the contemplative grasping of its external manifestation. Expressed in another way: that which manifests itself in the visible thing, call it what one will—life, essence, idea—is grasped in the act of contemplation, as one reads off, so to speak, the hidden interior from the visible exterior. This is Goethe's way of making himself the master of natural phenomena. In him the eye was the dominant sense organ. Like Heraclitus, Aristotle, and Plato he was convinced that the eyes were clearer and more reliable witnesses than the ears. He speaks of his "irresistibly indwelling urge to look," of his "peculiar way of staring at Nature." At times, he remarks, one would wish to have more than two eyes, in order to take in everything completely. Surely he was "For seeing intended, Employed for [his] sight."¹ A profound spiritual need corresponds to the peculiar organization of his body. He who believes that God is one with Nature, i.e., reality, can only find assurance of the Divine by observing the

¹ Zum Sehen geboren, / Zum Schauen bestellt. (*Faust* [JA, vols. 13 and 14], verse 11288.)

phenomena of life. To him Nature is the book of God, as Jakob Böhme says, the surest, plainest revelation of the invisible "World Spirit," of the Eternally-One who brings forth all things. Here, in the phenomena of Nature, the questing mind of man fingers its way along the shape of the Deity. Goethe's efforts to attain to a scientific understanding of the organization of Nature do not spring from a detached urge to knowledge or from professional industriousness. The best trait of his soul, his need for productive intercourse with the mysteries of the world, for pious understanding and illumined worship—it was this which made him a student of Nature and which kept him at that occupation, unweariedly, to the end of his life.

One need only observe the manner in which he speaks of Nature. He calls her "the never-aging mother," who is always in the right ("and most fundamentally so at the points where we understand her least"), inexhaustible in her charms, everywhere consistent in her truthfulness.

What more can life afford us for our using,
Than that God-Nature grant us revelation? ²

The living and working of the eternal world spirit, which realizes itself in the phenomena of reality, in all visible appearances, can only be coped with by a mode of cognition which is at once sensory (grasping the phenomenon) and spiritual (perceiving the spirit which manifests itself in the phenomenon). Contemplation, Goethe says, is to be clearly distinguished from viewing. The mere glimpsing of a thing must go over into contemplation, into reflection, into a combining of phenomena. The fact is "that upon every attentive glance into the world we begin to theorize."³ Every perception activates the productivity of our mind, which develops, expands, and transforms all that is perceived.

What we see is single phenomena, parts of an invisible whole. Their connection, the order which is manifested in them, can only be divined and comprehended by the recreating mind. Here too Goethe prefers to speak not of thinking, but of looking. He speaks of the inner eye, the inner power of sight, "eyes of the mind," without

² Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen, / Als dass sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare. (JA 1:286.)

³ . . . dass wir schon bei jedem aufmerksamen Blick in die Welt theoretisieren. (Preface to the *Farbenlehre*, JA 40:63.)

which, especially in Nature research, we should be blind and merely grope about in the chaos of single phenomena. Plato had already spoken of the eye of the mind, and later one finds the expression among the Christian mystics, and in Leibniz and Rousseau. When Goethe says that we must contemplate Nature with bodily and spiritual eyes at one and the same time, because only in this way are we in a position to grasp both the phenomenon and the idea appearing in it as one, from within and without, the underlying view is that it takes like to recognize like. There "speaks one spirit to the other" (*Faust*, verse 425), the world spirit to the human spirit. Like Leibniz, Goethe assumes that a preëstablished harmony exists between the two. Nature, he says, reflects herself "everywhere in a manner analogous to our mind."

The exact empiricists of the nineteenth century reckoned Goethe, on account of this attitude of his, among the representatives of the trend in natural philosophy upon which they looked back, in general, with contempt. But Goethe, in accordance with his nature and his means, attempted to make the precise individual observations without which science is not possible. True, he shrank from "boundless empiricism" and admitted that the single datum often perplexed him, and also that the observation of detail was not his forte. In practice he was wont to begin with a relatively small number of single observations, and then to proceed rapidly to simplifications and general formulations. He sought to grasp in the individual phenomenon the universal principle manifested in it, the "inner law," thereupon to revert from the contemplation of the whole to the observation of its parts. What underlies his researches is a world picture anticipated by his creative imagination; he tries to discover in reality this picture, as it hovers before his mental vision. Again and again Goethe expressed the opinion that a merely rationalizing research, which limits itself to a causal linking of phenomena, is no match for the gigantic organism of Nature.

The parts he then has in his hand,
But lacks, alas, the spirit-band.⁴

Whereas the modern scientist, when he wishes to explain a single phenomenon as resulting from its connection with something uni-

⁴ Dann hat er die Teil in seiner Hand, / Fehlt leider nur das geistlich Band. (*Urf Faust*, verse 369. Translation of W H van der Smuisen [Dutton, 1926].)

versal and regular, speaks of a hypothesis, Goethe ventures to assign to faith its place in the scientific picture of the world. Less than a month before his death he stated this to be his conviction: "We must learn to realize that what we have seen and recognized in the simplest forms must also be supposed and credited in the complex ones. For the simple conceals itself in the manifold, and this is the point where for me faith enters in, which is not the beginning but the end of all knowledge."⁵ As to his relation to the natural philosophy of his age, Goethe said that his own position occupied a middle ground between the view which leads "down from above" and the one which leads "up from below"; he calls his viewpoint "contemplation." To ascend from the real to the transcendental, to see God in Nature and Nature in God: this mode of contemplation, he said, was the basis of his entire experience. Like the romantic theorists, he is fond of using the "magic wand of analogy," without however surrendering at any time the standpoint of pure, precise observation in favor of poetic speculation. It is true that he wishes like Schelling to know the "bases" of a natural phenomenon, but always in such a way that he looks for them in the phenomena themselves. "Let no man look for anything back of the phenomena; they are themselves the teaching."⁶ When a contemporary scholar remarked that one might call Goethe's mode of thinking "objective" (*gegenständlich*), Goethe accepted this characterization with approval: such was indeed the case, he said, and his thinking did not separate itself from objects. Contemplation and thinking, thinking and contemplation, interpenetrated each other in his mind at all times and most intimately, in his poetry as well as in his scientific labors.

The world spirit does not appear to man directly. We can recognize it only "in its reflection, in the example or symbol, in single and related phenomena." Only in them is it present. Thus all the phenomena of Nature, including every single case, become a symbol of the Whole, which we can neither see nor grasp. Only when one thus conceives of the single phenomenon can one attain to the ideal goal of research into Nature, which consists in the attempt "to command

⁵ Wir müssen einsehen lernen, dass wir dasjenige, was wir im Einfachsten geschaut und erkannt, im Zusammengesetzten supponieren und glauben müssen. Denn das Einfache verbirgt sich im Mannigfaltigen, und da ist's, wo bei mir der Glaube eintritt, der nicht der Anfang, sondern das Ende alles Wissens ist. (Letter to Sulpiz Bousserée, February 25, 1832.)

⁶ Man suche nur nichts hinter den Phänomenen; sie selbst sind die Lehre. (JA 39:72.)

the Whole, to a certain extent, by means of contemplation." Thus that which is "evermore increasingly living" becomes for us the picture of the essence "of which we are not supposed to form a picture" (letter to Sulpiz Boisserée, June 27, 1826). If everything real is a simile of the Absolute which appears in it, it must ultimately suffice us to speak of the invisible interior of Nature in pictures and similes. But the point is to find suitable, appropriate similes. The most valuable ones, says Goethe, are those "which cover the object completely and seem to become identical with it."⁷

This grasping of the universal in the symbol of the individual phenomenon can only be successfully achieved when the worker's soul and mind are pure and calm. Nature speaks softly to us, and she answers only him who asks in the right way. More than that: properly speaking, only a spiritual competence of the rank of creative genius can cope with the creative mind in Nature. At any rate, only the totality of our inner powers is in a position to wrest Nature's secrets from her. Imagination, contemplation with eyes of the mind, creative intuition, i.e., the talents of the artist, must enter into activity and come to the aid of positive experience, if adequate insights are to be gained. For Nature herself (stated as early as the essay on Nature of 1781) is a genius and acts like an artist. Both isolating observation and analyzing reason have, undoubtedly, their inalienable rights in science; but they must enjoy harmonious interaction with "the imagination which strives toward the universal." There exists, remarks Goethe, such a thing as a "precise imagination," which has nothing to do with caprice or with the fantastic. Starting from the secure ground of an exact observation of the visible, it tries to advance to the invisible connections, which one can only divine, only imagine. No great natural scientist could be conceived of without this kind of precise imagination (conversation with Eckermann, January 27, 1830). Knowing, looking, divining, believing, these are all "feelers with which man gropes his way into the universe," and they must all work together if the investigator is to do justice to his difficult task.

Goethe said that as research worker he had no system. For Nature, he said, has none either. "She has and is life and sequence from an

⁷ . . . welche den Gegenstand decken und identisch mit ihm zu werden scheinen. (Letter to K. L. Knebel, February 21, 1821)

unknown center to an unknowable boundary.”⁸ But this freedom is not license. Nature creates according to fixed basic patterns, spiritual formative principles which Goethe calls “ideas.” When he compares the procedure of Nature with that of the artist, he is doing more than uttering a metaphor. What appears in man as the power of artistic production is of the same kind as the force which creates the forms of Nature. Goethe saw no disadvantage for his scientific research in the fact that he was a poet; he regarded a combination of artistic intuition and imagination with the methodical procedure of scientific observation as the highest guarantee of genuine apprehending. It is obvious that the so-called exact, experimental form of natural science, as it developed in the century following that of Goethe, would have nothing to do with such views. Even among the scholars of his own day, Goethe stirred up plenty of opposition, although there was at that time along with inductive research (and more than ever after the rise of romantic philosophy) a great speculative approach to Nature. Following the example of classical antiquity, philosophers had tried again and again to outline a picture of the organization of Nature as a whole. In Goethe’s day Kant was teaching that exact natural science, if it restricts itself to experience, cannot know the origin and the causes of the natural laws. That could be attained, he said, only by a pure, aprioristic cognition of Nature, a “metaphysics of Nature,” stating the laws to which Nature is subject, and thus forming a “Nature system” which must underlie all empiric research.

Later came interest in a methodical observation of natural phenomena, which was in constant rivalry with speculative science, and which did not triumph until the nineteenth century. Not before the middle of the seventeenth century had the age of exact science in the modern sense begun. In the eighteenth century, whose views and insights were Goethe’s point of departure, mechanistic and metaphysical modes of explanation had maintained themselves side by side. Against materialistic views, such as those of Pierre Bayle, Leibniz set up the claim that there was an all-embracing principle of the highest intelligence and power. Pope had said of the universe that Nature was its body, but God its soul. Goethe’s pantheistic faith epitomized the tradition of those views and modes of thinking for

⁸ Sie hat, sie ist Leben und Folge aus einem unbekannten Zentrum, zu einer nicht erkennbaren Grenze. (JA 39:342.)

which the realm of the real was "the living garment of the Deity." His research was not directed to that which is called explaining, not to the causal derivation of single phenomena, and least of all to the practical purpose of mastering the powers of Nature in order to exploit them, as modern science does in the service of technology. Goethe's concern was contemplation, the viewing of the eternal in the finite. In the flow of ever-changing phenomena he wanted to recognize that which was permanent, the traces of the God who seems to expand into the infinite and yet everywhere and always creates in accordance with law and order. "Shall the son not know his way about in his father's house?" (Jakob Böhme)

It seems that one can establish for Goethe the scientist the same affinity for classical antiquity that is so patent in his poetry and in his secular wisdom. A learned expert, Adolf Meyer, has pointed out that in both cases there is a general philosophic attitude in the conception of Nature which proceeds from the universal toward the particular. Just as little as the Ancients in their study of Nature does Goethe incline to the mechanistic thinking and the mathematical methods upon which modern science is based. From this follows his aversion to the causal mode of explanation, to all measuring and counting procedures. Goethe will not forsake the realm of that which can be visually conceived. Like the Ancients, he is at pains to grasp qualitative fundamentals and changes. That his doctrine of the primal phenomena is closely related to the Platonic theory of "ideas" has been remarked often enough.

The resistance and rejection which Goethe encountered among professional scientists caused him much vexation. "You wouldn't believe how many lifeless and life-hostile elements there are in science until you enter it yourself with seriousness and energy, and all through it, I feel, the scientists proper are animated more by a sophistic than by a truth-loving spirit."⁹ He said he thought a scientist capable of denying all his five senses if he did not wish to accept a new observation. Nobody would admit "that an idea, a concept, underlay the observation." The whole eighteenth century had been much too self-assured, he thought, and had prided itself "on a certain

⁹ Man glaubt nicht, wie viel Totes und Totendes in den Wissenschaften ist, bis man mit Ernst und Trieb selbst hineinkommt, und durchaus scheint mir die eigentlichen wissenschaftlichen Menschen mehr ein sophistischer als ein wahrheitsliebender Geist zu beleben. (Letter to Knebel, January 12, 1798.)

clear rationality." Whatever could not be immediately assured and explained had been rejected. He calls this type of scientist the empiricist: one who is content to observe precisely and to analyze the individual phenomenon. "In a peculiar way he is at home in the labyrinth of his facts, without seeking to find a thread which would lead him more swiftly from one end of it to the other."¹⁰ It is only late in life that Goethe recognizes the divergences between scientists to be unavoidable and irreconcilable, because every judgment follows from the premises, and each judgment starts from particular premises. At the very end of his life he remarked bitterly, "Had I never occupied myself with the natural sciences, I should never have come to know men."¹¹

Still more insulting seemed to him the ultimate fact that his labors were rejected *in toto* on the ground that a poet, and were he the greatest of poets, simply could not possess the gift of methodic research. "Nowhere would anyone concede that science and poetry could be reconciled."¹² It was no less insulting in his eyes when his discoveries were viewed as results of isolated "inspirations," i.e., as accidental, lucky finds. Of his doctrine of metamorphosis he says, "not by any momentary inspiration, nor unexpectedly and all at once, but by dint of a consistent endeavor have I finally come to so gratifying a result."¹³ This was the greatest agony, he said, "not to be understood when, after great toil and effort, one finally believes to have understood oneself and the object of one's study."¹⁴

¹⁰ Er ist in seinem Labyrinth auf eine eigene Weise zu Hause, ohne dass er sich um einen Faden bekümmerte, der schneller durch und durch fuhrte. (WA II:6-6.)

¹¹ Hatt' ich mich mit den Naturwissenschaften nicht abgegeben, so hätt' ich die Menschen nie kennen lernen. (Letter to K. F. Zelter, January 29, 1831.)

¹² Nirgends wollte man zugeben, dass Wissenschaft und Poesie vereinbar seien. (JA 39:323.)

¹³ Nicht durch eine momentane Inspiration, noch unvermutet und auf einmal, sondern durch ein folgerechtes Bemühen bin ich endlich zu einem so erfreulichen Resultate gelangt. (JA 39:316.)

¹⁴ . . . nicht verstanden zu werden, wenn man, nach grosser Bemühung und Anstrengung, sich endlich selbst und die Sache zu verstehen glaubt. (JA 39:325.)

Morphology

ONE MAY CALL GOETHE'S IDEAL OF SCIENCE AT ONCE ARROGANT AND MODEST. HE WAS CONVINCED THAT NATURE DENIES HERSELF TO "INCOMPETENT, BUNGLING persons," but reveals herself to the persistence of one who seeks with reverence. Even though "the Whole" may be made only for a god, he who asks in the right manner will get an answer. If the whole mystery remains inaccessible to man, that is well, for otherwise "our boredom and indifference would be such that we should not know what to do." The infinity of knowledge as a task makes the very act of achieving knowledge an infinite one. There are enough details from which the veil can be lifted. "Much is accessible to man, but much is not."¹ Mystery or secret (*Geheimnis*) is a word which occurs over and over in Goethe's utterances about Nature. She appears to be unfathomable, an immeasurable abyss, deep as the ocean, and monstrous her concealed interior, "which reveals itself in constant creation and destruction." Though a final store of incomprehensibility remain, still man cannot refrain from "so narrowing down the unexplorable as to be content and to concede his defeat."² Calmly and with pious resignation Goethe speaks thus, shortly before his death, of his life-long endeavor to get closer to Nature. Enough and more than enough had been his success therein. Before the ultimate, however, "the mysterious primal source of all things," man should bend the knee in worship. "The fairest happiness for a thinking man is to have explored the explorable and to revere in calmness the unexplorable."³ One of Goethe's favorite phrases is "open secret." In his *Märchen* we read that this, the open secret, is the most important of the great mysteries. One meaning of this is that Nature, "Mysterious even in open day,"⁴ will not allow her secrets to be wrested from her by

¹ Manches ist dem Menschen zugänglich, manches nicht. (Letter to C. D. von Büttel, May 3, 1827.)

² . . . das Unerforschliche so in die Enge zu treiben, bis er sich dabei begnügen und sich willig überwunden geben mag (Letter to H. W. F. Wackenroder, January 21, 1832.)

³ Das schönste Glück des denkenden Menschen ist, das Erforschliche erforscht zu haben und das Unerforschliche ruhig zu verehren. (JA 39:100.)

⁴ . . . geheimnisvoll am lichten Tag. (*Faust*, verse 672.)

force. But for the mind which looks at her in the right way, her inner essence lies revealed in her phenomena.

When we view the world around us
 Parts and whole must not confound us.
 Nought's internal, nought's external,
 Each is other, both eternal.
 Swiftly seize then, here revealed,
 Sacred secret, ne'er concealèd.⁵

The secret of which Goethe speaks here is the organizing spiritual principle, "the unknown but divined law," by which Nature brings forth and molds her forms.

For it was this upon which Goethe's contemplation of Nature concentrated: "the world of the eye, which is completely taken up by shape and color."⁶ His research, in so far as it dealt with organisms, was directed to the shape, its distinctions, its formation and transformation. It was *morphology*. Goethe had an equal share with Georges Cuvier and K. E. von Baer in founding the science whose purpose it is to discover the natural laws governing the shape of living beings and their development. Plants and animals interest him as "a living stuff which progressively develops itself out of itself." Life is a unity of substance and form; everything living exists only as form (shape). But nothing persists unchanged. The Deity, he says, delights in the changefulness of forms. How Being and Becoming, Unity and Freedom, manifest themselves simultaneously in organisms, how in the manifold, the individually distinct, a universal norm becomes apparent, and in the midst of incessant transformation a constant is revealed, which however only persists as long as there is change—this is the basic phenomenon which Goethe wishes to understand as far as it is possible to do so. His research is directed to the problem of making comprehensible, by means of a hypothesis, the way in which the transformation, the *metamorphosis* of organisms proceeds. Nature has no system. Her eternal development would lose itself in the infinite if the "centrifugal force" were not counteracted by a

⁵ Musset im Naturbetrachten / Immer eins wie alles achten: / Nichts ist drinnen, nichts ist draussen; / Denn was innen, das ist aussen. / So ergreift, ohne Saumnis, / Heilig öffentlich Geheimnis. (JA 2:249.)

⁶ . . . die Welt des Auges, die durch Gestalt und Farbe erschöpft wird. (Letter to Schiller, November 15, 1796.)

"centripetal force." The element of constancy in change, the morphological principle, is not rigid but "living," at once liberty and law, a "mobile order." The method by which Goethe seeks to come upon the trail of this law consists in the comparison of forms which resemble each other. He seeks the common factors, the structural plan which is everywhere at the bottom of things, the *type* according to which they are all built. Now he speaks of "idea," now of "primal image." But even this latter he would think of not only as concept: he would conceive of it visually as a schematically simplified form, in accordance with the contemplative manner of his cognition. This schematic image serves then as a thread "along which we grope our way through the labyrinth of living shapes."⁷

Goethe's morphological research and Schiller's aesthetic speculation are the beginning of that typological mode of viewing things which later on, and especially in Germany, played so great a role in the investigation of the "mental sciences" and the history of the arts. The method consists in a procedure whereby the basic features are lifted out, so that an ideal *schema* results, an ideal *type*, which does not occur in the real world. The purpose of this abstraction, however, is to illuminate more plainly everything individual in the phenomenon, and make it understandable. What Goethe calls "type" is not completely realized in any single plant or animal. "No organic being corresponds wholly to the idea which underlies it; behind each one the higher idea lies concealed."⁸ It is true that all are contained in the primal image, all formed according to the type; but each individual being is an independent variant of the integral formative principle. This principle is the eternal essence in the flux of the constantly developing shapes, the permanent element in the incessant Becoming of things, "the mysterious and invincible model, in which all life must move."⁹

If the "type" is the organizing principle, the higher nature, in the sphere of organic beings, in the inorganic field Goethe calls the analogous thing *Urphänomen* (primal phenomenon). One may speak so,

⁷ . . . woran wir uns durch das Labyrinth der lebendigen Gestalten durchhelfen. (WA II:6:279.)

⁸ Kein organisches Wesen ist ganz der Idee, die zugrunde liegt, entsprechend; hinter jedem steckt die höhere Idee. (Biedermann, IV 267.)

⁹ . . . geheime und unüberwindliche Vorbild, in welchem sich alles Leben bewegen muss. (Letter to Johannes Müller, November 24, 1829.)

he remarks, "because there is nothing higher than they [primal phenomena] among visible things, but they on the other hand are wholly suited to permit us to descend from them, step by step, to the commonest instance of daily experience."¹⁰ Magnetism, for example, is such a basic phenomenon. It can serve as a symbol for all single phenomena of polarity, because in it the idea manifests itself with least distortion—a universal dualism (as Schelling says) which in physics is not derived from anything but must be presupposed as basic condition. In the field of optical phenomena, the "primary and vast opposition of light and darkness" is the primal phenomenon. Goethe said that this was the highest and ultimate thing to which the investigator can attain and that it should be respected as the boundary of our knowledge of Nature. "He should not seek anything beyond it." This is the threshold of the "realm of the Mothers."

No way! Into the untrodden, Not to be trodden . . .¹¹

Comparative Anatomy

GOETHE'S LABORS IN NATURAL SCIENCE BELONG ALTOGETHER TO HIS WEIMAR PERIOD. THE PRACTICAL TASKS WHICH GREW OUT OF HIS INTEREST IN THE government of the little country had the simultaneous effect of setting his mind in motion. The administration of the mines in Ilmenau led him into problems of geology. Or again, his intention of functioning as teacher of anatomy in the Weimar School of Design compelled him to study anatomy in a systematic way. As a student at Strasbourg he had only cast a fleeting glance at this subject. Now he undertook to instruct himself more thoroughly under the anatomist Justus Christian Loder in Jena. Interest in J. K. Lavater's physiognomic works had already led him to occupy himself with human and animal skulls. He had come to realize "how the bones are the

¹⁰ . . . weil nichts in der Erscheinung über ihnen liegt, sie aber dagegen völlig geeignet sind, dass man stufenweise . . . von ihnen herab bis zu dem gemeinsten Falle der täglichen Erfahrung niedersteigen kann. (*Farbenlehre*, § 175, *WA* II:1:72.)

¹¹ Kein Weg! Ins Unbetretene, / Nicht zu Betretende . . . (*Faust*, verse 6222.)

fortresses of morphology and embrace the properties of a creature." And so his interest was concentrated upon the theory of the bones, upon osteology, when he began to work systematically. He treated this subject from the beginning, however, not as a detached specialty, but "as a text to which all life and all human attributes can be attached."¹ The concept that the skeletons of man and the other mammals were constructed on the same principle, and hence that a common type was at the bottom of both, he seems to have acquired intuitively to start with. By comparing human and animal skulls with each other, he succeeded in 1784 in making a discovery which gave him "unspeakable joy." He found that one could prove the existence in the human skull of the so-called intermaxillary bone, which lies between the two main sections of the upper jaw, and in which the upper incisors are imbedded. This bone is still recognizable in the human fetus, but in the adult the sutures which separate it from the upper jawbones disappear. In the absence of this "famous bone" the contemporary scientists saw the most important anatomic difference between man and the animals. For Goethe it was an intolerable idea that a bone which all other vertebrates possess could be missing in a single species. "All our concepts of conformity in structure," he remarked, would be nullified by such a gap. Nature could not act like that. What was thus demanded of the human skull in theory, Goethe succeeded in demonstrating as a fact. At the same time he showed that this bone is differently formed in every animal species, corresponding to the shape of the teeth as a whole and the kind of food the animal required. Even though the intermaxillary bone in man had coalesced with the upper jaw and could therefore only be distinguished with difficulty, it was there all the same, even if no longer in detached independence. Goethe's conviction of the homogeneity of biological organization, of the "consistency of the osteological type," had been confirmed; the human skeleton lacked none of the parts of which the skeletons of all other vertebrates were composed.

Of a true "discovery," to be sure, we may not speak in connection with Goethe's find. In a polemic directed against Galen, the Belgian anatomist Andreas Vesalius had described the *os intermaxillare*

¹. . . als einen Text, woran sich alles Leben und alles Menschliche anhängen lässt. (Letter to J. K. Lavater, November 14, 1781.)

in man back in the sixteenth century, and other scientists had confirmed its occurrence. But this knowledge had been lost to sight in Goethe's day. The evident fact is that Goethe made his discovery, which in a historical sense was a rediscovery, independently by means of his own visual procedure, before he had studied the scientific literature on the subject. At about the same time the French scientist, Felix Vicq d'Azyr, upheld the same view, without any possibility of Goethe's knowing of it. Moreover, this view was so contrary to the universal teaching of the day that even then it was rejected. The little treatise which Goethe wrote in 1786 won the approval of only a few scientists. That is probably the reason why he did not publish it in his collected writings on morphology until 1820. At the very outset of his scientific labors he had to find out in this way how dangerous it is when the layman "dares to contradict the masters of the guild, or even, what is still more foolish, thinks to convince them."

These very first studies of his give Goethe a share in the trend toward morphology by which in those days the budding science of comparative anatomy was dominated. This was precisely the trend which agreed with Goethe's own fondness for genetic relationships. To understand what had resulted by studying the process of its origination, this seemed to him everywhere the surest way to take. "*Voir venir les choses est le meilleur moyen de les expliquer*" (Turpin). By means of the comparison of skulls he attempted to determine the structure of man in relation to that of the animals which were closest to man, and thus to reach an ideal "type," a unified image, in which all the possible shapes of vertebrates should be comprised.

Another morphological idea at which Goethe arrived by means of his osteological studies was the vertebrate theory of the skull. While he was contemplating a sheep skull which he had found in 1790 on the shore of the Lido, during his second sojourn in Italy, the thought came to him that the skulls of mammals have developed by metamorphosis from vertebrae. The exact confirmation of this intuitive, "visual" insight, however, proved to be so difficult that Goethe gave up the idea of working it out for publication. That deprived him of the glory of his discovery. In 1807 Lorenz Oken, who at that time began his professorship in anatomy at Jena, set up a very similar theory, which however was permeated with scientific

speculations and had blossomed out into a "bone philosophy." Not until ten years later did Goethe publish his find. In this case too much vexation grew out of it for him, especially as he did not get along well with Oken. The vertebra theory as such played an important role in nineteenth century research. Since T. H. Huxley criticized it in 1858, it has been regarded as invalidated in the formulation given it by Goethe. But a scientific hypothesis which has been able to stimulate research down to the present day has surely not been useless.

Goethe's morphological views regarding the skeleton of the vertebrates were put together by him in 1790 in a fragmentary document entitled *Versuch über die Gestalt der Tiere* ("Essay on the Shapes of Animals"). The principal idea in this essay is that of the simple *schema*, the type to which, as to all primal images, all the skeletons of mammals occurring in Nature can be reduced. Goethe knows very well how difficult it will always be to construct by the comparison of single forms one general structure which would fit all genera and species. For the type is a Proteus, "which can hardly be seized even partially, and then only in contradictions, as it were." But Goethe is convinced "that living creatures most similar to each other" must issue "from a single formative principle" and "that a certain universal image underlies all these individual shapes." In the greatest detail he finally presents his views in his *Allgemeine Einleitung in die vergleichende Anatomie* ("General Introduction to Comparative Anatomy"), written in 1795 but not printed till 1820. Aside from the idea of a primal type, the most important problem discussed is this: how it comes about that every single creature has the smoothed and balanced unity of an organic whole. When Goethe contemplates a marine animal on the Lido, he cries out in admiration, "What an excellent and splendid thing is a living being! How well adapted to its condition, how true, how real!"² The organism seems, as Schopenhauer expresses it, to be based entirely upon *one* fundamental idea, so that one has the impression that this form was absolutely necessary just as it is, and could by no means be otherwise.

In this adaptation lies at the same time the beauty of the forms. Goethe seeks to explain the harmonious relation between the various parts of any living body by the law—which he was the first to formu-

² Was ist doch ein Lebendiges für ein köstliches, herrliches Ding! wie abgemessen zu seinem Zustande, wie wahr, wie seiend! (JA 26:104.)

late—of compensation or balance of growth. Every animal, he assumes, possesses by nature a limited, unalterable sum of morphological possibilities. "These bounds no god can extend, and Nature respects them." No creature can "escape from its mass." If one part of a body is developed to a special degree, then from another part in compensation "something must be taken away, and conversely." The serpent has an uncommonly long body, but on the other hand no arms and feet. This law of economic compensation prevents the formation of monstrosities of shape; it is "the old law of organic Nature, so infinitely precious to me, that there can be no surplus at one spot unless a deficiency arises at another."³

Goethe tries to account for both the origin of the shapes of organisms and their morphological alteration by the operation of opposite forces. From within, the shape which is potentially given in the type strives for realization in ever new variations, a process which is regulated by the law of compensation; but from without the conditions of environment (atmosphere, climate, soil, etc.) operate contrariwise.

Thus the figure determines the mode of life of the creature,
And this manner of living affects in turn every figure
Mightily too . . .⁴

By virtue of its organization and its shape, the living creature is the result of this polarity of forces: the immanent formative law working from within, which is given in the type, and the modifying external conditions. The assumption that this external influence is not productive, not constituent, but only limiting, separates Goethe's theories from those with which the scientists of the nineteenth century explained the origin of certain properties of living organisms. They are mechanists, one and all, and assume that the inner forces are set in motion by external stimuli. For Goethe a living being is not "built and brought forth from without," but is organized by an inner principle. "The deciding shape is as it were the inner nucleus, which forms itself differently by virtue of the determination of the

³ . . . das alte, mir so unendlich werthe Gesetz der organischen Natur: dass an einem Orte kein Ueberfluss sein kann, wenn am andern nicht ein Mangel entsteht. (Letter to Knebel, February 26, 1798.)

⁴ Also bestimmt die Gestalt die Lebensweise des Thieres, / Und die Weise, zu leben, sie wirkt auf alle Gestalten / Mächtig zurück . . . (JA 2:250.)

external element.”⁵ In general, in Goethe’s viewing of Nature, a mode of seeing is revealed which is basically different from the modern one. Modern science strives to understand the world “as a mechanism of strict mathematical consistency” (Georg Simmel). For its adherents, the true task of science is the analysis of the single object, the explanation of its constitution and its function in accordance with the laws of causality. Goethe on the contrary starts out from an intuitive conception of Nature as an entirety permeated by powers subordinate to law. His main endeavor is to grasp the single phenomenon both within and from its connection with this entirety, and to understand it then in its individuality. He believes, as he says himself, in the soul-endowment (*Beseeltheit*) of matter in the sense of the “hylozoism” of the Ancients, convinced that Nature proceeds in accordance with ideas. To repeat: his endeavor is directed to finding the idea in the experience, i.e., in the phenomenon. In the concrete shape the conceptual opposition of within and without is annulled:

For that is Nature’s way throughout:

What held within, now holds without.⁶

The properties which the eye perceives are traced back to the invisible inner principle, whose realization is the organism. Here there is no question of causality. He who conceives of a happening as the effect of another which precedes it in time merely establishes a historic interpretation, without interpreting the what and the how. The type is something different. It relates to the biological species, not in the manner of cause and effect, but like a theme with variations, like a general idea and its individual specifications.

As to the nature of Goethe’s positive achievement in the field of comparative anatomy, the scholars of our day have expressed divergent, even contrary opinions. We will reproduce here the view of an expert who goes further than others in his commendation. The anatomist Wilhelm Lubosch⁷ says that Goethe raised comparative anatomy to the rank of an exact science by introducing the homologous mode

⁵ Die entschiedene Gestalt ist gleichsam der innere Kern, welcher durch die Determination des äussern Elementes sich verschieden bildet. (JA 39:131.)

⁶ Denn das ist der Natur Gehalt, / Dass aussen gilt, was innen galt. (JA 4:93.)

⁷ See Lubosch’s statements in: *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, vol. 6 (1919), p. 157; *Biologisches Zentralblatt*, vol. 38 (1918), p. 374, *Handbuch der vergleichenden Anatomie der Wirbeltiere*, Herausgegeben von L. Bolk u. a., vol. 1 (Berlin, 1931), pp. 25-26.

of study. He adds that Goethe, to be sure, had not known the word "homology," but he did know the thing so designated—the theory of the close correspondence of organs according to the place they occupy in the animal organism and the importance they have in it, even if they differ as to shape and function (as e.g., the lung of mammals and the air bladder of fish, the human arm and the bird wing are homologous organs). The concept of homology, says Lubosch, is the only one in the field of comparative anatomy which was taken over from the "idealistic" epoch into that of Darwinism. On it is based the exact method of this science. Etienne Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire and Sir Richard Owen are regarded as its real founders. But Goethe, as aforesaid, had already developed it. When this mode of study had to defend its claim to justification in the celebrated controversy between Geoffroy and Georges Cuvier in 1830, Goethe took cognizance of the fact with great satisfaction and wrote the last of his scientific essays on it. He hailed Geoffroy as the champion of his own ideas, a "powerful ally" in the "synthetic mode of dealing with Nature": for he too had endeavored to establish the "mysterious kinship" of living creatures. But in Cuvier Goethe saw the prototype of the scientist who distinguishes, describes, and arranges the single phenomena, but to whom the Whole remains incomprehensible. "What is after all our entire intercourse with Nature if we merely deal in an analytic manner with single material parts and do not feel the breathing of the spirit which prescribes for every part its proper direction and restrains or sanctions every extravagance by means of an immanent law."⁸ Analysis and synthesis in science, he said to Eckermann, are everywhere like two inseparable functions of life. Everywhere we can and should merely proceed "from the whole to the parts, from the parts to the whole." This, he said, was like inhaling and exhaling.

⁸ Was ist auch im Grunde aller Verkehr mit der Natur, wenn wir auf analytischem Wege bloss mit einzelnen materiellen Teilen uns zu schaffen machen, und wir nicht das Atmen des Geistes empfinden, der jedem Teile die Richtung vorschreibt und jede Ausschweifung durch ein inwohnendes Gesetz bündigt oder sanktioniert. (Conversation with Johann Peter Eckermann, August 2, 1830.)

Botany

ALONG WITH HIS GEOLOGICAL WORK GOETHE HAD ALSO BEGUN STUDIES IN THE FIELD OF BOTANY. HE HAS HIMSELF NARRATED THE HISTORY OF THESE labors in the essay, *Geschichte meines botanischen Studiums* ("History of my Study of Botany"). His transfer to Weimar brought it about that for the first time he lived in an "atmosphere of agriculture, forest, and gardens." He had to participate in the administration of the country, and also pay attention to the types of trees and plants which grew in the great forests of the Thuringian mountains. This new practical experience set his scientific speculation in motion. He studied the works of Carolus Linnaeus, his *Philosophia botanica* (1750), his *Systema plantarum* (1779/80), and others of his botanical writings. On the way to Karlsbad in 1785 Goethe began an extended study of the flowering plants, aided by an expert who accompanied him. At this time and later his interest was restricted to the annuals occurring in Europe.

The research of that day had as yet hardly progressed beyond Linnaeus' kind of botanizing. In it one found the world of plants in order, divided systematically into classes and subclasses, with the introduction of a description and designation for each individual item. The establishment of a system of plant life—a favorite procedure ever since the seventeenth century—had in this case been perfected by a genius at systematic thinking. One could easily identify every plant in accordance with this practical system. What remained to be done, however, was to establish an order from the point of view of relationships. Linnaeus had indeed demanded such a natural system, but he himself had not made it. His belief that every species was independently created and unalterable blocked for him and his adherents the way to the concept of an order based upon an evolutionary relationship. Only when men began to study not one isolated property but all the properties of a plant, and to explore its organization, were they on the road to the overthrow of the old schematism. It was in this research trend, which was interested in

"the ordering of plants by families in an ascending, gradually developing advance," that Goethe took part. That he had learned "infinitely much" from Linnaeus he reaffirmed in his old age. Apart from Shakespeare and Spinoza, he said, no historic personality had influenced him so much. But botany, he added, was just the thing he had not learned of the great man. Goethe's own views clarified the more rapidly by virtue of his opposition to Linnaeus' schematism. He too wanted to obtain a great comprehensive view of the plant world, but according to other principles and with different results. "Separating and counting were not in my nature."

There was however a common ground in the mode of study and in the concentration upon definite problems, as when Goethe based his classification upon the shape of the plant, upon its formal image. Linnaeus had done that too. It was in Linnaeus' thinking also that Goethe found the idea of metamorphosis, although it was playing a great role, even at that time, in other areas of biology. A negative agreement, finally, consisted in the fact that Linnaeus too took no interest in an anatomy which investigated the inner structure of things, or in a physiology which was concerned with the vital functions. When Goethe at a later time claimed that he had "invented" the metamorphosis of plants, this statement had validity only in the sense that he had previously pressed forward to the very threshold of this idea, and that it now emerged into clarity as a result of his study of Linnaeus' writings. "For that which is in the air and is demanded by the age can arise in a hundred heads at once without any borrowing by one from the other."¹ J. J. Rousseau was also among Goethe's teachers. It was in Rousseau, according to Goethe's own assurances, that he had found confirmation of his endeavor to divide the vegetable kingdom into families.

This field of Goethe's production was also influenced decisively by his sojourn in Italy. Even before starting out on that journey, "the enormous kingdom" had become "simplified" for him, and he had visualized "in his soul" the basic form, the primal plant (*Urpflanze*), out of which Nature had playfully developed the multiplicity of plant life. The new plants which he got to know in the southern

¹ Denn was in der Luft ist und was die Zeit fordert, das kann in hundert Köpfen auf einmal entspringen, ohne dass einer dem andern abborgt. (Letter to Zelter, November 7, 1816.)

land, "the abundance of unfamiliar vegetation," which he encountered first in the botanical garden in Padua, then in Rome and in Sicily—these impressions brought to maturity the ideas which had begun to form in him. To his Weimar friends he reports joyfully in June 1787 that he is now "quite close to the secret of plant generation and organization," and that he has already grasped with clarity the basic concept of his metamorphosis theory, the primal plant, this sensually pictured, supersensual "magic form." After his return to Weimar he attacked the task of "reducing the manifold particular phenomena of the glorious world-garden to one universal, simple principle."² In 1790 appeared his *Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* ("Attempt to Explain the Metamorphosis of Plants"), a pamphlet of eighty-six pages. It was the first scientific monograph that Goethe printed, and it has remained down to the present day that one among his scientific works which has found the most recognition on the part of professional scientists. He also set forth his doctrine in poetic language, in the poem entitled *Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen*.

All have a similar form, yet none is the same as the other,
So this chorus of growth shows a mysterious law.³

In this case, too, a predecessor can be found, Kaspar Friedrich Wolff, who as early as 1768 had set forth similar views. But of that Goethe knew nothing when he wrote his *Versuch*. The British botanist Agnes Arber, who has published a translation of Goethe's treatise (*Goethe's Botany*, 1946), calls it "one of the minor classics of botany." One should not, she warns, take it as a scientific treatise, but as the presentation of a concatenation of ideas whose material basis was already given. Goethe's achievement she finds to lie in the fact that he had combined these single ideas into an organic whole. Linnaeus had distinguished a host of organs in the flowering plants and designated them by special names. But Goethe conceived of all the vegetal parts with the exception of the stem and the root, that is, all the subsidiary organs, as successive permutations of a basic organ

² . . . die mannigfaltigen, besondern Erscheinungen des herrlichen Weltgartens auf ein allgemeines, einfaches Prinzip zurückzuführen. (JA 39:318.)

³ Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich, und keine gleicht der andern; / Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz. (JA 2:247.)

which he calls "leaf." Here, he says, "the true Proteus [lies] hidden." It is always the same organ, he contends, which develops from the simple to the complex.

Always changing, firm persisting,
Near and far and far and near,
Thus in forming and transforming—
To your wonder I am here.⁴

"In his mind's eye" he beholds the idea of "the original identity of all the vegetal parts"; this constitutes the basic concept of his theory, whereby he interprets the various forms and the manner of their origination.

Weighing truth and error in Goethe's labors, the distinguished botanist Adolf Hansen came to the conclusion that Goethe's theory of the metamorphosis of plants had led to a correct conception of organic development in the vegetable kingdom, and that hitherto it had maintained its claim to be the only tenable theory in this field.⁵

Goethe and Darwin

DOES GOETHE, WITH HIS THEORY OF THE METAMORPHOSIS OF PLANTS AND ANIMALS, BELONG WITH THE FORERUNNERS OF THE MODERN EVOLUTIONARY theory as formulated by Charles Darwin? Darwin himself called Goethe a path-maker, and Ernst Haeckel went so far as to declare Goethe's idea to be of "equal value" with the hereditary theory. The battle on this ground has broken out anew over and over; but a final decision which could have been accepted by all parties has never been achieved. At least men have come to see that it is not so easy to claim Goethe as one member of the family tree of the Darwinists, as Haeckel's uncritical enthusiasm had pictured him.

⁴ Immer wechselnd, fest sich haltend, / Nah und fern und fern und nah, / So gestaltend, umgestaltend— / Zum Erstaunen bin ich da. (JA 2:246.)

⁵ *Goethes Metamorphose der Pflanzen* (Giessen, 1907), and *Goethes Morphologie* (Giessen, 1919).

True, there are some few passages in Goethe's scientific writings which sound as if he had come close to the basic idea of the theory of evolution. His diary registers in September 1797 a conversation with the Tübingen professor K. F. Kielmeyer, in which the hypothesis was discussed "that the higher organisms in their development advance by a few stages which leave the others behind." Later on one occasion he says that the "fossilized bull" must be regarded as a "lost ancestral race," from which the cattle living today have descended. Lamarck's epoch-making work, *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809), in which the view was expressed that new species have developed by mutation out of the already existing ones, and especially the higher species out of the lower, is nowhere mentioned by Goethe. If he was acquainted with it, he evidently did not take it seriously. Another important work, the *Zoonomia* (1794) of Erasmus Darwin, he mentions only in passing. In his writings on botany he reveals himself rather as an adherent of the theory of the persistence of species.

Anyone who has understood Goethe's morphological thinking and seeing cannot consider it difficult to find a solution for this mooted problem. In the circumstance that there has been so much dispute about it he will merely see a new proof of the difficulty which modern scientists, who are accustomed to Darwinistic ideas, have in understanding the symbolic character of the Goethean concepts "primal phenomenon" (*Urbänomen*) and "type." Goethe does not pursue natural history, but the phenomenology of natural forms. He is not interested in the historic process whereby the now existing species have developed out of lower forms of life. Of this problem he would probably have remarked that it belongs among the unknowable things.

The temporal starting point of the evolutionary process, as Darwin conceived of it, is the "stem form" from which the later organisms developed. Morphological similarity, however, has nothing to do with real kinship. Here it is not a question of an ascent from a stem form, but of the transmutation (or variation) of a primal form. In the type a number of variations are potentially given, which are probably not unlimited, but whose multiplicity is incalculable. After producing the primal form, Nature brings forth, as it were in sport, ever new varieties. But not in such a way that each new species derives from the last previous one, which also precedes it immediately in a

morphological sense. The relation between type and variant corresponds rather to that between the special case and the general law. The type "comprehends" within itself all the single cases. In 1823 Goethe printed in his series *Zur Morphologie* ("On Morphology") the essay of the young botanist Ernst Meyer and commended it "as a witness to pure community [between him and Goethe] of meaning and mind." In this essay we read that it is only possible to speak symbolically of a metamorphosis of species: it was impossible that one species could issue from another one. "For nothing interrupts the connection of the sequential in Nature." Such was Goethe's view as well.

There are other differences between Goethe's view and the modern theory of evolution. Darwin thinks that higher species have developed out of lower ones; in general, he explains the origin of more highly organized beings by selection, and this process itself he conceives of as a mechanical one, which can be derived entirely from natural causes such as adaptation, survival of the fittest individuals, and sexual selection in breeding. But even in this case Darwin does not assume that a purposeful intelligence is at work. For him there is no ideal goal to which this process, which goes on as an endless causal sequence, is directed. Chance throws certain organisms into certain life situations, and thereby sets in motion the mechanical process which is activated by chemico-physical forces. Goethe too thinks in genetic terms. He too will understand that-which-is as something which has become, will understand the result from the process of its origination. He also knows that Nature can attain to her productions only in the course of connected efforts. *Rien ne se fait tout d'un coup* (Leibniz).

The basic idea of the evolutionary theory is that the organisms living today have originated little by little out of a relatively simple primal form in a gradual ascent. This idea had been put forth as early as the eighteenth century by G. L. L. de Buffon, K. F. Wolff, and also by Immanuel Kant (in his *Kritik der Urteilkraft*, §80). Only that up to Darwin's time no one had succeeded in explaining, in a manner which would satisfy mechanistic thinking, the process of the ascent, the origin of higher organisms. Goethe had a view of this matter and gave expression to it; but it is of such a nature that even in this respect he is not an adherent of the modern theory of evolution,

but confronts it in an isolated position of his own. Nature, he says, brings forth from not many "basic maxims" her multiple forms, varying to an infinite extent the simple phenomena by upward intensification (*Steigerung*). The process of mutation, then, does not run on an even track. In the course of metamorphosis, of development, a being of like kind and like value does not take the place of the organism which was previously in existence. Everywhere in Nature Goethe finds a force at work which gives to the process of mutation an upward direction toward an organic refinement and perfectionment. In all living things this spiritual potency of an "ever-striving ascent" is at work. So the structural plan of the realm of Nature reveals itself as a sequence which obtains its coherence and its standard from this immanent urge "upward." Nature has ascended "as on a ladder" by way of the higher mammals to man. In man "the animal properties are perfected for higher purposes." But with this Nature is not at an end. She will never be at an end; for in her "inspirations" she is as inexhaustibly rich as the genius of the artist. In a conversation Goethe is said to have remarked, "Who knows whether all of mankind is not just another throw toward a higher goal?" What Goethe means by "upward intensification" (*Steigerung*) has nothing to do with mechanical efficiency, with selection and adaptation, with utility in the sense of fitness for life. For him it is a question of an original tendency, immanent in Nature, which cannot be derived from other forces or connections, cannot be causally explained.

But though Goethe was no forerunner of Darwin's theory, in another respect he appears to be closer to the evolutionists of the nineteenth century. Like them he is a resolute opponent of every teleological interpretation of Nature. Only that Goethe arrived at this view along entirely different roads and bases it on totally different presuppositions. Even before he had acquired by means of his own research a clear and positive picture of Nature organization he found himself, by reading Spinoza, confirmed in the opinion that it was absurd to reckon with any "final causes." In the first draft of a *Vergleichungslehre* ("Theory of Comparison"; 1792), he argues against the assumption "that any living being was brought forth for the sake of certain purposes directed outward, and that its shape had been determined therefor by an intentional primal force." He

added that it was a trivial piece of anthropocentric thinking in man to regard himself as the ultimate purpose of creation and to estimate things by the measure of their usefulness to him. "Because he uses and can use things, of course it follows that they were made in order that he might use them."¹ Thus in naïve vanity man calls a plant which he cannot use a "weed"; and yet it is like other living things "a child of great and universal Nature." What man values most highly in himself, intentional and purposeful actions and effects, he also ascribes to Nature. And so he accustoms himself to giving "to all things an inner determination outward." It would be more correct, says Goethe, to view the original force in Nature as "conditioned." Nature forms as well "from without as toward without, from within as toward within." The fish, for example, is certainly not created *for* the water; but the element which we call water is the necessary condition for the production of fish by Nature. The whole of the vegetable and animal kingdoms we must regard "as one great element, in which one generation, if it does not originate on and by another, maintains itself so."² One may not confuse relationships and connections of this kind with missions and purposes.

Just as the whole of Nature is a living organism, which has cause and effect within itself and may not be viewed in the light of utility or efficiency, so every single living being also exists as a world complete in itself and for its own sake. Every being is "its own purpose," adjusted to its condition, and physiologically perfect in such a way that one could not imagine it different either in detail or as a whole. It possesses the organs which it needs in order to be able to exist under the conditions for which it is made. To this extent, i.e., "toward within," it is efficiently organized. But one may not premise the effects of single organs as purposes, one may not ask what purpose an organ is supposed to serve and then explain its make-up from this assumed purpose. An organism is shaped in all its parts into an entirety from within; it is not brought into being by external influences. "One will not assert that a bull was given horns so that he could thrust with them, but one will inquire as to *how* he could have horns with

¹ Weil er die Sachen braucht und brauchen kann, so folget daraus: sie seien hervorgebracht, dass er sie brauche. (JA 39:128.)

² . . . als ein grosses Element, wo ein Geschlecht auf dem andern und durch das andere, wo nicht entsteht, doch sich erhält. (JA 39:132.)

which to thrust.”³ This “how” leads to a morphological, not a teleological explanation. To the “teacher of utility” Goethe presents this objection: if the bull has horns in order to defend himself, why does the sheep have none? “And, if it does have any, why are they curled around its ears so that they do it no good?” In the same conversation (with Eckermann, February 20, 1831) Goethe says that the naïve teleologist reveres a God who as a thoughtful householder gives the cattle their fodder and man his food, but that he (Goethe) is worshipping a god “who has put into the world such a productive force that if only the millionth part of it is activated the world will swarm with creatures, so that war, pestilence, flood, and fire will be unable to make headway against them.”⁴ While Goethe says ironically of the cheerful philosophers of antiquity, of Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen, that they attributed to Nature “a most delightful common sense,” he praises Kant for understanding the production of Nature, as of art, as a free, purposeless working “from within outward.” In Kant’s view, “the products of these two infinite worlds existed for their own sake, and things that stood side by side might well be *for* each other but not intentionally *because* of each other.” Again and again Goethe rejects “the sad makeshift of final causes.” Like Spinoza, he regards them as *figmenta humana*. The search for first beginnings and the reasons for them he thrusts from him as unscientific.

The mountain-mass meets nobly mute the sky;
I do not ask from whence, do not ask why.⁵

To him Nature is an artist. “Her working is always vital, excessive, and prodigal.”⁶ Without any pitiful teleological expediency she follows her own great, inexhaustible inspirations and brings forth within a living entirety organized according to well-regulated connections individual creatures, each one of which has its existence from within itself, its value within itself.

³ Man wird nicht behaupten, einem Stier seien die Hörner gegeben, dass er stosse, sondern man wird untersuchen, *wie* er Hörner haben könne, um zu stossen. (JA 39:144.)

⁴ Und, wenn es welche hat, warum sind sie ihm um die Ohren gewickelt, so dass sie ihm zu nichts dienen? . . . der eine solche Produktionskraft in die Welt gelegt hat, dass wenn nur der millionste Teil davon ins Leben tritt, die Welt von Geschöpfen wummelt, so dass Krieg, Pest, Wasser und Brand ihr nichts anzuhaben vermögen.

⁵ Gebirgesmasse bleibt mir edel-stumm, / Ich frage nicht woher? und nicht warum? (*Faust*, verse 10095.)

⁶ Sie wirkt ewig lebendig, überflüssig und verschwenderisch. (Letter to Zelter, August 13, 1831.)

But this view, and the consequent rejection of any explanation proceeding from a primitive idea of efficiency, does not make Goethe, all the same, a forerunner of the antiteleologists of the nineteenth century. For the latter condemn efficiency because they will not admit that in Nature a spiritual element resembling reason is at work. They admit only "natural" causes, working mechanically from without, which are given by the accident of the life situation. That one excluded efficiency and put blind necessity in the place of efficiently operating final causes—this constituted the greatest advance, in the opinion of Emil Du Bois-Reymond, which scientific thinking had made in the nineteenth century. But Goethe believes that in creative Nature, what Spinoza calls *natura naturans*, there is an indwelling rationality which gives to every creature "purposefulness from within." In the *Geschichte der Farbenlehre* ("History of the Theory of Colors"; 1810), Goethe rejects the mechanistic interpretation of Nature which had come forward during the Renaissance. At that time, he contends, when the teleological mode of explanation was excluded, men had taken from Nature her intelligence, but had not had the courage to ascribe to her in its stead a higher intellectual competence, which Goethe calls rationality (*Vernunft*). "And ultimately she was left without a mind. What they demanded of her was technical, mechanical services, and in the end men only found her conceivable and comprehensible in this sense."⁷ In Goethe's doctrine of metamorphosis, laws are inner principles of spiritual nature, constructive "ideas," according to and out of which efficiently organized living beings are produced. This view separates him most decidedly from the mechanists of the nineteenth century, with whom he agrees only in the rejection of a teleological interpretation of creative Nature. Goethe shares with them the endeavor "to view the productions of Nature in and of themselves, without reference to usefulness or efficiency" and "without any relation to their original creator, merely as living entirety."

⁷ Und sie blieb zuletzt geistlos liegen. Was man von ihr verlangte, waren technische, mechanische Dienste, und man fand sie zuletzt auch nur in diesem Sinne fasslich und begreiflich. (JA 40:221.)

Optics

GOETHE HIMSELF REGARDED HIS OPTICAL RESEARCHES AND WRITINGS AS THE CROWNING PHASE OF HIS SCIENTIFIC ENDEAVOR, AND HIS *FARBENLEHRE* AS THE supreme achievement vouchsafed to him in the field of natural science. Of none of his other labors did he speak with such unconcealed pride.

My theory of colors is as old as the world, and in the long run it cannot be denied and thrust aside.¹

These gentlemen may behave as they will, but at least they will not get this book out of the history of physics.²

It would take fifty years, he opined, before the theory of colors could be accepted; it was only for young, unprejudiced men; with the others nothing could be done, they were sitting up to the neck in their system.³

But say yourself, could I not be proud when I had to confess to myself, these twenty years past, that the great Newton and all the mathematicians and exalted computers along with him were involved in a decisive error with respect to the theory of colors, and that I was the only one among millions who knew what was really the truth of this great subject in Nature? ⁴

From the time when Goethe took his first independent look at the world, the phenomena of light attracted him above all others. The poems of his youth show that clearly enough. In them, the eye and its acts are already prominent as the most decided representatives of a mode of understanding reality which is in a high degree creative. Here too light and dark are already used everywhere as symbols when the point is to designate inner processes, spiritual and moral stirrings of the soul. Wherever the light comes forward victoriously,

¹ Meine Farbenlehre ist so alt wie die Welt, und wird auf die Länge nicht zu verleugnen und bei Seite zu bringen sein. (Conversation with Eckermann, March 18, 1831.)

² Diese Herren mögen sich gebarden, wie sie wollen, so bringen sie wenigstens dieses Buch nicht aus der Geschichte der Physik heraus. (Letter to F. A. Wolf, September 28, 1811.)

³ Es bedürfe, meinte er, fünfzig Jahre, ehe die Farbenlehre anerkannt werden könne, sie sei nur für die jungen, unbefangenen Menschen, mit den andern sei nichts anzufangen, die sitzen bis an den Hals in ihrem System. (Conversation with S. Boisserée, August 2, 1815.)

⁴ Aber sagen Sie selbst, konnte ich nicht stolz sein, wenn ich mir seit zwanzig Jahren gestehen musste, dass der grosse Newton und alle Mathematiker und erhabenen Rechner mit ihm in bezug auf die Farbenlehre sich in einem entschiedenen Irrtum befänden, und dass ich unter Millionen der Einzige sei, der in diesem grossen Natur-Gegenstände allein das Rechte wisse? (Conversation with Eckermann, December 30, 1823.)

force and fullness of life are revealed to the young poet. But darkness and night are to him quintessences of non-life, of suffering and privation. Goethe's optical studies develop out of this lifelong fondness for the phenomena of light. In this field Goethe seeks to expand the subjective experiences of his beginnings into objective insights. What he gains in the sphere of science has a powerful effect upon his poetic production. The work of Goethe's old age is dominated by the world of the eye, of the primal polarity of light and dark. His late lyrics, for example, are wholly permeated by phenomena taken from the world of light, which serve as symbols. One may say that in his old age light became for Goethe the highest sensory manifestation of the Divine. "Light and spirit, the former dominating in the physical, the latter in the moral world, are the highest thinkable indivisible energies."⁵ The celebrated utterance in the last conversation with Eckermann (March 11, 1832), in which Goethe designates himself both as venerator of Christ and as worshiper of the sun, elucidates this statement. "If I am asked whether it is in my nature to revere the sun, then I say again: absolutely! For it is likewise a revelation of the highest good, and the mightiest one that it is allowed us children of earth to perceive. I worship in it the light and the generating power of God, whereby alone we live, weave, and are, and all plants and animals with us."⁶

At the close of his *Geschichte der Farbenlehre* Goethe himself relates how he came to begin his optical studies. In the course of his attempts at drawing and painting, just because for this branch of art a great self-assured talent was not granted him, there was forced upon him more and more the need to master first of all the technical problems which are wont to offer the dilettante the greatest difficulties. He thought it must be possible to find laws and rules for these, on which the artist must base his practical procedure. In Italy he enjoyed that association with painters which had long been denied him. As he watched them at their work and had himself instructed by them in technical matters, it appeared that in the field of color values,

⁵ Licht und Geist, jenes im Physischen, dieser im Sittlichen herrschend, sind die höchsten denkbaren unteilbaren Energien. (JA 39:94.)

⁶ Fragt man mich: ob es in meiner Natur sei, die Sonne zu verehren, so sage ich abermals: durchaus! Denn sie ist gleichfalls eine Offenbarung des Höchsten, und zwar die mächtigste, die uns Erdenkindern wahrzunehmen vergönnt ist. Ich anbete in ihr das Licht und die zeugende Kraft Gottes, wodurch allein wir leben, weben und sind und alle Pflanzen und Tiere mit uns.

strangely enough, the artists followed merely their accidental inspirations, their subjective taste, or tradition. "What was practiced was stated as technical devices, not as a matter of principle."⁷

At the same time, however, problems of related character forced themselves upon him whenever he was outdoors. The colors of the southern atmosphere, so much purer and stronger, brought the son of the north face to face with phenomena which he had not known hitherto. When Goethe returned to Weimar and began to occupy himself with questions of optics, he started out from the conviction, which he had acquired in Italy, "that one must first get at colors, as physical phenomena, from the standpoint of Nature, if one would gain control over them for purposes of art."⁸ He began to study Newton's theory more thoroughly, but it did not satisfy him. Then he chanced to look through a prism, something that he had not done since his boyhood. He thought (which was however an error) that Newton's theory would compel him to see white light as broken down into colored light. But a white wall seen through the prism remained white, and colors appeared only when the white wall was bounded by darker objects, such as the cross of a window frame. This seemed to him not reconcilable with Newton's theory; "as by an instinct" he thought he suddenly realized that that theory must be false. He repeated Newton's experiments in his own way. What he found out in so doing only strengthened his unfavorable impression. He thought he had found the basic error: "that a complex phenomenon should be taken as foundation, and that the simpler was to be explained from the complex."⁹ It was Goethe's conviction that only the reverse of this process could lead to success. He formulated his own results in 1793 in a letter to F. H. Jacobi. Light, he said, was not a compound, least of all made up of "colored light." "Every light which has taken on a color is darker than the colorless light. Brightness cannot be compounded from darkness."¹⁰ White light presented itself to his mind as

⁷ Was man ausübte, sprach man als technischen Kunstgriff, nicht als Grundsatz aus. (JA 40:308.)

⁸ . . . dass man den Farben, als physischen Erscheinungen, erst von der Seite der Natur beikommen müsse, wenn man in Absicht auf Kunst etwas über sie gewinnen wolle. (JA 40:309.)

⁹ . . . dass ein kompliziertes Phänomen zum Grunde gelegt und das Einfachere aus dem Zusammengesetzten erklärt werden sollte. (JA 40:316.)

¹⁰ Jedes Licht, das eine Farbe angenommen hat, ist dunkler als das farblose Licht. Das Helle kann nicht aus Dunkelheit zusammengesetzt sein.

the simplest, most homogeneous entity we know. In 1791 Goethe published his first study of optics; his chief work, the *Farbenlehre*, did not appear until 1810.

Goethe's own theory took shape along with a constant process of arguing with Newton. To the complicated physical experiment he opposes the observation of phenomena which can be watched under the open sky, without intentional and complicated arrangement. Deep-seated is his distrust of instruments, apparatus, and experiments generally. Nature, in his conviction, reveals her secrets willingly, but only to him who lets her speak to the senses undisturbed. But on the "rack" she falls silent. "He demands therefore for the investigation of physical objects such a disposition of the observed facts that one would always explain the other, and that one would thus arrive at an insight into the connections without abandoning the field of sensory perception."¹¹ For the same reason he was prejudiced against both microscope and telescope. His aversion to eyeglasses, which even affected his intercourse with men, is also connected with all this. In Goethe's opinion, these agencies, whereby man comes to the aid of his senses, actually have an unfavorable moral effect. "He who looks through glasses thinks himself smarter than he is: for his external sense is in this way taken out of equilibrium with his inner capacity for judgment."¹² In this utterance the basic view is revealed. Between the object and the subject of observation, between Nature and man, there is a natural equilibrium. Man's normal senses are all he needs; they are "the greatest and most accurate physical apparatus that can be had." When the astronomer artificially moves a single star closer by means of the telescope, he distorts in this way, in Goethe's opinion, the natural relationship which it bears to the other celestial phenomena and thus makes the single phenomenon stand out "disproportionately" (*Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, book I, chapter 10). Goethe knows, of course, that instruments cannot be banished from the modern world any more than other technical inventions. Even if his aversion has only the importance of a whim, there is revealed in it a marked trait of Goethe's general scientific attitude (as in a disturbing, even limiting trait the positive characteristics of a person-

¹¹ Hermann Helmholtz, *Populäre wissenschaftliche Vorträge*, Erstes Heft (Braunschweig, 1865), p. 52.

¹² Wer durch Brillen sieht, hält sich für klüger, als er ist: denn sein äusserer Sinn wird dadurch mit seiner inneren Urteilsfähigkeit ausser Gleichgewicht gesetzt. (*JA* 19:139.)

ality become visible, as it were, from the rear). Goethe's aversion to apparatus and experiments under artificial conditions closed to him the field of experimental physics. His battle against Newton was also conditioned by this negative attitude, deeply rooted in his nature.

There was another motif which entered in, no less fundamental, but pertaining to the sphere of his *Weltanschauung*. The assertion that white light was composed of all the colors of the spectrum contradicted, in Goethe's view, not only the simple sensation of color: it also contradicted the basic structure of all natural processes. Here, too, among the phenomena of optics, the eternal formula of life must be valid, and a primal polarity must be the creative fundament. In order that colors may arise, Goethe teaches us, a final, not further derivable, absolutely primal (*uranfänglicher*) opposition of brightness and gloom, light and dark, is essential. Like all other elementary phenomena in Nature, he says, this too, "as well as the magnetic, electric, and others," is based "on an interrelationship, a polarity, or however else one may call the phenomena of the twofold, indeed the manifold, within a positive entity."¹³ From the polar opposition of black and white Goethe explains the origination of color phenomena. In so doing, to be sure, he was in irreconcilable opposition to Newton's theory. Whereas Newton had shown that the light which we sense as white consists of light rays of different color quality, it is Goethe's view that the colors arise from the coöperation of light and dark, i.e., from a disunity which strives for reunion. From this he develops his doctrine of the "murky medium." Whereas a direct mixture of light and dark would only produce gray, the murky medium brings about a coöperation of the "primal polarity," whereby the colors are produced. They originate, then, when light passes through transparent bodies of delicate kind (like the sun shining through a vaporous atmosphere). This is for Goethe the primal phenomenon from which he derives all the physical phenomena of color.

The deviating results in the experiments carried out by Newton he explains as growing out of the intentional arrangement and the falsification of observation which is caused by the complicated em-

¹³ . . . so gut als die magnetischen, elektrischen und andere auf einem Wechselverhältnis, einer Polarität, oder wie man die Erscheinungen des Zwiefachen, ja Mehrfachen in einer entschiedenen Einheit nennen mag. (JA 33:111.)

ployment of optical aids. That Goethe thus misjudged Newton's experiments and the theory achieved by means of them, that indeed he was unable to understand either their presuppositions or their method, resulted ultimately from his equivocal or actually negative feeling toward mathematics. Though he subscribed to pure mathematics, which "independent of all externals" pursued its "own great spiritual course," still physics seemed to him to be on the right track only when it proceeded without reference to mathematics. His capacity to operate in mathematical fashion was as slight as his acquaintance with mathematics. He himself states that his nature compels him to work with words and images, and that he is wholly incapable of working with figures and numbers. Of the great mathematicians of his day, Bernoulli, Euler, Lagrange, he takes no notice. Mathematics was always "the strangest of all" to him. In this science there was nothing exact but its exactitude, he said, i.e., the method of deriving logically correct conclusions from given premises. He quotes with approval Voltaire's dictum, *que la géométrie laisse l'esprit comme elle le trouve*, and he expresses the same idea thus: "Mathematics cannot remove any prejudice, mitigate obstinacy, or soften the spirit of partisanship; it can achieve nothing in the moral field."¹⁴

On the other hand, he esteemed the geometry of Euclid, after the fashion of the Ancients, as "most perfect preparation for, indeed introduction to, philosophy," even though to be sure he thought a mathematician was far from being a philosopher. The purpose of the mathematical language of figures always remained obscure to him; he calls it a "witch's tangle" of formulas. All this is closely connected with Goethe's chief maxim: that only the unclouded observation of phenomena, the simple contemplation of Nature at work, could lead to true cognitions. Theories, too, he would gain only from a survey of methodically ordered phenomena. But figures and numbers, in his opinion, only serve to paralyze the phenomena and to embalm them in "a scientific coffin." For him "the application of mathematics to the explanation of natural phenomena" represented "a monstrous abuse, in so far as it is not a question of purely geometric relations (as in geometric optics) or of phenomena of motion. Only for mechanics

¹⁴ Die Mathematik vermag kein Vorurteil wegzuheben, sie kann den Eigensinn nicht lindern, den Parteigeist nicht beschwichtigen, nichts von allem Sittlichen vermag sie. (JA 39:77.)

and astronomy was Goethe always ready to admit the necessity and importance of mathematics."¹⁵

In mathematical physics Goethe found the differences of colors expressed by numbers (index of refraction). This way of dealing with the phenomena of Nature seemed to him too isolated and too abstract. He scented back of it the same materialism as had repelled him in Holbach's *Système de la nature*. Goethe demands "that the single datum, by being given its place in the connected whole, in the constant sequence of happenings, retain its concretion and individuality in this allocation. It must be and remain something special, if the universal is to present itself veraciously and express itself symbolically therein. Hence too a sensation may not be simply replaced by values of number and magnitude and thus be obliterated by them, as regards its immediate status; but sensation itself is a peculiar, incomparable, and inalienable cognition value. It is that single fact from which one *must* start in order to make the universal order of the Whole finally comprehensible."¹⁶

Goethe's own optical observations, with their results, belong overwhelmingly to a partial field, that of physiological optics, which deals with the origin of color impressions. It was in physiological optics that he saw "the foundation of the theory." This fact alone made it inevitable for diverse oppositions and misunderstandings as regards physical optics to occur. Goethe seeks to recognize in the activity of the eye, when it is affected by light and color, a behavior which could be expressed by a single law. The theories of colored shadows and of contrast are principal items in these sections of his work. Here too the idea of polarity serves as ultimate explanation. The eye demands brightness when the dark confronts it, and vice versa. For every color it requires the complementary color: thus violet for yellow, green for purple. These required colors are brought forth by the eye, they depend on the fact that the retina is stimulated to an oppositional reaction and produces a totality by means of the opposition. Thus, seeing as such proves to be a productive act in the physiological field.

The scientists who worked after Goethe's time in the field of

¹⁵ Paul Epstein, "Goethe und die Mathematik," in *Jahrbuch der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, vol. 10 (1924), p. 91.

¹⁶ Ernst Cassirer, *Idee und Gestalt* (Berlin 1921), p. 52.

physiology, such as the great Johannes Müller, have judged of Goethe's labors much more positively than the physicists. A modern specialist in the physiology of sense, Karl Wessely, says that for writing these sections (above all, the first division of the didactic part) Goethe deserves one of the leading places of honor in the history of the theory of visual sensations. Upon this, as upon the abundance of correct, new observations—in the field of physical optics too—is founded the scientific value which Goethe's *Farbenlehre* possesses to this day.

The remainder, however—and in this even sincere admirers of Goethe, such as are found especially among German scientists, concur with his uncompromising critics—is untenable. The theoretical part of Goethe's *Farbenlehre* is "not physics" (Helmholtz). Evidently it is true of him, as he said it was of Newton, that fundamental convictions depend ultimately not upon insights, but upon the will, and that, in knowing as in acting, prejudice decides. We affirm or deny what is consonant with our nature. The physician Max Morris has said that the polemic part of the *Farbenlehre* occasions in an admirer of Goethe "the feeling with which a son sees his father engaged in a brutal tussle with an opponent—who is moreover superior to him."¹⁷ Only in his controversy with the romantics did Goethe let himself be swept into such passionate, unsparing words as those he uses against Newton. Newton's spectrum he calls "the most shameful of all jugglery"; the great physicist himself he reckons among those brilliant but tyrannical investigators who bring forth a world from within themselves, "without much concern as to whether it will coincide with the real one." Newton's theory he calls "a grotesque kind of explanation," a "crazy image," something "quite absurd," which the author of it had the effrontery to defend as proven truth. He said he had written his own *Farbenlehre* in order to refute Newton's "great error, most harmful to the human spirit."

But even from contemporaneous experts Goethe got nothing but rejection; only philosophers, like Hegel and Schopenhauer, showed understanding of his viewpoint. This caused him much vexation, robbed him of "a happier and more profitable utilization of several years," but could not shake him in the conviction that he was the only man of his age who knew the real truth. With respect to his *Farbenlehre*, says Eckermann, he was like a mother "who loves an

¹⁷ JA 40:xliv.

excellent child all the more, the more it is underrated by others." In verse too he formulated his optical theory and continued his polemic against the school of Newton:

Friends, avoid the darkened prisons
Where they pinch and tweak the light,
And in pitiful decisions
Bow to rays distorted quite.
Worshippers most superstitious
Thronged in plenty down the years.
Leave in heads of teachers vicious
Spectres, madness, cheats, and leers! ¹⁸

Geology

WHOEVER READS THE LETTERS AND NOTATIONS CONNECTED WITH GOETHE'S JOURNEYS TO THE SPAS OF BOHEMIA WILL BE STRUCK BY THE GREAT ROLE WHICH geological and mineralogical questions play in them. This too was an interest which had been occasioned by Goethe's participation in the administration of the Weimar land, above all by reason of the re-opening of the mines of Ilmenau. As early as 1780 he had "devoted himself with veritable passion" to these studies. His first essay (1784) treats of granite, in which he sees the oldest kind of rock, "the basic fortress of our earth." In Italy he continues his observations. Geology and mineralogy were at that time still young sciences. In Germany, Abraham Gottlob Werner, professor at the Academy of Mines in Freiberg, had founded a new school of natural history and also taught geognosy, the science of the upbuilding and the origination of the earth. It was in close connection with Werner's revolutionary theories that Goethe sought to work out his own views. His conviction that everywhere in her processes Nature operates

¹⁸ Freunde, flieht die dunkle Kammer, / Wo man euch das Licht verzwicket / Und mit kümmerlichstem Jammer / Sich verschrobnen Bildern bückt. / Aberglaubische Verehrer / Gab's die Jahre her genug, / In den Köpfen eurer Lehrer / Lasst Gespenst und Wahn und Trug. (JA 4:93.)

slowly and steadily, and does not use violent means, controlled his ideas on geology too. The theories of the opposing school, the so-called "Vulcanists," to the effect that geologic developments are to be explained as the result of catastrophes, were bound to be hostile to his way of thinking. This aversion led him astray into biased and false views. His preference was to accept only the explanatory attempts of the "Neptunists," who conceived of all the strata of the earth, more or less, as deposits of slowly sinking, gigantic oceans. In his general method, too, Goethe followed Werner's lead. It consisted in the attempt to derive imaginatively, from the oldest formations on earth, the causes of its origin and the forces at work in it. When Werner died in 1817, the party of the Vulcanists, hitherto held down by his authority, gained ground rapidly. Goethe did not share in this new direction, although the old mode of explanation found it harder and harder to stand its ground. In the *Wanderjahre* (book II, chapter 9) the two theories are mentioned, and in the "Klassische Walpurgisnacht" (*Faust* II, Act II) they confront each other in the polemic dialogue of two Greek philosophers. In it Thales praises the quiet rule of Nature, who has created the shape of the mountains in long-protracted labor. Not tumultuous outbursts, but the slowly operating influences of water and atmosphere played the chief role in this. "Everything took its origin from the water!"¹ As regards volcanoes, Goethe assumed that they had only originated in the most recent epochs of the earth's history and could be traced to local conflagrations in the earth, like burning coalbeds. Here as elsewhere in his geological views it is apparent that he lacks the gift of thinking historically. There is no point in searching out his errors. It is true of them, as of those of the learned Werner, that they were not caused by a lack of accuracy in the observation or interpretation of the facts. The chief blame rests on the condition of geological science at that time. Uncertainty and faulty views, even in the most important matters, were still prevalent in Goethe's day.

Some say that Goethe was the first to express the supposition that there had once been an age of glaciation in Europe. Others deny this "discovery" to Goethe. At that time, to be sure, not enough facts were known to enable one to determine with certainty the role of the diluvial glaciation of Europe. It may also be that such a theory

¹ Alles ist aus dem Wasser entsprungen! (*Faust*, verse 8435.)

is not to be reconciled with Goethe's views. But it cannot be denied that he did give expression to the conjecture that "an epoch of great cold" had passed over Europe. In the *Wanderjahre*, too, there is talk of such an age, when glaciers had transported from the high mountains "heavy masses of primal rock" into the plains. It is possible that Frédéric Soret had already acquainted Goethe with the similar theory which the Swiss geologist Ignaz Venetz put forth in 1821. Not until after Goethe's death was the theory of an ice age affirmed and brought to victory by Louis Agassiz. The latter says himself that this doctrine, as far as the idea is concerned, can be found clearly expressed in Goethe's writings.

For the rest, Goethe did not present his geological theories in such a manner that they could have won recognition from the scientists of the time. He was also interested in mineralogical problems, but in this special field he achieved nothing of significance. Here too his aversion to chemical analysis and physical research stood in his way. But he brought together a great collection of minerals, with which he occupied himself a great deal in his own way. The same is true of his interest in paleontological material.

Meteorology

IN ITALY GOETHE HAD BEGUN TO OBSERVE THE FORMATION AND THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE CLOUDS, AND IN THESE PHENOMENA LIKEWISE TO SEEK FOR A law, an order. But he only arrived at an untenable theory. He assumes that here too the law of polarity operates, and traces the changes in the atmosphere back to the alternate increase and decrease of the "electricity of the air." In this way he thought he could recognize another primal phenomenon in the changes of weather. Thus a rhythmically structured vitality is assigned to matter, an inhalation and exhalation which is not physically possible.

The change in cloud forms was another phenomenon which attracted Goethe's ever-attentive gaze. But he did not succeed in finding a law by which this seemingly lawless variety was governed.

So he greeted with enthusiasm the theory of Luke Howard which was made known in 1815. In it the cloud forms were classified, under a fourfold system, as cumulus, stratus, cirrus, and nimbus. With this as key Goethe now began eagerly to make observations and write them down, especially on his trips to Bohemia after 1820. The reason why Goethe picked up Howard's theory with such joy was that, as he says, it offered him a "thread," such as he had hitherto lacked. To the man "who distinguished clouds" he also recorded his thanks in a little cycle of poems with the title *Howards Ehrengedächtnis* ("In Honor of Howard's Memory"). As the chief merit of his teaching the following is praised:

That which cannot be reached or held, at last
 He seizes it, he first doth hold it fast,
 Defines what is indefinite, limits it.¹

The error in Goethe's theory consists in the assertion that the changes in the atmosphere are elicited by variations in air pressure. Cosmic influences, such as the energies streaming from the sun toward the earth, he does not take into consideration. He thinks he can explain the alterations in pressure by means of the assumption that there are fluctuations in the attractive force of the earth. Here too Goethe's aversion to an exact physical investigation of the phenomena prevented him from gaining a correct idea of air pressure. Hence, if we except his advocacy of Howard, he and his "telluristic" weather theory did not even catch up with what the meteorology of his day was teaching. But Goethe's errors in this field did lead ultimately to positive stimuli and positive steps. He pointed out that it was necessary to make systematic observations of barometric conditions all over Europe. Upon his urging, Karl August, who took an interest in such problems, established a network of meteorological observation posts in his little land. At that time there was nothing of the kind anywhere in Germany.

¹ Was sich nicht halten, nicht erreichen lässt, / Er fasst es an, er hält zuerst es fest, / Bestimmt das Unbestimmte, schränkt es ein. (JA 2:255.)

Poet and Scientist

GOETHE'S CONTEMPORARIES CAME TO SEE THAT FROM HIS SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH SPIRITUAL FORCES ACCRUED TO HIM WHICH CONTRIBUTED TO HIS ABILITY TO DEVELOP so mightily as poet. Also, that conversely the special type of his active concern with Nature, with her direction toward human and cosmic totality, could only be understood as part of the creative genius of the poet. In both cases he was driven by the urge to grasp and express the inner and the outer world, man and cosmos, as one whole. In contemplating the unceasing creation going on in Nature, he kept gaining new force for his own productivity, as Antaeus did from his contact with the earth. The study of Nature was the university in which Goethe learned how to outgrow the excessive mass of his feelings and visions, the titanism of his youthful "existence intoxication," and to secure a picture of the world which had the necessity and the truth of reality. He discovered now that for this a "thorough study (*Durcharbeitung*) of his poor ego" was necessary, of the possibility of which he had previously had no conception. It was somewhat as Herder had once expressed it in the years of his spiritual communion with Goethe: "The more true physics increases, the farther we can emerge from the realm of blind power and caprice into the realm of the wisest necessity and of a goodness and beauty which stand fast within themselves."¹

To what a degree Goethe's views on poetry and art were clarified and furthered by his insights into the life of Nature in her regulated creativity is clearly shown by the notes which he wrote down on his journey to Italy. He now looks at art in the same way as he views Nature. The highest, indeed the only operation of Nature and of art, he remarks on a later occasion, is that of producing forms. If art wishes to bring forth works which can compete in truth and beauty with those of Nature (although they are part of another stratum of existence, that of the works of man), then the artist must at any rate "learn at least to some extent from Nature the way in which she

¹ *Gottf* (ed. 1787), p. 92.

proceeds in the forming of her works." He must penetrate not only the depths of his own interior, but also the depths of natural phenomena, in order "to bring forth something spiritually organic, and to give his work of art a content and a form whereby it appears at once natural and supernatural."² To be sure, art must be true in its own way, not in that of Nature. But even though the truth of art is not supposed to be the reality of Nature, yet the creative spirit of the artist is subject to the same norms as Nature, the basic norms which science seeks to recognize and to express as regards organic forms: unity, definiteness, wholeness. Art—so we read in a note to Diderot's *Essai sur la peinture*—holds fast the highest factors of sensory phenomena by recognizing in them that which responds to law. But the "lawful," Goethe finds, manifests itself in proportions which have the effect of beauty because they convince us by giving us the impression of perfect adaptation to purpose. In contemplating the works of those "incomparable artists," the Greeks, he realizes that here too the individual form is developed from the ideal norm, the type. This is what he means when he says of the Greek artists that they proceeded according to the same laws as Nature. "Everything arbitrary, presumptuous collapses: there is necessity, there is God."³ With this we shall deal in greater detail later on. Here the only point is to show how everywhere in Goethe's work the growing understanding of Nature urges forward his aesthetic speculation at the same time, showing that his insights in one field clarify and confirm those in another. And more than that: contemplation "of the living forms governed by law in their greatest activity and perfection" puts the poet into the condition of greatest activity. He feels himself impelled to bring forth something of like kind, of equal importance. That was, in the final analysis, the greatest and most important gain which the poet Goethe derived from his scientific labors.

² . . . etwas Geistig-Organisches hervorzubringen und seinem Kunstwerk einen solchen Gehalt, eine solche Form zu geben, wodurch es natürlich zugleich und übernatürlich erscheint. (JA 33:108.)

³ Alles Willkürliche, Eingebildete fällt zusammen: da ist die Notwendigkeit, da ist Gott. (JA 27:108.)

THE THINKER

Goethe's Way of Thinking

For philosophy in the strict sense I had no aptitude.¹

I contended that a detached philosophy was unnecessary, seeing that it was already fully comprised in religion and poetry.²

. . . my thinking does not separate itself from objects . . . my contemplation is itself a way of thinking, my thinking a way of contemplating.³

AT ALL PERIODS OF HIS LIFE GOETHE HELD HIMSELF ALOOF FROM "PHILOSOPHY IN THE STRICT SENSE." HIS ATTEMPTS TO MAKE FOR HIMSELF A PICTURE OF THE organization of the world never showed any tendency to crystallize into a speculative system. Nor did his thinking develop by and out of a critical disagreement with the transmitted systems or the teachings of contemporary philosophers. In the days of his youthful irrationalism he thought he could gain control of truth by means of feeling better than by logical demonstrations. In maturer years he sought to gain it by independent contemplation of Nature and life, being convinced that sensory experience and spiritual comprehension, contemplation and thinking, must interpenetrate each other to the utmost, if one would reach valid cognitions. Goethe said himself that his thinking was "objective," and that this showed itself in his poetic works. "It is easier, to be sure, to form the world according to an idea than to subject one's ideas to actual things."⁴ He found it unacceptable when philosophers talked of the "absolute in a theoretical sense."

¹ Für Philosophie im eigentlichen Sinne hatte ich kein Organ. (JA 39:28.)

² Ich behauptete, eine abgesonderte Philosophie sei nicht nötig, indem sie schon in der Religion und Poesie vollkommen enthalten sei. (JA 23:7.)

³ Dass mein Denken sich von den Gegenständen nicht sondere . . . dass mein Anschauen selbst ein Denken, mein Denken ein Anschauen sei. (JA 39:48.)

⁴ Bequemer ist es freilich, die Welt nach der Idee zu modeln, als seine Vorstellungen den Dingen zu unterwerfen. (JA 33:175.)

For him there was no special essence or spiritual principle apart from the phenomenon and capable of being abstracted from it.

Enormous as is the mass of what Goethe put forth in the way of reflective utterances, thoughts, and apperceptions, he was never intent upon a scientific philosophy, upon a picture of the world built up by speculative thinking. Toward hypotheses and theories he always took a skeptical, indeed distrustful, attitude. Too often they seemed to him rather to satisfy the need for giving oneself understandable ideas of a thing than to do justice to reality. He did not find philosophy fruitful at points where it made conceptual distinctions, but only "where it heightens and strengthens our original feeling of being one with Nature and deepens it into a profound, calm contemplation."⁵ We may not permit philosophy to confuse our feeling of the inner unity of subject and object, or to substitute abstraction for contemplation. Speculative thinking can only operate positively when it contributes to the process of heightening feeling and intuition into a clear awareness, so that we are led more deeply into the phenomenon itself. In Goethe's view, one can only attain to general ideas by seeking the intuitively anticipated norm in the special case. For every individual thing represents in its particular way that which is general and lasting. "Nothing is more consonant with Nature than that she puts into operation in the smallest detail that which she intends as a whole."⁶ This is true of all life processes. "What is the general? The single case. What is the particular? Millions of cases."⁷ The particular phenomena, by explaining themselves, reveal at the same time the general law of which they are special cases.

Anyone who had all his organs of cognition directed in this way to the objects, the phenomena, must regard "pure thinking," i.e., abstracting speculation, as a dubious affair. What had become evident to Goethe in his youth remained a decisive truth to him throughout his whole life: that true cognition (*Erkenntnis*) can be won only by feeling, intimation, and intellect in collaboration. Later he was wont to say that we must look simultaneously with the eyes of the body and

⁵ . . . wenn sie unsere ursprüngliche Empfindung, als seien wir mit der Natur eins, erhöht, sichert und in ein tiefes, ruhiges Anschauen verwandelt. (Letter to F. H. Jacobi, November 23, 1801.)

⁶ Nichts ist der Natur gemässer, als dass sie das, was sie im Ganzen intentioniert, durch das Einzelste in Wirksamkeit setzt. (WA II:7:40.)

⁷ Was ist das Allgemeine? Der einzelne Fall. Was ist das Besondere? Millionen Fälle. (JA 39:69.)

the mind. In other words, precise sensory observation and an intellectual kind of contemplation (what Kant calls "intuitive understanding") must go hand in hand, because only thus can we grasp, along with the individual phenomenon, the operating and regulating "idea" which is patent in it. In all these utterances, the same principle is reiterated: no single ability, but only the union of all our cognitive powers, both rational and irrational, can cope with life, which is everywhere a living union of matter and mind, phenomenon and essence. One should not seek anything back of the phenomena, says Goethe. The idea is ensconced in them. We find our way to it by shifting from sensory inspection to intuitive contemplation. That of which we thus become aware is held fast in the concept by our "thinking power."

That the world of phenomena constitutes a living whole, in such a way that all single phenomena are individual variations of idea-like primal images or types, underlies as aprioristic assumption Goethe's attempts to make for himself a picture of the operation of "ever-creating Nature." This way of thinking can be designated neither as naturalistic nor as idealistic. If one would call to aid the terminology whereby definite types of *Weltanschauung* are distinguished, in this case one might perhaps speak of "objective idealism." The divined, unknown, transcendent thing is experienced in the actual, and in such a way that the individual becomes aware of the connection of things in pure contemplation, calmly beholding. In the universal harmony is revealed the divine essence, whose elucidation is all reality, the particular as well as the general. That we are thus capable of discovering the invisible in the concrete, and of following its paths through actuality, guarantees an inner community of our spirit with the world spirit. The laws which are valid in the universe must also be operative in human cognition.

Is not the core of Nature

In the hearts of men? ⁸

No distinction is made here between subject and object, between the thinking ego and the world. In the act of apperception we experience

the harmony, which bold the bosom leaves

And in its heart the world again retrieves. ⁹

⁸ Ist nicht der Kern der Natur / Menschen im Herzen? (JA 2:260.)

⁹ . . . den Einklang, der aus dem Busen dringt / Und in sein Herz die Welt zurücke schlingt. (*Faust*, verse 140.)

Or, looking at it from the other side, "There is something unknown in the object, having the nature of law, which corresponds to the unknown lawful element in the subject."¹⁰

Goethe's conviction that man possesses in his nature everything he needs to gain valid apperceptions (even though not everything is apperceptible), and the deep satisfaction which he finds in the indefatigable contemplation of world and life and the ceaseless inquiry into their secrets, make him indifferent to the problem of how cognition is possible in the first place, and in what manner it comes about. He thinks that anyone who contents himself with pure experience, and acts accordingly, will have enough that is true. "Man is sufficiently equipped for all true needs on earth if he trusts his senses . . . The senses do not deceive, it is judgment that deceives."¹¹ He considered epistemology to be rather confusing than useful. The old question, "how much our Self and how much the outer world contributes to our spiritual existence," failed to interest him, if only for the reason that he was not accustomed to distinguish those two. The philosophers, and above all the contemporaneous epistemologists, he remarks, are a strange folk. "To enter into oneself, to catch one's own mind in the process of its operations, to lock oneself wholly up in oneself in order to improve one's acquaintance with objects—is that to be thought the right way?"¹² At that rate the unconscious naïveté of the man who is convinced that reality is just as it shows itself to our apperception seemed to Goethe more fruitful.

"How is't that you so well have wrought?

They say, success you've safely sought!"

My child, the secret I have caught:

Of thinking I have never thought."¹³

¹⁰ Es ist etwas unbekanntes Gesetzliches im Objekt, welches dem unbekannten Gesetzlichen im Subjekt entspricht. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, herausgegeben von Max Hecker [Weimar, 1907], no. 1344, in *Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft*, 21. Band.)

¹¹ Der Mensch ist genugsam ausgestattet zu allen wahren irdischen Bedürfnissen, wenn er seinen Sinnen traut . . . Die Sinne trügen nicht, das Urteil trägt. (*JA* 4:242.)

¹² In sich selbst hineinzugehen, seinen eignen Geist über seinen Operationen zu ertappen, sich ganz in sich zu verschliessen, um die Gegenstände desto besser kennen zu lerner—ist das wohl der rechte Weg? (*JA* 33:141.)

¹³ "Wie hast du's denn so weit gebracht? / Sie sagen, du habest es gut vollbracht!" / Mein Kind, ich hab' es klug gemacht: / Ich habe nie über das Denken gedacht. (*JA* 4:104.)

Spiritual Forebears and Kinsmen

No doubt we are born with capabilities, but our development we owe to a thousand influences of a great world, from among which we appropriate what we can and what is suited to us . . . The chief thing is to have a soul which loves the truth, and which picks it up wherever it finds it.¹

At bottom however we are all collective beings, turn and twist as we may. For how little do we have and are we which we can call our own in the strictest sense! We must all receive and learn, both from those who were before us and from those who are with us. Even the greatest genius would not get far if he would owe everything to his own self . . . And at bottom it is pure silliness [to inquire] whether a man have something from himself or from others . . . the chief thing is to have a great ambition, and possess the skill and persistence to carry it out.²

It is not only matter that we receive from without; we may also appropriate content from others.³

IT CAN CERTAINLY BE MAINTAINED THAT GOETHE WAS INFLUENCED BY THIS OR THAT PHILOSOPHER, AND BY ONE MORE THAN BY ANOTHER. BUT WE MUST MAKE one limitation at the outset. If one will designate as Goethe's philosophy his attempts to gain a connected picture of the world from his experiences, one must say that this philosophy bears to none of the great systems, past or present, a relation which would permit us to put Goethe into any definite philosophic school. He is pupil or disciple to no one, much as he learned from single philosophers. In this field, too, his way of learning was wholly productive. In his essay, *Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie* ("Influence of Recent Phi-

¹ Wir bringen wohl Fähigkeiten mit, aber unsere Entwicklung verdanken wir tausend Einwirkungen einer grossen Welt, aus der wir uns aneignen, was wir können und was uns gemäss ist . . . Die Hauptsache ist, dass man eine Seele habe, die das Wahre liebt, und die es aufnimmt, wo sie es findet. (Conversation with Eckermann, December 16, 1828.)

² Im Grunde aber sind wir alle kollektive Wesen, wir mögen uns stellen wie wir wollen. Denn wie Weniges haben und sind wir, das wir im reinsten Sinne unser Eigentum nennen! Wir müssen alle empfangen und lernen, sowohl von denen, die vor uns waren, als von denen, die mit uns sind. Selbst das grosste Genie würde nicht weit kommen, wenn es alles seinem eigenen Innern verdanken wollte . . . Es ist im Grunde auch alles Torheit, ob einer etwas aus sich habe, oder ob er es von andern habe . . . die Hauptsache ist, dass man ein grosses Wollen habe und Geschick und Beharrlichkeit besitze, es auszuführen. (Conversation with Eckermann, February 17, 1832.)

³ Nicht allein den Stoff empfangen wir von aussen, auch fremden Gehalt dürfen wir uns aneignen. (JA 39:41.)

losophy"; 1820), he explains his method of making others' doctrines his own. He speaks there of his relation to Kant. The latter's rejection of the teleological interpretations of Nature and art confirmed and clarified Goethe's own thinking, which moved in the same direction. That a great thinker had arrived at like insights along different roads, and that in Kant's writings a methodical criticism had proved what he had found out for himself, caused Goethe profound satisfaction. But as he took from the totality of Kant's teachings only that which fitted his own convictions, and then developed it more clearly, so the principal gain lay for him in the fact that he could now walk his own road with greater confidence and strength. What he owed to this encounter was a decided stimulus, no more—stimulus to independent thinking. Goethe relates that Kant's disciples would not assent to the way in which he rearranged the views of their master. "For I only expressed what was stirred up in me, but not that which I had read [in Kant]." ⁴ He does not repeat another's insight: he brings forth, stimulated by that other, something of his own.

The same is true of Goethe's relation to other philosophers. To some he owes no more than the confirmation and clarification of his own views. From others he learns new insights, to be sure, and he also takes over from them single ideas or concepts, but not more than this, and never the entirety of their system. His selective behavior is always determined by the needs of his own system. Whenever he appropriates an element of others' thought, he adapts it to his world picture, takes it into his own ideation, and thus makes it his own property. One might call his procedure a productive eclecticism. Anyone who could give, in such rich measure as he, could admit without embarrassment how much he had taken from others. It is all very well, he remarks, to speak of originality; but our environment affects us all through life. "What else can we call our property save our energy, our power, our will-ing!—If I could say all that I have come to owe my great predecessors and contemporaries, not much would be left." To be sure, he goes on, one can really learn only of him who is in tune with one's own nature." ⁵

⁴ Denn ich sprach nur aus, was in mir aufgeregt war, nicht aber, was ich gelesen hatte. (JA 39:31.)

⁵ Was können wir denn unser Eigenes nennen, als die Energie, die Kraft, das Wollen!—Wenn ich sagen könnte, was ich alles grossen Vorgängern und Mitlebenden schuldig geworden bin, so bliebe nicht viel übrig. (Conversation with Eckermann, May 12, 1825.)

One might think that Goethe was as much an apprentice of the Greeks in philosophy as in the realm of aesthetics. But one cannot speak of Goethe's making a genuine study of the ancient thinkers. What is rather the fact is that his original mode of thinking led him into the vicinity of the Greek thinkers. He did not have to learn from Heraclitus that the life-processes pulsate in a polar rhythm, because the "one in all" divides and then reunites. Probably Goethe never really studied Heraclitus or any other of the pre-Socratic philosophers. Otherwise he could not have maintained of the Greeks in general what he says of Aristotle: that they had not yet come to the recognition of how oneness separates into twoness (*Zweiheit*)—i.e., the phenomenon of polarity. On the other hand, he praises Aristotle because he is a reliable empiricist, a "man of facts," who had looked at Nature in a more correct way than the modern investigators. But at the same time he criticizes Aristotle for passing too easily from phenomenon to concept, just as in general "the Ancients' way of treating" Nature was foreign to the modern scientist. But Goethe's contemplation of Nature is, in a number of respects, not unlike that of the Stagirite. Common to them is perhaps their inclination to morphological problems. Aristotle's theory of tragedy, a favorite object of literary theorizing in the eighteenth century, was examined anew by Goethe in his old age. He gave it a disposition which is not entirely just to the wording of the original. In general, Goethe was not an authority on Aristotle; he appears not to have read his chief works. Similar is his relation to Plato. However, he did read the *Phaedo* at an early time, and later he read the *Timaeus*, the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and the *Apologia*. But there was little which impressed him deeply. He calls Plato an excellent man, though he does find him odd. In his *Farbenlehre* he praises "the holy awe" with which Plato approaches Nature and the simplicity of his regard, which appears to Goethe an antidote for the disjunctive and complicated science of his own day.

Through the Platonism of the eighteenth century, especially through the writings of Shaftesbury and Winckelmann, Goethe came into closer contact with the world of Greek ideas than he himself knew. The basis of Plato's theory of "ideas," to be sure, namely, the opposition of constant essences—the bodiless forms of the *logoi* which can only be grasped by thought in the world of things, and the shift-

ing shapes of the visible world—all this remained foreign to Goethe because the philosopher's concept of duality was quite different from that of the poet. Goethe thinks that that which is permanent, the idea, can be grasped in the midst of a Becoming, and only thus. In his conception of metamorphosis, Being and Becoming are one: the idea makes its appearance and endures amid change, and the Eternal can be viewed in the transient. For Plato, however, there is nothing primal in the relativity of phenomena, and so also there are no "primal phenomena" (*Urphänomene*) in the Goethean sense. The truth of that-which-is is only in the pure concepts, the *logoi*. Ernst Cassirer has brought out these fundamental differences most clearly. Goethe's view that idea and phenomenon are one in the outward form would alone bring him into an unbridgeable opposition to Plato. What unites the Greek and the German is the setting of the problem itself and the way in which they approach Nature.

Closer and more numerous are Goethe's relations to the Neoplatonic tradition. But that it was Plotinus who influenced him is not so certain as has been assumed of late. Not until 1805, when his own picture of the world had long since been fixed in all its basic features, was Goethe induced by the great philologist Friedrich August Wolf to study the writings of Plotinus. What made the greatest impression on him was the theory of the Beautiful held by the "wonderful mystic." Goethe translated some of the cardinal passages of the *Enneads* and later printed them in the *Wanderjahre* (in the appendix called "From Makarie's Archives"). We read there of the relation of art to Nature. The old theory, that art imitates Nature, is replaced by a profound metaphysical explanation. Both Nature and the mind of the artist, we read, imitate (each in its own way) a higher beauty "exalted above all senses," the divine reason, which the "inner eye" is capable of beholding. Both of them seek to embody the idea in matter, and thus forms originate. "So Phidias could form the god, although he imitated nothing sensually perceivable, but grasped in his mind a mode in which Zeus himself would appear if he should confront our eyes."⁶ In this cluster of ideas we may also place Goethe's statement that art is a mediator of the inexpressible.

But if he saw himself confirmed in this by Plotinus, yet the

⁶ So konnte Phidias den Gott bilden, ob er gleich nichts sinnlich Erblickliches nachahmte, sondern sich einen solchen in den Sinn fasste, wie Zeus selbst erscheinen würde, wenn er unsern Augen begegnen möchte. (JA 35:317.)

spiritualism of the Neoplatonist was repugnant to him, as it is revealed in the contention that the begotten is necessarily weaker than the begetter and the phenomenon somehow less than the idea of which it is the realization. To this Goethe replies, "The Begotten is not less than the Begetter; indeed, it is the advantage of living procreation that the Begotten can be more excellent than the Begetter."⁷ In the beautiful form, idea and manifestation are one in a way which assigns to neither of them a higher rank, just as in general mind and matter, body and soul, have equal rights and are both together "lieutenants of God," the "necessary double ingredients of the universe." By virtue of the fact that the teaching of Plotinus separates phenomenon and idea and gives them different values, it is directly opposed to Goethe's view. Goethe does not dream of regarding the material embodiment as something inferior, as a prison from which man must escape. Whereas Plotinus opined that the highest intuitive contemplation of the ideas, and the *unio mystica* with them, could only be achieved by a detachment from the sensual world, Goethe confronts this doctrine with "contemplative thinking" (*anschauliches Denken*) as the only behavior appropriate to the character of the world.

In the *Farbenlehre* Plotinus is saluted as an early witness to the old truth (already expressed by Empedocles) that like can only be known by its like. The eye can only become aware of light because it is "of like kind," a "creature of light." One must think of the two as identical, Goethe goes on to say; in the eye dwells a passive light, which emerges upon any inner or outward stimulus. Plato (in the *Timaus*) had explained seeing as a collaboration of inner and outer light, and expressed the opinion that the eye was akin to the sun. In order to make this difficult concept comprehensible, Goethe refers to Plotinus' essay "On the Beautiful," where he says that the eye can only see the sun because it is itself "sunlike."

Were not sunlike our human eye,
How ever could the sun-god light us?
Did not in us the god's own power lie,
How could the godlike then delight us?⁸

⁷ Das Gezeugte ist nicht geringer als das Zeugende, ja es ist der Vorteil lebendiger Zeugung, dass das Gezeugte vortrefflicher sein kann als das Zeugende. (JA 35:318.)

⁸ Wir' nicht das Auge sonnenhaft, / Wie könnten wir das Licht erblicken? / Lebt' nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft, / Wie könnt' uns Göttliches entzücken? (JA 40:71.)

Closer than to Plotinus are Goethe's relations to the ideas of Alexandrine mysticism which persisted in the European tradition. They were transmitted to him by the thinkers who, in the century of Faust, stood for the German speculative trend called pansophy and theosophy. The universe an organic whole, man a microcosm, a tiny universe, and as such an analogue of the macrocosm—with such concepts Goethe had become acquainted in his youth through the now forgotten books of the pansophists, which were despised as unscientific by the professional scholars of his time (see *Goethe the Poet*, p. 6). It was also the ideas of European Neoplatonism which brought him into contact with ancient philosophy, including Aristotle and Plato. More than this can hardly be claimed. Goethe read Paracelsus and the hermetic Nature philosophers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries influenced by him, the alchemists and the occultists, but probably not Jakob Böhme. In those days he felt himself most closely akin to the thinkers who taught that everything there is must belong to the essence of God, because God, they said, was the only actuality and embraced everything. "We only know the soul by means of the body, God only by means of insight into Nature."⁹ From one of the writings of Paracelsus Goethe makes a note of the statement that art is "the light of Nature." These are germs from which principal motifs of Goethe's *Weltanschauung* are subsequently developed. At bottom it is the views of the Renaissance which he encounters here: the affirmation of life, of Nature, and of the world in general, the feeling that the soul is one with God, and God is one with the world—i.e., so-called "World piety" (*Weltfrömmigkeit*), from which modern pantheism emerges as a new, original creation of western thinking.

About 1770 Goethe began to read the philosophic representatives of pantheism. From Giordano Bruno he adopted some principal theses at that time: that God and world, mind and matter, are one; that God is the center of all being; and that the multiplicity of single beings unite to form the entirety of the Cosmos. At that time Bruno was almost forgotten. He was listed among the curious atheists who no longer deserved any interest, on account of the obscurity of their speculation. In Germany, J. G. Hamann was the first to take a new interest in the despised eccentric. In his diaries, young Goethe made a

⁹ Die Seele erkennen wir nur mittelst des Körpers, Gott nur durch den Einblick in die Natur. (Morris II:33.)

note of Pierre Bayle's criticism of Bruno, and doubted its justification. As rebel against the rationalism of his age Goethe no doubt scented a kindred spirit in the opponent of scholasticism. But it was not until much later that he studied Bruno's writings. Then he felt that the extraordinary man had never grown wholly foreign to him. He saw in Bruno "an apostle of an education immediately deriving from and at the side of Nature" (letter to J. F. H. Schlosser, March 31, 1812), but felt all the same that while his writings did "lead to general reflection and to elevation of mind," they were at the same time too greatly permeated by a mysticism which was no longer endurable. In Goethe's philosophical poems of Nature, especially in the stanza "What were a god, who did but push from without," one finds lines in which the teachings of Bruno were transferred into Goethe's own mode of thought and speech.

The only philosopher of whom Goethe speaks at length and with approval in his autobiography is *Spinoza*. To him alone did he pay the honor of calling him "our old lord and master." What impressed him at the outset was Spinoza's person, his courageous life and the calm clarity of his mind, which desires nothing but the truth. To J. K. Lavater he praises Spinoza's honesty, his love of God and men, his justice. "An atmosphere of peace" breathed from Spinoza's writings upon him, at a time when he was tormented by inner unrest and vacillation. But the whole of Spinoza's philosophy, his system, Goethe did not accept either then or later. Yet he must have understood from the first that the conception of God and man presented in strictly systematic fashion in Spinoza's *Ethics* was close to the views which were forming within himself. Spinoza taught that the essence of the creative force which rules throughout the universe was an undivided oneness which only appears as a twoness (*Zweiheit*). God is not only the operative cause of existence, he is also the being that is indwelling in all things. "For everything there is must belong to the essence of God, since God is the only actuality and embraces everything."¹⁰ This sentence, which is found among Goethe's notes of 1770, is to be sure not the fruit of a thorough study of Spinoza; in it is expressed Goethe's own original view, which the philosopher could only confirm. Spinoza's clarity, calm, and love of all being Goethe doubtless understood even then as the moral fruit of such a world

¹⁰ Denn alles was ist, muss zum Wesen Gottes gehören, da Gott das einzige Wirkliche ist und alles umfasst. (Morris II:33.)

view, seeing in it a pattern for his own existence. For Goethe the way to maturity did not lead through abstract thinking: the proper way for him to attain to clarity was not systematic speculation *more geometrico* (in the three steps of definition, axiom, and demonstration). His nature demanded that he should use all his sensory and mental powers in the attempt to penetrate the world of single phenomena, to behold the Eternal in the Earthly. Spinoza's belief that nothing but clear reason could enjoy infallible cognition was not Goethe's view, and the existence of the *modi*, the individual things, he saw as more in equilibrium with the divine substance than did the philosopher. On June 9, 1785, he writes to F. H. Jacobi that he can recognize the so-called divine essence only in the single phenomena, "to whose more intimate and profound contemplation no one can encourage me more than Spinoza himself, although before his own eyes all individual things seem to disappear."¹¹ To the confident view of Spinoza that our reason is capable of attaining to an adequate knowledge of God, since all reality is rational, Goethe opposed his positive resignation. He believed that the Absolute itself must remain inaccessible to us; but he also said that while his idea of Nature was different from that of Spinoza, still the latter's view was the one which agreed most closely with his own. Just because Spinoza was so closely akin to him in fundamental views, but at the same time so different in his mode of thinking, Goethe felt himself mightily stimulated by him.

In Weimar, in the years 1784 and 1785, Goethe began to study Spinoza more thoroughly, together with Charlotte von Stein and Herder, yet even now without taking any interest in his system as a whole. "But when I look into it, I think I understand him." He saw his chief gain in the fact that Spinoza gave him courage to devote "his whole life to the study of things," of phenomena, in order to provide himself with an appropriate idea of their law-governed connections. Spinoza clarified and strengthened in him the conviction that Nature is governed throughout by law: in Nature (said Spinoza) there is no chance; everything is destined to be and to act by the necessity of God's nature (which acts only in accordance with its own laws). Such was also Goethe's feeling and thought.

¹¹. . . zu deren nahern und tiefern Betrachtung niemand mehr aufmuntern kann als Spinoza selbst, obgleich vor seinem Blicke alle einzelnen Dinge zu verschwinden scheinen.

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The result of his studies of Spinoza he set down in a résumé which is preserved for us in the handwriting of Charlotte von Stein. Existence is God—this “fundament of all Spinozism” forms the point of departure. But even in the following sentences Goethe withdraws from Spinoza and also from Herder: “But the infinite or the whole of existence cannot be thought by us.” We can only advance in contemplation from phenomenon to phenomenon, without the possibility that our experience could ever comprehend the Whole. For the Infinite lies “outside the power of comprehension of the limited mind.” Elsewhere too Goethe emphasizes the point, in opposition to Spinoza, that every existing thing has its existence in itself and cannot be measured by anything which is outside it; that no organism is put together out of parts but that each is an integral whole, and as such is an image of the universe. The individual organic being cannot be rightly comprehended by concepts, any more than the universe itself. This view places Goethe in opposition to Spinoza’s rationalism, as also to traditional metaphysics. The basic note in his ideas is the conviction that everything real is akin to us, but that at the same time the special uniqueness of every individuality constitutes a mystery which we are not in a position to unveil. Goethe’s mental courses operate between philosophy and “Nature science.” He does not attempt to explain Nature by the laws of pure thinking, or to understand the universe as a rational system. Out of idea, feeling, and thinking our creative genius forms for itself a picture of the universe which preserves the fullness and animation of the actual because it is not converted into concept and system. Goethe’s “world piety” (*Weltfrömmigkeit*) is something other than Spinoza’s *amor dei intellectualis*.

Thou gav’st me Nature as a kingdom grand,
 With power to feel and to enjoy it. Thou
 Not only cold, amazed acquaintance yield’st,
 But grantest, that in her profoundest breast
 I gaze, as in the bosom of a friend.
 The ranks of living creatures thou dost lead
 Before me, teaching me to know my brothers
 In air and water and the silent wood.¹²

¹² Gabst mir die herrliche Natur zum Königreich, / Kraft, sie zu fühlen, zu geniessen.
 Nicht / Kalt staunenden Besuch erlaubst du nur, / Vergönne mir, in ihre tiefe Brust, /
 Wie in den Busen eines Freunds, zu schauen. / Du führst die Reihe der Lebendigen / Vor

To behold the world of living beings in their unity and multiplicity, groping his way step by step through infinite diversity toward the laws by which the profusion is united and held together to form the Whole—that is Goethe's way. He wishes to know God through his works. With Spinoza, however, "all individual things [seem] to disappear" in the concept of oneness which is the supporting fundament of his system. Spinoza's "abstruse generalities" are positively repugnant to Goethe. But in one respect he is and remains at one with the philosopher: for him there is no other view of the world than that of seeing God in Nature, Nature in God. When in telling the story of his youth he speaks of the great influence which Spinoza's writings had exerted upon him, he names as the first and most important conviction which he found to be confirmed there: "Nature works according to eternal, necessary, and in this sense divine laws, that the Deity himself could change nothing in them."¹⁸ But no less important is the ethical effect which Spinoza's religious determinism had upon Goethe: his profound tranquillity, his ideal of unselfish love and of the positive resignation which resulted from insight into the all-pervading necessity of Nature and her subordination to law. He also learned to regard human passions as natural phenomena, uninfluenced by the convention which divides and disposes of things with concepts like "good" and "bad." Whereas of course "one and the same thing can be at once good and bad, and also neither."

If Spinoza came to be so important for Goethe, because he confirmed his pantheistic faith, Goethe is linked with *Leibniz* above all by his ideas of the operation of Nature and of the essence of individuality. The ideas of the greatest philosopher of Germany prior to Kant were part of the traditional possessions of the age in which Goethe grew up. Here too it is more a question of mediate effect than of direct dependence. Their most important spiritual kinship is that shown by the basic traits of their world views. They both start out from the idea that Nature is alive, everywhere and always, and that the essence of "substance" is working, creating. They also have in common the conviction that the universe organizes itself into countless independent

mir vorbei, und lehrst mich meine Brüder / Im stillen Busch, in Luft und Wasser kennen.
(*Faust*, verse 3220.)

¹⁸ Die Natur wirkt nach ewigen, notwendigen, dergestalt göttlichen Gesetzen, dass die Gottheit selbst daran nichts ändern konnte. (JA 25:8.)

single beings, which Leibniz calls "monads." These final, eternal units of spiritual character are active in an independent manner, like the "entelechies" of Aristotle. But at the same time they are members of a universal harmony, in which every individual substance has a share. There is nothing in the universe that is unfruitful and dead. All bodies are involved in an incessant development. The core of the personality, essentially, is activity; but here too the principle of individuality holds good: every monad is active in correspondence with its innate peculiarity. Each one is in its way a small image of the universe, a microcosm; not in a passive way, but as "creative mirror" (*miroir vivant*). Goethe says: "Within us too there is a universe."

It was through Lavater, whose physiognomics was based on the monad theory, through Herder, and especially through *Shaftesbury* that Goethe came in contact with the principal ideas of Leibniz. Shaftesbury, that philosophizing man of the world, had made a great impression on the Germans. His essayistic, elegant style of writing contrasted favorably with the cumbersome philosophy of Christian Wolff and his pupils, as it was taught in those days at German universities. Herder called Shaftesbury the "amiable Plato of Europe," and remarked that he was the first to present optimism in such a way as to touch the heart, whereas the optimism of Leibniz only appealed to the intellect. Leibniz himself acknowledged that his own ideas were presented by Shaftesbury in poetic language and graceful form. Shaftesbury also gave a modern stamp to Neoplatonic ideas. With joyous enthusiasm he paints the picture of a universe in whose harmony the Divine expresses itself as quintessence of the beautiful. A wise and kindly spirit is at work in the world. It creates on a large scale as the artist does on a small one; in both cases the same form-giving force is at work. Shaftesbury's aesthetic conception of the world and the optimism which follows therefrom dominates also his view of man. Morality does not consist for him in the obedience to definite commandments. Here too the point is to give a beautiful form to one's existence as person, that is, to carry out as human being in the sphere of culture that which God does in Nature. To shape oneself into a cultivated personality is the task of every individual. The individual attains his perfection by bringing his own striving into unison with the harmonious order of the world. Harmony is good, it rests upon the balance of the egotistic and altruistic emotions; im-

moderateness and chaos are the evil. Man possesses in his nature the powers and capacities for developing the inner self to "moral beauty." It is from Shaftesbury that Goethe takes over the concept of "inner form" which plays such an important part in his aesthetics. But more important was the fact that in this case a man who represented in a modern way the culture enthusiasm of the Renaissance existed in harmony with God and world, with himself and his like, because he had confidence in the great order of things, in life, and in the natural goodness of man. Goethe longed to gain in his own way such a cheerfulness and wisdom as this.

Despite his aversion to epistemology and metaphysics, Goethe followed the philosophic work of his own epoch with lively interest. His age was not only great for its extraordinary achievements in belles lettres; at that time Germany also produced a number of great thinkers. Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel—what a cluster of stars of the first magnitude! For Goethe as for others *Kant* was the foremost among the philosophers of his day. He called him "our old teacher" and celebrated him as the thinker who was the first to lay "a real foundation" (that is, for all philosophic thinking). Schopenhauer reports Goethe as having said to him that when he read a page of Kant he felt as if he were entering a brightly lighted room. In Kant he saw the destroyer of the popular philosophy which thought that common sense, even when not entirely sound, sufficed to enable man to form a clear conception of Nature and to create a usable ethics. Goethe himself drew up a sort of accounting as to his attitude toward the chief works of Kant in the essay *Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie* ("Influence of Recent Philosophy"; 1820). The *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* ("Critique of Pure Reason"), into whose "labyrinth" he did not venture to enter, he praises in later years, saying that it was important to determine for once the limits of the human mind.

For the rest, Kant's epistemological idealism was the very thing which was bound to lack interest for Goethe, unwavering realist that he was. For him the world of experience was not a product of our thinking. Of Kant's ethics he said it was the philosopher's immortal merit to have confronted the flabby eudemonism of the eighteenth century with the transcendental earnestness of the moral imperative. That in all action the question is one of motives and not of the effect,

that only the mood, the spirit in which we act, can be called morally good, this doctrine of goodwill was altogether consonant with Goethe's own view. Kant's rigorous contrasting of duty and inclination, however, he rejected; and even Schiller did the same. For Goethe there is no strict opposition between Nature and free will, sensuality and reason. "Will and Shall are indissolubly intertwined." When in the essay *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* ("Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason"), Kant presented his doctrine of the radical evil in human nature, Goethe dissented violently, because he took it to be a concession to the Christian doctrine of original sin. Later he admitted that certain aspects of human nature compel us "to ascribe to it a kind of radical evil, an innate sinfulness," but he added that other manifestations demand that we "also ascribe to it an innate virtue" (JA 37:288). Actually, however, that was also Kant's opinion. Kant's anthropology seemed to Goethe in many respects narrow-minded and not liberal enough. The philosopher, he said, looking "down from a rational eminence" beheld life as an evil disease and the world as a madhouse. But Goethe looked upon human nature with the same confidence as upon cosmic Nature. "As soon as I plan to represent man as he is, especially when I have to admit at every moment that it is not even within his power to be different . . . then it seems to me that one should give the whole thing a friendlier, more inviting, and more encouraging aspect."¹⁴ In this as in all other cases Goethe found the rigoristic standpoint narrow-minded and absurd.

Unqualified assent was drawn from him only by the last of Kant's great works, *Die Kritik der Urteilskraft* ("The Critique of Judgment"). The teleological part of it interested him almost more than the aesthetic, he remarked after a first reading. The main idea he found wholly in consonance with his own doing and thinking: Nature and art are conceived as two great infinite worlds, each existing for its own sake, both of them too great to act in accordance with purposes. The antiteleological standpoint which he himself had taken as student of Nature, philosopher of art, and poet, and in which he had already been strengthened by Spinoza, he now saw confirmed by the greatest

¹⁴ Sobald ich den Menschen darstellen will, wie er ist, besonders wenn ich allen Augenblick gestehen muss, dass es ja nicht einmal von ihm abhängt, anders zu sein . . . so dünkte ich, müsste man die Sache freundlicher, einladender und erquickender geben. (Letter to C. G. Voigt, December 19, 1798.)

philosopher of the age. This gave him the joyous certainty of being on the right track, without his feeling the need, as Schiller did, of entering the school of the philosopher. Another doctrine was also bound to appeal to him, namely, that art mediates between Nature and freedom, because works of art are produced by the mind of man according to the ideal principles which are operative in Nature too. But Goethe probably sensed how rationalistic, at bottom, was Kant's relation to art. Of genius Kant has as little understanding as of poetry and the other arts, he remarked. Later he pointed out as one of the defects of Kant's philosophy the fact that as principal forces of our power of ideation he reckons only sense perception, intelligence, and reason, but forgets imagination (*Phantasie*).

Another viewpoint as to which Goethe knows himself divergent from Kant involves so-called intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*), which is directed to the essence of the object, or, in Goethe's terminology, to the idea which realizes itself in objective phenomena. The point in question is nonsensory cognition, of the viewing with "eyes of the mind," whereby Goethe grasped the primal phenomena and types as the norms of that process by which Nature produces her forms. On this point Kant had said that we could imagine an intelligence which is intuitive and does not build up the Whole out of individual parts, but which "begins with the view of the Whole as such and then passes from that to the particular, i.e., from the Whole to its parts." But he had added that for man a reliable knowledge of the intelligible substance, of the Absolute in Nature, was impossible; this exceeded our capabilities. On the other hand, the investigator must subsume an "original organization," for which the processes that can be mechanically explained are only executive media; as e.g., comparative anatomy seeks to find "the common primal picture" of all animal skeletons and in this way determines the kinship of the single species one with another. This almost corresponds to the way in which Goethe deals with morphology—almost, for in distinction to Goethe, Kant evidently thinks of stem forms, of the genetic issuance of species from each other, and indeed he sees them as rising step by step. In this way he anticipates the basic contention of the modern theory of evolution. But if one should actually wish, he remarks, to view the realm of Nature as a single organism of immanent efficiency (somewhat as Aristotle does), such a hypothesis

would indeed not be nonsensical, but must at least be called "a daring venture of the reason." To this Goethe replies that this is precisely the venture which he has had the courage to undertake in his scientific work (see *Anschauende Urteilskraft*, "Contemplative Judgment"; 1820). What he wants to know (*erkennen*) is just "that which underlies the phenomena."

Among the representatives of critical idealism, *Fichte* was certainly the one who meant least to Goethe, even though he had various personal dealings with him during the time when Fichte was professor in Jena. He remarks that Fichte is a queer duck, but despite the rigidity in his views interesting all the same, and adroit in conversation. Goethe felt Fichte's mode of thinking wholly alien to himself, because it was so completely concentrated upon the ego. "These gentlemen, one and all, keep chewing the cud of their own folly, ruminate their own ego."¹⁵ In 1798 Fichte got into difficulty on account of his religious theories, and was accused of being an atheist. When he published his passionate "Appeal to the Public," Goethe advised the Weimar government to dismiss him. But it was not Fichte's controversial theories to which Goethe took exception. What outraged him was the presumptuous language which Fichte allowed himself with reference to the government. But the considered judgment in the *Annalen* reads: Fichte was "one of the ablest personalities" that ever lived.

To *Schelling* Goethe felt himself drawn more than to any other of the contemporaneous philosophers. (See the chapter on the Romanticists in *Goethe the Poet*, pp. 147ff.) What united him with Schelling was a strong measure of agreement in the principles under which they viewed Nature. Schelling's doctrine that there is only one single reality, which is spirit from within and phenomenon from without, and that God and Nature together produce only one living being; the conviction that only intellectual intuition is capable of penetrating the secrets of creative Nature; the conception of polar opposites as the primary basis of all life; and finally the view that Nature is a realm of ideas at work—all this coincided with Goethe's "deepest convictions." Most of Schelling's writings were familiar to him. He praised those on natural philosophy, shelved those on

¹⁵ Diese Herren kauen sämtlich ihren eignen Narren beständig wieder, ruminieren ihr Ich. (Letter to Wilhelm von Humboldt, September 16, 1799.)

epistemology, and one may really contend—as was the fact—that in Schelling Goethe found his own *Weltanschauung* presented, but in a systematic arrangement and in the language of modern speculation. Schelling had about the significance for Goethe among the living philosophers that Spinoza possessed as representative of the tradition to which Goethe's pantheism was traceable. And this was the reason why Goethe could consider collaborating with Schelling in presenting the new picture of Nature in a didactic poem after the fashion of Lucretius, a plan which to be sure proved itself to be not practically feasible (see the chapter, "Last Poems," *Goethe the Poet*, p. 232).

The last and greatest of the idealistic philosophers, G. W. F. Hegel, Goethe esteemed as a personality, but he turned away from Hegel's writings. Hegel's philosophy, he said, both attracted and repelled him, but fundamentally he wanted to have nothing to do with it. Upon receiving word of Hegel's death he summarized with valid precision what the great man had meant to him: "The fundament of his doctrine lay outside the sphere of my vision, but wherever his doing reached me, or perhaps took a part in my efforts, I have always drawn a genuine spiritual advantage from it."¹⁶ But even if it cannot be said that Hegel's philosophy had a traceable influence upon Goethe, yet there is a variety of kinship between them, or even agreement. At bottom Goethe was close enough to Hegel's *Realidealismus*, that philosophy which would not move in the void of pure thinking, but occupy itself with that which is present and actual. Hegel sought to lead speculation away from the abstract idealism which talked of that "which is only supposed to be, without being," and back to the actual, in which he like Goethe saw the identity of Nature and spirit. "The spirit of the actual is the truly ideal." Against a mechanistic empiricism which only pulls to pieces without achieving any synthesis he fought no less decidedly than Goethe. The doctrine of polarity is also found in Hegel's philosophy of Nature. It is at the same time the foundation of his dialectic method, which derives all happening from the synthesis of opposites. "Dualization (*Entzweiung*) is necessarily a factor of life, which constantly forms itself in opposites" (Hegel).

¹⁶ Das Fundament seiner Lehre lag ausser meinem Gesichtskreise, wo aber sein Tun an mich heranreichte oder auch wohl in meine Bestrebungen eingriff, habe ich immer davon wahren geistigen Vorteil gehabt. (Letter to Varnhagen von Ense, January 5, 1832.)

Other agreements between the two men could be mentioned; they have been determined by specialists on Hegel. At first Hegel had thought that Goethe had a kind of hatred of ideas and concepts and for this reason clung exclusively to the empiric. Later he came to see that the poet's foremost condition was a pure, simple appreciation of Nature. "A great mind perceives in the motley play of phenomena that which is essential," said Hegel, meaning that which is based upon reason, and added that that was precisely Goethe's way: naïvely, but with a great mind, the poet had approached objects by way of sensory contemplation and had at the same time had "the full intimation of their conceptual connection." It gave Goethe satisfaction that Hegel took his side in his conflict with Newton. A letter from Hegel which refers to this was incorporated by him in an appendix to his *Farbenlehre*. It has been justly said that the philosopher and the poet complement each other magnificently in that which distinguishes them, and that they erected their world pictures on a common foundation: upon faith in the immanence of the Divine in all life.¹⁷

This statement designates at the same time what links Goethe in general with the philosophy of so-called idealism. In his way, independently and of himself, he believed and practiced the synthesis of spirit and Nature, idea and being, subject and object, freedom and necessity, with which idealism was likewise concerned. The meaning and the capacity of the conscious mind which manifests itself in the creative subject and comes to awareness of itself as analogue, as image of the spirit at work in Nature—these were insights he did not have to learn of the contemporaneous thinkers, to be sure, but in their work he found basis and confirmation of them. This was evidently what Goethe meant when he said in 1830 that he thanked the philosophy of critical idealism for having directed his attention to himself. But for him Nature, objective being, was always the sphere where he had his decisive experiences, not the subjective mind and pure thinking. "Experience! what mist and froth! Nor with the mind at all coequal"¹⁸—these presumptuous words of the Baccalaureus in *Faust* designate that to which Goethe objected in the philosophy of

¹⁷ Hugo Falkenheim, *Goethe und Hegel* (Tübingen, 1934).

¹⁸ Erfahrungswesen! Schaum und Dust! / Und mit dem Geist nicht ebenbürtig. (*Faust*, verse 6758.)

his age. To him the spirit of the actual is the truly ideal, and the universal is only to be grasped in the single phenomenon. "We must not scorn that which is immediately, visibly sensual, else we sail without ballast."¹⁹

Modern pessimism, too, the opposing theory which replaced idealism in the course of intellectual history, became known to Goethe. Arthur Schopenhauer's mother and sister lived in Weimar and made part of the little circle with which Goethe had regular intercourse. He discussed his *Farbenlehre* with young Schopenhauer in 1814. But differences resulted from this, and Goethe had to give up hope of winning the young philosopher as a defender of his disputed theory. "You believe for a while that you have loyal disciples, and before you know it they fall away and form a sect."²⁰ The first volume of Schopenhauer's chief work, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* ("The World as Will and Idea"), attracted Goethe's notice in 1819, shortly after its publication. His criticism of the negative view of life and of the discomfort sublimated to a philosophy—as to which Goethe was informed from his conversations with the "mostly misjudged" young man, who was however "hard to know"—he summarized in brilliant and pregnant words in two verses which he wrote in Schopenhauer's album as early as 1814:

If joy in your own worth you'd know,
Worth on the world you must bestow.²¹

All the wisdom of Goethe's old age seeks by means of precept and example to counteract the new *taedium vitae*, which began to spread among the young intellectuals toward the end of the Romantic period.

¹⁹ Das unmittelbar sichtlich Sinnliche dürfen wir nicht verschmahen, sonst fahren wir ohne Ballast. (Letter to L. G. von Grusdorf, March 30, 1827.)

²⁰ Man glaubt eine Weile treue Schuler zu haben, und ehe man es sich versieht, weichen sie ab und bilden eine Sekte. (Conversation with Eckermann, February 19, 1829.)

²¹ Willst du dich deines Wertes freuen, / So mußt der Welt du Wert verleihen. (JA 4:14.)

Religion

From the inaccessible mountain across the desert which no foot has trod, up to the end of the unknown ocean, breathes the spirit of the eternal creator, rejoicing in every bit of dust that perceives him and lives.¹

I am more than anyone inclined to believe in a world outside the visible one.²

Whoso has sciences and art, religion has as well;

Whoso lacks sciences and art, should in religion dwell.³

A FEELING FOR THE MAJESTY OF THE SUPERHUMAN AND FOR THE LIMITS OF MAN, WHO IS FITTED BUT ALSO LOCKED INTO AN INVISIBLE ORDER, WHICH COMPRISES in itself the material reality; the consciousness that this supermundane greatness is akin to our mind, but is essentially incomprehensible and therefore accessible only to quiet reverence; surrender to a Will which is higher than our reason, and confidence in the loving character of this superworldly, supreme power—such features of every higher type of religion were manifested by Goethe all through his long life. With incomparable beauty and grandeur, in the stanzas of the Archangels at the beginning of *Faust*, faith is expressed in the divine element in all phenomena, together with the reverent admiration of its works. These feelings and convictions are deeply rooted in Goethe's personality. The older he grew, the more inexhaustible he found the mysterious profundity of the world. What greatness in the fact that so incomparable a mind as this, which has had a long and rich life beyond the common measure of men, at times closes letters in his last years with the pious phrase, "Respect for the Unfathomable"! He thinks he is living in the right way if in all his earthly doings he always looks up to the highest, feels something eternal to be present

¹ Vom unzugänglichen Gebirge über die Einode, die kein Fuss betrat, bis ans Ende des unbekannten Ozeans, weht der Geist des Ewigschaffenden, und freut sich jedes Staubes, der ihn vernimmt und lebt. (JA 16:58.)

² Ich bin geneigter als jemand, noch eine Welt ausser der sichtbaren zu glauben. (Letter to Lavater, November 14, 1781.)

³ Wer Wissenschaft und Kunst besitzt, / Hat auch Religion; / Wer jene beiden nicht besitzt, / Der habe Religion. (JA 4:125.)

in the transient moment, and thus rests tranquil in the feeling of being secure in the infinite ocean of creation. In this union of contradictory experiences true piety is proven valid.

Here the vital law of polar complements is confirmed: man and God, individual and world spirit are related to each other as complementary opposites. In the pulsing to-and-fro of the inner life the individual gathers up its forces in order to maintain itself, and then opens itself up again, in harmonious countermovement, to the boundless, of which everything individual is an integral part. In the alternating rhythm of contraction and expansion the individual soul has its intercourse with the "all-ruler" (*Allwaltender*). The poem in the *Divan* called *Selige Sehnsucht* ("Blissful Yearning") speaks of this as of the *mysterium magnum* of the religious life. He who does not know this, we read, is only a "sorry guest" on this earth; together with the Infinite, the fulfillment of life is also permanently hidden from him.

Within our bosom's pureness stirs a striving
To give ourselves in gratitude unbidden
To something higher, purer—whence deriving?
Unriddling for oneself Him ever hidden;
We call it: worship! ⁴

The self surrenders itself to the unknown god, certainty of whom is given by faith and intimation—but not out of fear, rather voluntarily, and in gratitude for the happiness of existence and the splendor of the world. Goethe calls this a piety which may hope to know what no word is capable of comprehending. That our purest sensations yearn for community with the Divine, hence that we have religion, is in Goethe's view a part of the nature of man.

But if man must have religion in order to be wholly human, how then can Goethe assure us in the celebrated epigram (quoted above: "Whoso has sciences and art") that religion is not a requirement for the trained intellect which lives in the world of science and the arts? Educated agnostics and learned unbelievers have often chosen to interpret the saying to their advantage. Or is that not what Goethe means to say? The clear basic thought is evidently this, that every-

⁴ In unsers Busens Reine wogt ein Streben, / Sich einem Hohern, Reinern, Unbekannten / Aus Dankbarkeit freiwillig hinzugeben, / Enträtselnd sich den ewig Ungenannten; / Wir heissen's. fromm sein! (*Trilogie der Leidenschaft*, JA 2:209.)

one should have religion, but that there are two ways of having it. Of those who are devoted to science and the arts the assertion is made that such intercourse and possession embrace that which is meant by religion, and that therefore these persons need not practice their veneration of God in the traditional forms and institutions.

Who without piety would live

Himself to effort great must give:

To rove without support or aid.⁵

But a man to whom this special way of life is not given should walk the common road of positive religions and churches. In this view is comprised the contention that not only the regular believers have communion with God and knowledge of him. To be sure, the science of which Goethe says that it includes religion is not the "pure research," the modern rationalism, which has detached itself from faith and for which there is no further invisible world behind the visible one. This kind of science was in existence in Goethe's day. In his critique of Holbach's *Système de la Nature* he rejects it; this seemed to him a gray and death-infested book. The science which Goethe has in mind is that practiced by him and kindred spirits: contemplation of the Divine in the phenomena of coursing life, the way to the Absolute through the world of externals. This kind of Nature exploration, carried on with the aid of all the spiritual powers, Goethe does indeed regard as the most reliable and immediate way of attaining to the knowledge of the "great world god." And the art which he refers to is certainly not that of modern realism, the spiritual sister of scientific positivism. Goethe means the art which attempts to make the higher aspect of Nature visible in her forms, the idea visible in phenomena—i.e., the art of symbolic idealism. Such science and such art speak of the Eternal which they seek to approach: science on the pathways of the questing mind, art by embodying the creative ideas in their manifestations and thus helping us to contemplate the transcendent. "Contemplation, observation, and reflection bring us closer to those secrets."⁶ But that is no contradiction, for the world is "the living garment of the Deity."⁷

⁵ Wer ohne Frömmigkeit will leben, / Muss grosser Mühe sich ergeben: / Auf seine eigne Hand zu wandern. (JA 4:125.)

⁶ Anschauung, Betrachtung, Nachdenken führen uns näher an jene Geheimnisse. (JA 39:35.)

⁷ . . . der Gottheit lebendiges Kleid. (*Faust*, verse 509.)

God and World

In contemplating the cosmic structure in its greatest expansion, in its ultimate divisibility, we cannot resist the conception that underneath all this lies an idea whereby God in Nature and Nature in God must create and work from eternity to eternity.¹

As if the external world did not everywhere reveal to him who has eyes the most mysterious laws by day and night. In this persistence of the infinitely manifold I see most clearly the handwriting of God.²

As far as eye can see or ear can hear,
Known things alone, you'll find, like him appear,
And though your mind in highest ardor soar,
You can achieve this picture, nothing more.³

THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH GOETHE'S WORLD PICTURE RESTS IS THE BELIEF THAT REALITY IS A UNION OF OPPOSITES, "TWIN-NATURES SINGLE GROWN" (*GEEINTE Zwiennatur*). God and world, mind and matter are not separated, but exist only with and in each other. All "Be-ing" belongs to the essence of God; for God is the only real thing. *Deus sive natura*. Existence is God. Goethe prefers to say "God and Nature"; at times he welds Spinoza's formula into a firmer unity and says "God-Nature." If reality is the organ of God, how can one seek a more perfect world outside of or above it? It is itself the quintessence of force, order, and beauty. The lofty feeling which is disseminated by this view of the Eternal in the phenomenon, of God in his works, is expressed everywhere in Goethe's writings. In his early works, pantheism is still rather a feeling of God-filled infinity than it is cognition (*Erkenntnis*). Goethe calls it a floating "in the gloriously, infinitely

¹ Wir können bei Betrachtung des Weltgebäudes in seiner weitesten Ausdehnung, in seiner letzten Teilbarkeit uns der Vorstellung nicht erwehren, dass dem Ganzen eine Idee zum Grund liege, wonach Gott in der Natur, die Natur in Gott, von Ewigkeit zu Ewigkeit, schaffen und wirken möge. (JA 39:34.)

² Als wenn die Aussenwelt dem, der Augen hat, nicht überall die geheimsten Gesetze taglich und nachtlich offenbarte! In dieser Konsequenz des unendlich Mannigfaltigen sehe ich Gottes Handschrift am allerdeutlichsten. (JA 38:125)

³ So weit das Ohr, so weit das Auge reicht, / Du findest nur Bekanntes, das ihm gleicht, / Und deines Geistes hochster Feuerflug / Hat schon am Gleichnis, hat am Bild genug. (JA 2:239.)

holy ocean of our Father, who is incomprehensible but accessible.”⁴

The next stage becomes visible in the *Fragment über die Natur* (“Fragment on Nature”; 1782), written by Georg Christoph Tobler as an abstract of his conversations with Goethe. Here (as Goethe judged forty years later) “an unfathomable, unconditioned essence” is assumed as the basis of all the phenomena of the world. But there is still a lack of realistic insight into the way in which the mind in Nature creates; not yet formulated is the doctrine of polarity and “progress through intensification” (*Steigerung*), the “two great driving-wheels of Nature.” Then the study of Spinoza’s writings and Goethe’s development of his own morphological mode of contemplation strengthen his pantheistic convictions and round off the world picture which grows out of them. In the processes of eternally creating Nature the Deity makes itself known, not to be grasped entirely, but still revealing itself step by step. Its essence is force and spirit all in one, substance and form, eternal motion and at the same time fixed order. Its bottom is beyond the reach of our mind. But where it enters into life as phenomenon, we see that it is analogous to our reason.

The final opposition is that of the one and the many, the unified control of law and the infinite multiplicity. The Eternally One realizes itself incessantly in nothing but independent individuals. “This personified vastness confronts us as a god, as creator and preserver, whom we are in every way summoned to worship, to revere, and to praise.”⁵ In his relation to the great world spirit the believer needs no mediation other than his senses and his reason. The possibility of man’s having such an immediate relation to, so close an association with, the God that is interwoven with the world is regarded by Goethe as the principal advantage of “Nature piety” (*Naturfrömmigkeit*).

On one occasion Goethe speaks to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi of the Christian God as a formless God—simply because he does not have any shape and does not appear as a picture, but is only to be revered in a spiritual way as the invisible one. On the other hand, the Spinozists have been rebuked because their identification of God and reality makes the conception of God impersonal and does not permit

⁴ . . . im herrlich unendlich heiligen Ozean unsers Vaters, des unbegreiflichen aber des beruhlichen. (Morris V:309.)

⁵ Dieses Ungeheure personifiziert tritt uns als ein Gott entgegen, als Schöpfer und Erhalter, welchen anzubeten, zu verehren und zu preisen wir auf alle Weise aufgefordert sind. (JA 39:336.)

the individual to bring his peculiar self, his personality, into connection with the Eternal. Goethe, to be sure, cannot separate the deity from Nature, cannot conceive of it as personality and assign it a place outside of or above the world. He thinks like Giordano Bruno:

What were a god, who, but from outward pushing,
Should twirl all things in circles outward rushing!
'Tis fitter he should give them inward motion.⁶

But at times he does speak of a god of providence, who conforms to his conception of the determinism which springs from the idea of the all-embracing order. Or he thanks God the "all-ruler" for allowing him, after overcoming a severe illness, still to behold the lovely light of His sun—a feeling that can only be tendered to a Being which participates as person in the personal existence of the individual. So too Goethe declined to restrict his piety to God-Nature. His nature, he remarks, is so many-sided that a single conception of the Divine cannot satisfy him: as a student of Nature he is a pantheist, as a poet however a polytheist—viz., he sees the one divine essence emerging everywhere in the individual forms, and in such a way that what seems to us truly sublime is the boundless production, the breadth and multiplicity of Nature. But now he goes on, "If as a moral man I need a God for my personality, provision therefor has already been made. The heavenly and earthly things are so vast a realm that only the organs of all beings taken together can embrace it."⁷ More precisely, and in elucidation of this last utterance, Goethe formulated his conception of God thus: "We are in Nature research pantheists, in poetry polytheists, morally monotheists."⁸ The universal, i.e., the great mobile order of things ("God and his Law"), and the particular, in which the one divine essence dissects itself, i.e., the vast multiplicity of individual forms (" 'Tis the One, the everlasting, That is multiply revealed"),⁹ are both active also as primal polarity in the microcosm of the human person. So he says that the autono-

⁶ Was war' ein Gott, der nur von aussen stiesse, / Im Kreis das All am Fnger laufen liesse' / Ihm ziemt's, die Welt im Innern zu bewegen (JA 2:239)

⁷ Bedarf ich eines Gottes für meine Personlichkeit, als sittlicher Mensch, so ist dafür auch schon gesorgt. Die himmlischen und irdischen Dinge sind ein so weites Reich, dass die Organe aller Wesen zusammen es nur erfassen mögen. (Letter to F. H. Jacobi, January 6, 1813)

⁸ Wir sind naturforschend Pantheisten, dichtend Polytheisten, sittlich Monotheisten. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 807.)

⁹ Und es ist das ewig Eine, / Das sich vielfach offenbart. (JA 2:246.)

mous conscience is the sun of the moral life. It is the same power, creating according to law, which gives to the life of Nature, as to the moral-spiritual life in us, both norm and form. How that can be, and how the impersonal deity which rules in the world can organize the human personality at once as consciousness and as moral law, Goethe does not attempt to visualize. For him this is part of the unfathomable, which one must in quiet reverence let alone, if one can no longer accept the miraculous explanations of mythology. In the last conversation recorded by Eckermann Goethe says that "worshipful awe" of the "highest principle of morality" revealed in Christ is just as natural to him as that he should revere the sun as the mightiest revelation of the "procreative power of God." The experiencing of God in Nature and in the conscience stand side by side here as equal in importance and value. The idea of order, of law, unites the moral with the cosmic. But many another secret remains unrevealed.

Christianity

As I had often enough heard it said that ultimately every man has his own religion, nothing seemed to me more natural than that I too might form my own.¹

You find nothing lovelier than the Gospel, but I find a thousand pages, written by ancient and recent men favored by God, just as lovely, and useful and indispensable to mankind.²

Jesus thought, in purest feeling,
But One God in his creation;
Making Christ a God was dealing
Wrongly with his high vocation.³

GOETHE GREW UP IN A CITY WHOSE CULTURAL LIFE BORE THE REGULATING STAMP OF LUTHERAN FAITH AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH. HE WAS INSTRUCTED BY

¹ Da ich oft genug hatte sagen hören, jeder Mensch habe am Ende doch seine eigene Religion, so kam mir nichts natürlicher vor, als dass ich mir auch meine eigene bilden könne (JA 23:163.)

² Du findest nichts schöner als das Evangelium, ich finde tausend geschriebene Blätter alter und neuer von Gott begnadigter Menschen ebenso schön, und der Menschheit nützlich und unentbehrlich. (Letter to Lavater, August 9, 1782)

³ Jesus fühlte rein und dachte / Nur den Einen Gott im Stillen, / Wer ihn selbst zum Gotte machte / Krankte seinen heil'gen Willen. (JA 5:137.)

tutors who were mostly trained theologians. Above all, his mother was a Christian of the ideal kind, pious and merry at once. In the story of his youth he relates what these circumstances meant for his education and earliest development. The Bible was for him, as for all Protestants, still the book of books, "so full of content that it offers, more than any other book, matter for thought and occasion for reflection upon human affairs."⁴ The wonderful fates of the Jewish people, the figures of the patriarchs, the bucolic conditions in the archaic eras, the unshakable belief of the Jews that they were a people chosen and led by God—these parts of the Old Testament had probably made upon the boy's imagination an even greater impression than the accounts of the wondrous life and sufferings of the Redeemer. To the Bible, said Goethe, he owed almost exclusively his moral training. This is true of his boyhood. A later judgment calls the Bible a book of unending effect, not to be comprehended as a whole, but venerable, understandable, and applicable in detail. That the Protestant service had "too little abundance and consistency," too few sacraments and rites—this judgment, expressed and supported in *Dichtung and Wahrheit*, certainly belongs to a later period.

But the remembrance of the emptiness and dullness which the imaginative boy had had to endure every Sunday constituted the foundation of his later aversion. In Frankfurt, as everywhere else in Germany, the church was a state church; a privileged citizen had to belong to it. In addition, there was the sect of the Pietists, which had long been flourishing. Like Puritanism and Methodism in England, this movement of Protestant laymen had once more emphasized, in contrast to the ethical and dogmatic conventionality of the church, the ideals of Christian life contained in the Bible. Piety was then altogether a matter of personal feeling, love and brotherliness were substituted for strict obedience and duty, and a serious attempt was made to substantiate faith in daily life. In Leipzig Goethe had made the acquaintance of a young man, Ernst Theodor Langer, who was committed to a subjectivistic Christianity; under his influence Goethe studied the New Testament in a new fashion, with "feeling and enthusiasm." In the years of sickness and recovery which Goethe then

⁴. . . so voller Gehalt, dass sie mehr als jedes andere Buch Stoff zum Nachdenken und Gelegenheit zu Betrachtungen über die menschlichen Dinge darbietet. (JA 23:72.)

spent in Frankfurt, he was brought into contact with the Pietist conventicles by his mother's friend Susanna von Klettenberg, and by his mother herself. In Strasbourg he met Herder, the most "modern" young theologian there was in Germany at that time. Other representatives of a new, subjectivistic, and enthusiastic Christianity became his friends: Johann Kaspar Lavater, the Swiss theologian, and Heinrich Jung-Stilling, the physician and Pietist.

By the end of his youthful period Goethe had already formed a definite, independent attitude toward Christianity. He had ceased to participate in the life of either church or conventicle. But along with that which he owed to his Christian education, his feeling and his striving had derived from his intercourse with the amiable Christianity of the Pietists a spiritual and intellectual profit which he never lost again. One can form a clear view of this from one of the two theological pamphlets which Goethe published in 1773. In it he says that only that faith may be considered valid as true religion which is founded on the conviction that God and love are one, and that this love was made man in Christ. God can only be comprehended by the heart. The visible church of the theologians and their dogmatic intolerance are rejected. "Let truth be dear to us wherever we find it."⁵ That is an important statement. At a later time, too, this was Goethe's way of thinking. He does to be sure acknowledge the Gospels to be essentially messages from God, but he does not accept all the details of historical tradition in them, and still less the ecclesiastical doctrine based thereon. The Bible, he remarks, is not the work of one mind; it was assembled little by little, and at various times it was revised. Goethe thought that to take as true the miracles related in the Bible involved not only an outrageous demand on one's common sense; to him these reports are "blasphemies against the great God and his revelation in Nature."⁶ How should the God who manifests himself in Nature as uninterrupted Order, as infallible Law, wish to prove his grandeur and power by interrupting and nullifying the sacred Order of his creation? The true believer will be content with the contemplation of "God's great world," and with the knowledge of "its universal uninterrupted and unintermittible workings" (JA

⁵ Die Wahrheit sei uns lieb, wo wir sie finden. (JA 36:92.)

⁶ . . . Lasterungen gegen den grossen Gott und seine Offenbarung in der Natur. (Letter to Lavater, August 9, 1782.)

36:145). But Goethe did also say that miracle is the dearest child of faith (*Faust*, verse 766).

An absolutely true, exclusively true religion is for Goethe not to be found among the organized denominations. In Jesus he does not see the sole mediator inspired by the divine spirit. Other religions too have a share in the one simple truth which Goethe calls "natural religion." Every person who looks at Nature and life with open senses has the certainty that behind visible Nature there is "a great, producing, guiding, and regulating being." Philosophers—Locke, Hume, Shaftesbury, Voltaire, Rousseau, Leibniz—had spoken throughout the entire eighteenth century of natural religion as a faith which issues from a healthy reason and replaces the supranatural religion or revelation. But in these cases it was mostly a question of nothing but "rational reverence for God" and a moral code derived from the nature of man. But Goethe's natural religion is a complex of feelings which are awakened in us by the contemplation of Nature as the most glorious revelation of God. This faith has no need to formulate itself dogmatically. It demands nothing save what senses and reason recognize as true. But every particular religion must defend against doubt and change, by absolute statements of belief, its claim to possess "the genuine ring" (see Lessing, *Nathan the Wise*, Act III, scene 7). In these matters Goethe shares, not wholly but in large measure, a kind of faith which superseded the different denominations, and which had spread among the educated classes of Europe in the eighteenth century and had estranged them from the churches. In Germany this rationalistic attitude toward religious problems was vigorously interpenetrated by elements of mystical piety and a philosophic irrationalism, for which reason it had less of a positivistic and moralizing manner.

Goethe opposes to the ascetic conquest of the world an enthusiasm for the beauty and sublimity of the universe. Visible reality is seized upon by him as apparition of the infinite Deity. Christian spiritualism and Christian morality united in his mind with modern "world piety." It was the same faith as that which underlay Herder's theology and philosophy. In this matter Herder was closer to Goethe than was any other thinker of the age. When Herder says that not concept and word, not dogma and sermon give us a genuine experience of God's existence, but only the use of our own powers, the vigorous, happy



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JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE, 1817

BY FERDINAND JAGIMANN

enjoyment of our life, those words might have been said by Goethe. Nature is the most exalted, clearest revelation of God, accessible to all peoples, and understandable by all. The sacred Scriptures constitute a supplement as "a fatherly explanation, a secret interpretation and doctrine for [God's] household and his children" (Herder). Everywhere and at all times God reveals himself, even though not always with equal clarity and in the same way. In this universal religion all men should unite as brothers, developing in its spirit so as to achieve an ever purer humanity.

About like this, though not always in exactly the same way, Goethe too was wont to reason, especially during the middle period of his life, when he had close spiritual intercourse with Herder. "Children, love one another," such was the content of the Bible, from Moses and the Prophets down to the Gospel of Saint John, he wrote to Herder. The entirety of his religious views he himself calls a Christianity for his own private use. What he emphasized, at times with the sharpness of a polemic, in the first decades of the Weimar period, was rather that which separated him from dogmatic Christianity than that which united him indissolubly with the spirit and the moral culture of Christianity. To Lavater he wrote at this time that he was certainly neither anti-Christian nor un-Christian, but that he was "decidedly a non-Christian." Some of the Venetian epigrams lash out so savagely against the mysteries and dogmas of Christianity that nobody ventured to print them prior to the twentieth century. But one should not take these ill-humored sarcasms seriously. Such "free thinking" was part of the intellectual fashion of the critical age, and it is only at this point that Goethe expresses himself so provocatively.

Goethe's aversion to the crucifix he never overcame. Even at the end of his days he says that that "sorry torture-tree" is to him "the most repugnant thing under the sun" (letter to Zelter, June 9, 1831). On the surface this antipathy looks like a crotchet. But it is connected with Goethe's most important convictions. In the *Wanderjahre* he explained one of the causes of his aversion: one of the educators says that in his school it is chiefly Christ's life and actions that are placed before the eyes of the boys, because these are more fruitful and instructive than his death. "For every man is destined for the former trials, but very few for the latter."⁷ It is true, he goes on, that Christ's

⁷ Denn zu jenen Prüfungen ist jeder, zu diesem sind nur wenige berufen. (JA 19:190.)

sufferings and death are pointed to as a model of sublime patience, but to the pedagogs it seems better to draw a veil over this horror, just because they feel so great an awe of it. "We consider it to be a damnable insolence to expose that torture-frame with the Saviour suffering on it to the sight of the sun which concealed its face when a nefarious world forced this spectacle upon it."⁸ A secret, he says, in which the profundity of divine suffering lies concealed should not be made public and become the object of a popularity which makes light of it. It seems more decent and reverent to leave this martyrdom behind its veil and to venerate it in silence.

The other cause of Goethe's aversion to the public portrayal of Christ in suffering and death is his conviction that what we must do is to strengthen in man the God-given forces of trust, faith, hope, and courage, since after all life holds in readiness for us a sufficiency of suffering, fear, and destruction. "*Memento mori!* we have enough of that," Goethe exclaims, and one need not place at every roadside for the living this reminder of the limits of all existence. For only the sage, according to the words of the pastor in *Hermann und Dorothea*, will so understand it that it will strengthen for him the force of active life. But Goethe knows well that awe of the dark mysteries of the world is one of those feelings which it is the function of Christianity to teach, and that just that makes it an "ultimate" goal to which humanity might attain. But how, he remarks, can we do the day's work if we intentionally immerse ourselves in that which threatens to cast every existence into the abyss of futility and negation? It is better, and certainly it is wiser, to avert one's gaze; even though our knowledge of the end toward which every individual life is hastening cannot and should not be silenced.

That Goethe did not accept the dogmas of the Christian faith, the divinity of Christ and its verification in the resurrection and ascension, made him by creed a non-Christian. In that light, the question as to his stand with respect to the two denominations appears less important. In Italy he lived for the first time among a Roman Catholic people, and in Rome he first made the acquaintance of the ecclesiastical cult in its full development. The living impression only

⁸ Wir halten es für eine verdammungswürdige Frechheit, jenes Martergerüst und den daran leidenden Heiligen dem Anblick der Sonne auszusetzen, die ihr Angesicht verbarg, als eine ruchlose Welt ihr dies Schauspiel aufdrang. (JA 19:191.)

strengthened his feeling of alienation. Every trace of the original Christian faith seemed extinguished in that which the Protestant felt to be "baroque pagandom." The church ceremonies were to him nothing but "soulless pomp." He persisted unmoved in that aloofness of the enlightened man of the world which is generally characteristic of the intellectuals of the eighteenth century. Only under the influence of the defense of Catholicism by the romantics, and of their interpretation of the old doctrine, the old cult, was Goethe's rejection transformed into a friendly understanding. Through his friendship with the Rhenish Catholic, Sulpiz Boisserée, he later came into personal contact with Catholic piety and tradition. In his later works, beginning with *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* ("The Elective Affinities"), one finds all sorts of intimations of a new position. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (book VII) a serious and respectful explanation is given of the importance which the sacraments have in the life of the Church. They are, says Goethe, "the highest summit of religion, the sensual symbol of an extraordinary divine favor and grace."⁹ The fact that the Protestant has too few sacraments and only one, the Lord's Supper, in which he takes an active part, is looked upon as a defect. Even though Goethe had no appreciation of such mysteries as the Immaculate Conception, it was his study of old German pictures and architecture, on his two journeys to the Rhine and Main in 1814 and 1815, which first brought him to a full realization of how greatly the church and its teaching had helped to rescue art from the downfall of the ancient world, and how the new spirit animated it. In Italy Goethe had still regarded all this as barbarism of the Middle Ages, which had only been terminated by the art of the Renaissance.

It has been thought that from boyhood on Goethe was in some respects closer to Catholic modes of thought than to those of Lutheranism. In his autobiography he tells that he had been distinguished from the Pietists, as also "from other worthy followers of Christ," by reason of his conception of human nature. Protestant rigorism looked upon man as a being stricken with the curse of original sin, as thoroughly evil, and as by himself incapable of betterment. To this gloomy doctrine, Goethe relates, he had even at that time opposed on his own impulse the more cheerful conception according to which

⁹. . . das Höchste der Religion, das sinnliche Symbol einer ausserordentlichen göttlichen Gunst und Gnade. *JA* 23:90.)

man, with all his inherited faults, still could voluntarily face the divine grace and help it to enable the sinner to be purified and grow upward toward "spiritual blessedness." Then, to his surprise, he had been informed that this conflict of views had never been entirely smoothed out in the history of the Church, and had at one time assumed a great importance for the very teaching of the church. Augustine's stern doctrine of divine grace, which man could not actually earn in any way, and of predestination—this doctrine, to which later on the Protestant movements, but also Jansenism, had adhered, had been contested by the Irish monk Pelagius. He had taught that man has a natural inclination to and power for the good. But the church had repudiated that and had confirmed in its place Augustine's doctrine of grace. In the end, however, a more positive conception of the nature of man and its role in the process of sanctification had achieved recognition and permanence. If Goethe inclined to this conception, as he certainly did, and if the rigorous view of orthodox Protestantism was patently repugnant to him, still he shares with all the humanistic thinkers of the eighteenth century his belief in the good core and foundation of man. That man should think worthily of himself and have respect for himself, that was the basic doctrine of the new humanism. That alone made of nobody a disciple of Pelagius or a follower of Catholicism, even though it is true that this view brings one closer to Catholic tradition and practice than to that of Protestantism. Luther's teaching, that by his own reason and power man could not even attain to faith, which alone makes us "pious, free, and blessed," was unacceptable to all the great thinkers and poets of the age, not to Goethe alone.

In general, Goethe had no use for the strictly religious claims of the Reformation and its dogmatic teachings. He did indeed designate himself in official publications as loyal to and an adherent of the Protestant Church; but the history of the Reformation itself makes upon him the unhappy impression of a boundless confusion, in which error conflicts with error, selfishness with selfishness, and truth, which suffers enough in this melee, only now and then makes itself felt. But in the Reformation he always saw one of the great movements in which the mind has sought to free itself from delusion, superstition, and oppression. Goethe also ascribed to Protestantism as a merit the fact that it was so decidedly focused upon the moral development of the individual. But this had turned into a lifeless moralism, and into

a doctrine which satisfied neither heart nor soul. Of Luther Goethe spoke with admiration, saying that he had been "a genius of very significant sort," a prophet who always managed to talk to the Germans in their own language; only through him were they able to become one nation. But here too, as elsewhere in history, Goethe found pure greatness only in the personality. That Luther thrust aside the tangle of error and tradition, and went back to the Bible as the original source, was good; but as to what developed then as new doctrine and new church, in this Goethe saw the same evil spectacle as he found presented by the entire history of the Christian Church: a "product of error and violence" (Biedermann III:26). If in spite of that Christianity has asserted itself against other religions and has become a world religion, it owes this success, in Goethe's view, to the circumstance that it took over and proclaimed the truths of the "natural religion."

In his youth Goethe had shown an inclination toward both Neoplatonic and Christian mysticism. But this trend left him when he turned his attention to the actual world in Nature and art. His study of the Oriental religions, much later, acquainted him with the mysticism of the East. Then it became clear to him why the mystic way to God was a false way. What was mysticism other than the attempt to leave behind all material being and the limitations of bodily existence, to approach the Deity immediately and to unite with it? But for Goethe this was folly and contrary to Nature. Man is made to see what is illuminated, but not the light itself, to behold God in his works, not God himself. Goethe concedes value to only *one* kind of mystic wisdom: resignation to God's incomprehensible will, the surrender of the self to something superpersonal and universal.

On two occasions in his works Goethe expressed himself as to Christianity in a significant fashion. The view of his middle period, when a humanitarian ethos was the core of his existence, is found in the fragment called *Die Geheimnisse*, which was discussed in the chapter entitled "The Voice of Humanity," in *Goethe the Poet* (pages 69-71). In the symbolic style of this poem it is said of Christianity that along with the other positive religions it stands before us as one of the great doctrines of which each is a mutation, a variant, of the natural religion. This view is likewise common property in the eighteenth century. Thus Kant teaches that there are various kinds of faith, but only one true religion. The individual kinds of

faith, says Goethe, contain as much of truth as they have of participation in this original religion of mankind, in its universal morality and love of man. What Goethe calls *Humanität* is in this case the Absolute, by which he measures the value of the great modes of faith, including that of Christianity. But the symbol of the chief "mystery" of Christianity, the cross, does indeed appear likewise as symbol of the universal religion of *Humanität*, but completed by the symbol of beautiful life, the wreath of roses. True religion should lead to life as well as to death, to the bright mysteries and the dark ones.

In another fashion the positive religions are weighed as to their comparative significance in the reflections on religion which Goethe sets forth in the *Wanderjahre*. Here the historic sequence of the three main types of religion (upon the ethnic religion of pagandom followed the philosophic religion of antiquity, and upon this the Christian religion) appears at the same time as a qualitative gradation. Awe of that which is above us appears as basis in the first stage; awe of that which is like us, which exists beside us, becomes the basis of the more admirable philosophic religions. Awe of that which is below us is considered to be the hardest to learn; upon it are based the religions of that type whose most important representative is Christianity. This position, we read, is "the ultimate stage which mankind could and must attain." For only by a long road could we come to the point where we recognize even the base and despised, poverty and misery, suffering and death, as valid parts of the divine Order, and thereby sanction them, "nay, revere and come to love crimes and sin itself not as obstacles to but as furtherances of the Holy."¹⁰ This represents a peak in the religious world view and the practical life below which (says Goethe) mankind cannot fall again; hence one may say that the Christian religion can never disappear. And yet it is only now that Goethe comes to the highest point of his graduated scale: above the three great types of religion stands as synthesis "the true religion," which is founded on the principle that man regards himself as the best "that God and Nature have produced." If man has no awe of himself as the highest creature of God, he will not be able to attain to the other stations of awe, nor to the religions which rest upon them.

¹⁰ . . . ja Sünde selbst und Verbrechen nicht als Hindernisse, sondern als Forderungen des Heiligen zu verehren und liebzugewinnen. (JA 19:183.)

So the Christian religion appears here, both as to its historic importance and its own value, as perhaps the last and highest faith and morality. But Christianity was only able to absorb and sanctify things painful, obscure, and terrible by appropriating what the preceding religions had already achieved. So Christianity itself goes back to a higher truth, which is at work in every individual religion but belongs exclusively to none. One sees how the idea of *Die Geheimnisse* is still dimly visible, but how Goethe now gives Christianity a more respectful characterization and a higher evaluation. Of Christ himself the poet says that he was "a sage in the highest sense," that he taught and lived "a religion for sages." This means that the pure doctrine which the founder of the faith proclaimed cannot be realized by the masses, only by individuals endowed with understanding. Fundamentally, Goethe always viewed and revered Christianity as the highest kind of personal *Humanität*, as sublimest ethics.

The Demonic

Man thinks to direct his life, to lead himself, and his soul is irresistibly drawn toward its destiny.¹

But this demonic quality appears at its most fearful when it comes forth predominantly in some human being . . . It is not always the most excellent persons, either in mind or in talents, and rarely commending themselves by goodness of heart; but an enormous force issues from them, and they exert an incredible power over all creatures, and even over the elements, and who can say how far such an effect will extend?²

The demonic is that which is not to be resolved by reason and common sense. It does not lie in my nature, but I am subject to it.³

¹ Es glaubt der Mensch sein Leben zu leiten, sich selbst zu fuhren, und sein Innerstes wird unwiderstehlich nach seinem Schicksale gezogen. (JA 11.333.)

² Am furchtbarsten aber erscheint dieses Damonische, wenn es in irgend einem Menschen uberwiegend hervortritt . . . Es sind nicht immer die vorzuglichsten Menschen, weder an Geist noch an Talenten, selten durch Herzensgute sich empfehlend; aber eine ungeheure Kraft geht von ihnen aus, und sie uben eine unglaubliche Gewalt uber alle Geschopfe, ja sogar uber die Elemente, und wer kann sagen, wie weit sich eine solche Wirkung erstrecken wird? (JA 25:126.)

³ Das Damonische ist dasjenige, was durch Verstand und Vernunft nicht aufzulosen ist. In meiner Natur liegt es nicht, aber ich bin ihm unterworfen. (Conversation with Eckermann, March 2, 1831.)

AS POET, SAYS GOETHE, HE IS A POLYTHEIST. "THE MOTLEY SWARM OF THE OLD GODS," WHICH THE ONE INVISIBLE GOD OF THE BIBLE DISPLACED, HAD IN THE religion of antiquity reached down into the sphere of everyday happenings and of local Nature. Not a few utterances from Goethe's last decades, utterances of confidential type, made in letters and conversations, sound as if old pagan belief in spirits had been once more revived in him. If he speaks of a matter that he would like to see brought to successful accomplishment, he may add (and certainly not without some slyness) that he wishes it may have the favor of the demons, who always have their paws in everything. If he succeeds in securing an especially precious item for his collections, he will acknowledge with gratitude that this could not have happened "without the special favor of the demons." When he withdraws to the castle of Dornburg after the death of the Grand Duke, and enjoys here a sojourn beneficent and enlivening beyond all expectations, he remarks gratefully that benevolent demons had pointed out that spot to him. To them he may also commend his friends in the concluding phrases of his letters, and Goethe knows full well that one must not expect only good and friendly dispositions from these "inexplicable beings." They also like to play "whimsical tricks," and prevent the success of plans and of work. But they show their vilest aspect when they send sickness and bodily torment and thus lame our active force. "But soon it pleased the villainous demons to beat me with their fists in a most painfully preposterous fashion" (letter to G. F. C. Sartorius, May 17, 1815). What is meant is a violent cold. So too on one occasion he says that the evil demon which is persecuting him "flung himself at last upon the left eye." One who feels like this will incline to the belief that in all the turning-points of his life invisible and uncontrollable forces have participated. "Fate" would be too pretentious a word, even if it also designated adequately the region to which these incomprehensible beings belong. In his youth Goethe had believed in "evil spirits" which torment man. Then he had been fond of citing "the gods." His transition to the word "demons" is surely not without deeper significance.

Then this great man too—such will be the conclusion of the "enlightened" reader of our time—fell prey to superstition in his own particular fashion. He said of superstition that it was to be preferred

to unfaith, and that "energetic, executive, forward-striding natures" (*JA* 40:168) had a leaning to it. He also gave it a general designation: "the poesy of life." But he warned that it was wise to surrender to the mysterious in life only so far, and to seek a "higher derivation" for that which appears and happens to us only to such a degree, as we are thereby impelled to feel awe of the incomprehensible forces which surround us. It is in this sense that one should understand what Goethe says about demons and spirits. This too is an expression of genuine piety, in the sense that Goethe feels the space in which man moves according to his own will to be enclosed in a larger, mysterious Order. Goethe beholds world and life after the fashion of the poet; everywhere he sees action and manifestation, and the transcendent powers show themselves to him in bodily form; and so he calls them by mythical names. "What man proposes, something disposes, varying according as the higher or the lower demons take a hand in it."⁴ Let them be friendly or hostile, Goethe knows that one hardly ever gets rid of demons. But it is well for man, as Faust does in the end, not to concede them more power over oneself than is indispensable.

Despite his veneration of the cosmic order and the "law-fulness" of Nature, despite his awe "of the mysterious power which surrounds us," Goethe is not a fatalist through and through. He is upborne by that strong feeling of personality which has developed in the more recent eras of the Occident. And so he seeks for a synthesis of the individual's need for unhampered development with the limiting experience that powers of a higher order bestow success or failure upon our volitions. A reconciliation is afforded by the view that in-born individuality is itself the first and most rigid necessity. "No man can alter one fiber of his being, though he can develop much of his endowment."⁵ In old age he expressed a number of times this thought, that our ego itself is our true fate. "Man may turn whithersoever he will, he may undertake whatever it be, but always he will come back to that road which Nature has once for all marked out for him."⁶ This is the insight which forces itself upon him in his retrospect upon

⁴ Was der Mensch denkt, wird anders gelenkt, es sei nun, dass sich die obern oder untern Dämonen dareinmischen. (Letter to Zelter, July 22, 1816.)

⁵ Kein Mensch kann eine Faser seines Wesens ändern, ob er gleich vieles an sich bilden kann. (Letter to F. H. Jacobi, March 31, 1784.)

⁶ Der Mensch mag sich wenden, wohin er will, er mag unternehmen, was es auch sei, stets wird er auf jenen Weg wieder zurückkehren, den ihm die Natur einmal vorgezeichnet hat. (*JA* 22:150.)

his own life (*Dichtung und Wahrheit*, I, 4). In grandiose and definite fashion he expressed the fateful power of one's inborn individuality in the first of the Orphic *Urworte* (see what was said about this in *Goethe the Poet*, p. 238). "So must thou be, thyself thou canst not flee."⁷ This "inborn force and peculiarity," which more than all else determines the life of a man, Goethe calls *Dämon*. The supra-really Mighty, the absolutely Necessary, as also the primally Creative, are designated by this venerable word, which Socrates had assigned to the divine voice that guided him.

The productive man has more reason than others to believe in the *Dämon* as a guiding superego. He who is dependent on inspiration knows how little control we have over anything which has to do with creative production. "Every productivity of the highest kind, every significant *aperçu*, every invention, every great idea which bears fruit and has consequences, is outside the power of anyone and is exalted above all earthly might."⁸ These are unexpected gifts from above, Goethe remarks, purely children of God whom one must receive with thanks. All artists feel the same way. Richard Wagner said that he left the guidance of his life to his instinct; for he felt that something was willed with him that was higher than his personality. He felt that "the queer genius" he served was taking care of him; this genius demanded that he should carry out that of which only *he* was capable.

Experiences of this kind lead Goethe to the understanding of the highest phenomenon there is in the sphere of these mysteries: the "demonic." He treats of this at length in the last book of his autobiography, where he speaks of *Egmont* (see *Goethe the Poet*, p. 38). He says there that the demonic is an essence of transcendent kind, just as powerful as it is incalculable, unfathomable and yet issuing forth plainly enough in manifestations of great variety. In it a force effects itself which shows consistency, which indeed points to an Order; and yet it is an Order which thwarts that which we call the moral order of the world. When the demonic has made itself known, we can recognize it as a meaningfully operative force and can therefore accept its stern necessity as a higher wisdom. But its effects are not to be fore-

⁷ So musst du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen. (*JA* 2:253.)

⁸ Jede Produktivität höchster Art, jedes bedeutende *Aperçu*, jede Erfindung, jeder grosse Gedanke, der Früchte bringt und Folge hat, steht in niemandes Gewalt und ist über alle irdische Macht erhaben. (Conversation with Eckermann, March 11, 1828.)

seen, still less to be brought about. Herman Grimm called this view a "retrospective fatalism," and one may well find that a fatalistic trait is revealed in it. But every sort of pessimistic thinking is lacking in Goethe's theory of the demonic. For all the manifestations of this essence are those of a positive activity, even if at first they appear in destructive guise. Other manifestations of the demonic include events which show themselves to be dispositions of the happiest kind. Goethe felt his acquaintance with Schiller to be a happening of such supreme importance. The wondrously meaningful aspect of it he sees in the fact that they met each other at a moment when each of them was in the midst of a crisis, which was then resolved in the happiest way by the very thing which the other had to give.

Still more powerfully does the mystery reveal itself in cases where an extraordinary man is destroyed by a sequence of mishaps, and we think we realize that this happened because he had fulfilled his mission. Napoleon above all, also Frederick the Great, Byron, Paganini, were called demonic natures by Goethe, also Karl August of Weimar. In this doctrine we see again Goethe's endeavor to gain a view of life which lies above the plane of common-sense comprehension as well as of moral distinctions. The demonic does bear a relation to the sensible as well as the moral, but it is one of productive contrast. This power belongs likewise to the fabric of existence. However it manifests itself, it is to be venerated as one of the instruments of primal necessity—namely, of the necessity that life should continue to be preserved in its contradictory totality, because only in this way can it be great and strong, only in this way can it constantly renew itself. But the question as to the whence and the wherefore of this phenomenon, in which an insoluble contradiction of the world order seems to make itself known, would lead the speculative mind into the sphere of the unexplorable. Goethe contents himself with indicating by a hint the content of the mystery by means of another one: *Nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse.*⁹

⁹ None may challenge God save God himself. (JA 25:126.)

The Process of Life

The life of Nature is to make two out of one, make one out of two; this is the eternal *systole* and *diastole*, the eternal *synkrisis* and *diakrisis*, the inhalation and exhalation of the world in which we live, act, and are.¹

The final calm is only traced
When both poles are together placed.
Then thanks to God, ye sons of life:
He's parted the poles in eternal strife.²

Everything that is perfect in its kind must go beyond its kind, must become something different and incomparable.³

IF FROM AMONG THE CONCEPTS WITH WHICH GOETHE SOUGHT TO MAKE THE PROCESSES OF LIFE UNDERSTANDABLE TO HIMSELF ONE WOULD WISH TO PICK out the most fundamental and important of them all, it could only be the concept of *polarity*. He himself called it "the eternal formula of life," and in the polar alternation of attraction and repulsion he saw the "real pulse of life." The doctrine of opposition as the basis of origination is to be sure old and widespread. It is as old as philosophic thinking. Aristotle conjectures that everything in Nature is organized into opposites or originates out of opposites (*Physics*, I, 5). More profound was the utterance we find among the natural philosophers, e.g., in Heraclitus, that the harmony of Nature does not arise out of likes, but out of opposites—just as man and woman must unite in order that a new human being be begotten. Even while Goethe is progressing in his scientific study of Nature, "polarity" becomes a principal and favorite term in contemporaneous philosophy, above all as a consequence of Schelling's philosophy, where there is mention of a "primal duation (*Entzweiung*) in Nature." Twoness which is

¹ Das Geeinte zu entzweien, das Entzweite zu einigen, ist das Leben der Natur; die ist die ewige Systole und Diastole, die ewige Synkrisis und Diakrisis, das Ein- und Ausatmen der Welt, in der wir leben, weben und sind. (WA II:1-296.)

² Die endliche Ruhe wird nur verspürt, / Sobald der Pol den Pol berührt. / Drum dankt Gott, ihr Sohne der Zeit, / Dass er die Pole für ewig entzweit. (JA 4:5.)

³ Alles Vollkommene in seiner Art muss über seine Art hinausgehen, es muss etwas anderes, Unvergleichbares werden. (JA 21-225.)

rooted in oneness, oneness which divides itself into twoness—this is seen as the basic law of the world.

Schelling had encountered not the phenomenon itself but the concept of polarity, in Kant's works. And if Goethe later stated that the idea of a polarity which is everywhere in operation was among his earliest convictions, and that he had always held fast to it, it was Kant all the same who got him to use the concept itself thenceforward in its precise meaning—namely, as expression of the apperception "that the forces of attraction and repulsion are part of the essence of matter, and that neither can be separated from the other in the concept of matter."⁴ From this, says Goethe, the primal polarity of all beings had become clear to him, and he had realized that this was one element which operates in all phenomena and is the source of their life.

We read in Kant's *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft* ("Metaphysical Fundamentals of Natural Science") that in matter only two moving forces could be imagined, an attractive and a repelling one, and that we cannot think of one without the other. "No matter is possible by means of mere attraction without repulsion." In Kant's *Anthropologie*, finally, the statement is made that the play of forces in both inorganic and organic Nature, in both the soul and the body, rests "upon decomposition and composition of the unlike." That is, in other words, Goethe's conception of the primal polarity of all beings. "With light weight and counterweight Nature weighs herself this way and that."⁵ In the explanation of the process whereby the plant forms originate, the periodic alternation of contraction and expansion seems to manifest an original dualism. Finally, it is from the contrast of light and dark that Goethe derives the colors. Colors originate when light and shade collide. That Goethe likewise insisted upon deriving the phenomena of optics from a polar contrast was the very thing that brought him into conflict with Newton.

In polarity we do not have to do with an antagonism of hostile, excluding kind, as in a logical antithesis where only one of two statements can be valid; rather with a complementary interrelation between effect and countereffect, an opposition which seeks to form an

⁴ . . . dass Anziehungs- und Zuruckstossungskraft zum Wesen der Materie gehören und keine von der andern im Begriff der Materie getrennt werden könne. (JA 28:155.)

⁵ Mit leisem Gewicht und Gegengewicht wagt sich die Natur hin und her. (Preface to the *Farbenlehre*.)

equilibrium from within itself. This complementary antagonism⁶ is found by Goethe in all organisms and all life processes. "To separate, to unite, to advance oneself into the universal, and yet persist in the particular,"⁶ this is the pulse of life throughout the universe. "Originating and ending, creating and destroying, birth and death, joy and sorrow—everything is in interaction."⁷ Without opposites, says Schelling, there is no life; and Goethe calls it nothing less than a law of Nature that every activity is opposed by a negation. The whole of existence is "an eternal parting and uniting." This is also true of human activity. Contradiction makes us productive. So too there is moral activity only when the force of the good is set in motion by the counterforce of the bad. Everywhere, in Goethe's poetic interpretation of life, men and processes face each other in a relation of polar contrast.

In magnetism Goethe finds the true primal phenomenon of polarity. Here as in the other phenomena of electricity it is only the combination of negative with positive forces which constitutes the totality of the phenomenon. When Goethe speaks of the polar rhythm of the life functions, he refers mostly to the activity of the heart as the special case which is a particularly clear symbol of the universal law, and uses the terms *systole* (contraction) and *diastole* (expansion). Or he points to the rhythmic motion of breathing. Inhalation already presupposes exhalation, and vice versa. The most important deduction from this doctrine of polarity consists in this, that everything in the world and life which we call negative appears justified. The very conception that contrast, opposition, or dualism are *per se* negative is thereby annulled. If there is no motion without a polar antagonism, then the negative pole is as necessary as the positive one. For if the pulsation which originates in opposition came to rest, then the process of life would itself stand still. Everything in the universe is connected, everything responds mutually, and this response is in the fashion of a polar relation, attracting and repelling.

In the process of metamorphosis, wherein shapes are formed and transformed, what proceeds from *systole*, the movement of contraction, is specification, but from *diastole*, the relaxing countermove-

⁶ Sich zu trennen, sich zu vereinen, sich ins Allgemeine zu ergeben, im Besondern zu verharren. (WA II:11:129.)

⁷ Entstehen und Vergehen, Schaffen und Vernichten, Geburt und Tod, Freud und Leid, alles wirkt durcheinander. (WA II:11:129.)

ment, "advance into the Infinite" (diary, May 17, 1808). If by means of the universal polarity, the to-and-fro of the "loom of time" (*Faust*, verse 508), the movement of life is produced, then there is need of another basic force to give this movement the inner dynamics whereby it is driven forward and gets a direction. Otherwise it would remain eternally in the one spot. Goethe sees with admiration how Nature is able to bring forth an infinite multiplicity according to but few "principles." A norm is at work in the creative process which sees to it that we do not have an infinite sequence of uniform products, but always something new (even though in accordance with the same type). But this new thing—and Goethe learned this from the process of metamorphosis—is not simply another of the same make-up. A qualitative change takes place. The series of kindred organisms rises, "as it were on a spiritual ladder," upward by successive stages; beginning with simple, primitive forms, it lifts itself up to most complex ones. Besides the "incessant attracting and repelling," the weaving to and fro, the tendency to "ever-striving ascent" operates. By means of this principle Nature can bring forth endless variations, without repeating herself. Polarity and progress through intensification (*Steigerung*), these are "the two great driving-wheels of all Nature."

In these ideas, too, a view comes to maturity in Goethe which has a tradition and plays a special part in the thinking of the eighteenth century. The conviction regarding the harmonious order and the inner efficiency of the universe, whereby the philosophy of Leibniz is sustained, had also included the assumption that everywhere "a forward urge toward perfection," a constant advance, takes place, directed toward conditions of an ever higher culture. This optimistic age was altogether ready to believe in a principle of "perfectibility" which was immanent in the world and its life-processes. The capacity of man for perfecting himself morally and his will to do so were regarded as the expression of a universal tendency. The development of mankind was seen in a similar light. Man's desire to realize more and more perfectly the *Humanität* which is as it were invested in him was, according to Herder's teaching, just the upward trend which gives to the history of mankind its ideal meaning. Such convictions lead to the development of a belief in a constant and steady progress.

But Goethe's concept of *Steigerung* has no metaphysical significance; nor does he refer to the course of history and "the education

of the human race" (the title of Lessing's important little syllabus). When Goethe speaks of *Steigerung* he means processes in the realm of creative Nature, who constantly produces such advanced forms; but he also means processes of more general, cosmic kind. Every sun, every planet, bears in itself a higher intention, he said once in conversation. Of the living things we read: "Everything that is perfect in its kind must transcend its kind, must become something different, incomparable. In some notes the nightingale is still a bird; then it rises up above its class and seems to wish to give every feathered thing a hint of what singing really is."⁸ So the plant has risen to the status of tree, the animal to that of man. "The final product of a Nature which keeps outdoing herself is the beautiful human being."⁹ In man this *Steigerung* is continued in the sphere of the mind and of morality, as is proper for him. It lies in man's nature to advance "on and on, even beyond its goal." As Faust says, "Yet birthright 'tis of every man, That feeling upward, forward drives."¹⁰ In Euphorion, who wishes to look farther and farther, Faust's noble urge is repeated and heightened, an urge by which the fleshless entelechy, even after death, is likewise impelled upward toward the Divine. "The mind would upward, where it bides for aye."¹¹ Love as it appears in our time, says Goethe in conversation with F. W. Riemer, is certainly no longer the original simple, natural instinct, but a condensed, intensified feeling. Betterment is "the joy of the world"; if one may call perfection the norm of heaven, then it is man's norm to strive for perfection. But one must take care not to restrict the concept of becoming perfect, and of the perfect itself, to the moral sphere. To gain more force and fire of life, in action and in creating, is for Goethe a no less positive *Steigerung*.

⁸ Alles Vollkommene in seiner Art muss über seine Art hinausgehen, es muss etwas anderes, Unvergleichbares werden. In manchen Tönen ist die Nachtigall noch Vogel; dann steigt sie über ihre Klasse hinüber und scheint jedem Gefiederten andeuten zu wollen, was eigentlich singen heisse. (JA 21:225.)

⁹ Das letzte Produkt der sich immer steigernden Natur ist der schöne Mensch. (JA 34: 17.)

¹⁰ Doch ist es jedem eingeboren, / Dass sein Gefühl hinauf und vorwärts dringt. (Faust, verse 1092.)

¹¹ Der Geist will aufwärts, wo er ewig bleibt. (JA 2:256.)

Life and Death

The pledge of life is life itself; it rests
But on itself and must go its own bail.¹

Every pure endeavor is also a living thing, its own purpose, furthering without a goal, proving a usefulness which one could not have foreseen.²

The highest thing we have received from God and Nature is life, the rotating movement of the *monas* about itself which knows neither rest nor peace.³

ADMIRATION OF LIFE, LOVE OF LIFE, IS ONE OF THE CHIEF SOURCES OF GOETHE'S PRODUCTIVITY. THE PROCESS OF FORMING AND TRANSFORMING, TO WHICH his morphological researches are directed, is especially important to him as revelation "of an irresistibly advancing organization, hastening from life to life, and even through annihilation to life."⁴ That poetry, all great poetry, by giving man a heightened image of life, reacts upon man and heightens in him the power and depth of vital feeling—of this Goethe is convinced. In life itself, as it reveals itself to him in the organization of Nature, he finds no purpose which lies outside it, no goal toward which it is hastening. Goethe always declined to ask about the wherefore of ultimate things. Other thinkers, Christian ones included, have done the same. Master Eckhart, for example, says that life has no wherefore, that it exists for its own sake. The Catholic mystic of the baroque age, Angelus Silesius, expresses the same thought in a picture: the rose is without a *why*, it blooms because it blooms. Whether we say that life and indeed everything living is its own purpose; or that man should abstain from such questions because he cannot answer them—that is indifferent to Goethe.

¹ Das Leben ist des Lebens Pfand; es ruht / Nur auf sich selbst und muss sich selbst verbürgen. (*Die natürliche Tochter*, verse 644, JA 12:251.)

² Jedes reine Bemühen ist auch ein Lebendiges, Zweck sein selbst, fordernd ohne Ziel, nützend, wie man es nicht voraussehen konnte. (JA 39:186.)

³ Das Höchste, was wir von Gott und der Natur erhalten haben, ist das Leben, die rotierende Bewegung der Monas um sich selbst, welche weder Rast noch Ruhe kennt. (JA 38:250.)

⁴ . . . einer unaufhaltsam vorschreitenden, von Leben zu Leben, ja durch Vernichtung zum Leben hineilenden Organisation. (WA II:6:186.)

The unknowable should be let alone. So much the more zealously did Goethe concern himself with the *manifestations* of the power which will always remain unknown to us in its essential character. It is with life as with the Divine: only in its deeds, in its phenomena, can it be known.

If life has no purpose outside itself, it does have a meaning. Goethe always said that the problems of existence, which cannot be surmounted in a speculative manner, must be solved practically, by action. Every kind of doubt, indeed, can only be removed by activity. What we must do, he said, is to transform the problem into a postulate, a practical demand. This applies also to the great question regarding the meaning of life. The situation is not such that this meaning is contained objectively in life, and that we can lay hold on it there. It must be produced by ourselves, and by us imparted to life. And life seems to wait for that as the ploughed field for the sower. It yields willingly to a fruitful act of willing. "For certainly one need only rise from his chair, or walk out of his door, to undertake anything whatever, and one will see that there is a kind fate which looks out for man."⁵ Goethe's poems and other writings are crisscrossed with teachings and admonitions, all of which refer to the one basic and principal truth, that man is born to be a doer, that activity is his foremost mission, that only in action and counteraction can we enjoy our life, and that we live in order to "perpetuate" ourselves. This mission must be served by the pure intellect in us, by knowing and thinking—but in such a way that it is these which must give to man's activity direction, rightness, and a rational meaning. We must test our doing by our thinking, our thinking by our doing. This process must be like inhaling and exhaling. Unconditioned activity, Goethe warns us, boundless activity, leads eventually to bankruptcy. The barbarous activism of this present age can certainly not justify itself by Goethe's "gospel of the deed." As to speculative thinking, here too Goethe demands, anticipating the basic thesis of modern pragmatism, that truth legitimate itself before the judgment seat of life. Only that is genuine truth which increases the force and competence of active existence. Practice

⁵ Denn gewiss, man darf sich nur vom Stuhle erheben oder zur Haustüre hinausgehen, irgend etwas unternehmen, so sieht man, dass ein gutes Schicksal ist, das sich des Menschen annimmt. (Letter to F. H. Jacobi, October 18, 1784.)

is the touchstone; only when principles and projects are applied can it be shown that they are correct. "That alone is true which is fruitful."⁶ One main characteristic whereby the true can be distinguished from the false is found by Goethe in the fact that "the former always proves fruitful and favorable to him who possesses and cherishes it; whereas the false lies there dead and fruitless in its very being, or can even be regarded as a necrosis, in which the moribund part prevents the living one from completing the cure."⁷ To his friend Zelter he confesses, in a letter of December 31, 1829, that he regards as true *that* thought (*Gedanke*) which unites with and promotes the rest of his thinking.

The belief that man is born to action, that to be active is his most important mission, controls likewise Goethe's relation to time. In a conversation with Chancellor von Müller (November 4, 1823), Goethe protested vehemently against the customary conception of recollection. Great impressions, important experiences, he remarked, do not need to be recalled to memory by a special act of the mind; at the moment of encounter they have already become one with our soul and have continued procreation within us. "There is nothing past for whose return one might permissibly long, there is only the eternally new, which forms itself out of the expanded elements of the past, and genuine yearning must always be productive, must create something new and better."⁸ In this view, past, present, and future are taken as several stages of a process which is productive at every stage, always on the way from yesterday to tomorrow. But at bottom only the present is really "be-ing." So the Moment must be the chief concern of him who wishes to act and to create. Man, we read in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, is really only destined to have an effect upon the present. For this is the only way in which he can do something for the future. Future and present are not opposites for Goethe; they are only two stages of a process of flow in which the present necessarily goes

⁶ Was fruchtbar ist, allein ist wahr. (JA 2:246.)

⁷ . . . jenes immer fruchtbar wirkt und den begünstigt, der es besitzt und hegt; dahingegen das Falsche an und für sich tot und fruchtlos dahliegt, ja sogar wie eine Nekrose anzusehen ist, wo der absterbende Teil den lebendigen hindert, die Heilung zu vollbringen. (JA 38:118.)

⁸ Es gibt kein Vergangenes, das man zurücksehnen durfte, es gibt nur ein ewig Neues, das sich aus den erweiterten Elementen des Vergangenen gestaltet, und die echte Sehnsucht muss stets produktiv sein, ein neues Besseres erschaffen.

over into the future. The true opposites are moment and eternity. He who lives life in the right way learns to know the mysterious harmony which unites these two poles:

Then is the past a constant striving,
The future in advance is living—
The moment is eternity.⁹

Basically, too, all love is directed to the present, to that which is now be-ing. And only when man's force and will are directed to the present can the urge to activity and human conscience, unbounded striving and unbending law, be reconciled with each other:

To quell desire for future deeds and distant,
Find worthy duties here and now existent.¹⁰

Or, in plain prose: "But what is your duty? The demand of the day."¹¹ Even this wisdom must be acquired. For man is prone to lose Today, because there was a Yesterday and there will be a Tomorrow.

But this lover of life, who never wearies of calling men to an active love of existence, and who seems so secure in the faith that a good meaning can be imparted to life, came to feel like other men the burden and the torment of existence, and to struggle with the demon of despair. And indeed, how should it not have been the lot of the poet to have a harder life than the more fortunate, the unaware ones? Often enough, too, Goethe was overwhelmed by the feeling of futility and forsakenness, when he saw how the world interpreted his works. If humanity en masse were not so detestable, he says, the philosophers would not need to go to such absurd extremes merely in order to have any effect at all. Nor did he begin saying this in his old age. Even as a young man he confesses to his friend the Duke, "The world is full of folly, dullness, inconsistency, and injustice, and it takes much courage not to surrender the field to them and retire."¹² Again and again he had to fight for this courage. If men only had the desire to

⁹ Dann ist Vergangenheit beständig, / Das Künftige voraus lebendig— / Der Augenblick ist Ewigkeit. (JA 2:246.)

¹⁰ Sehnsucht ins Ferne, Künftige zu beschwichtigen, / Beschäftige dich hier und heut' im Tüchtigen. (JA 2:268.)

¹¹ Was aber ist deine Pflicht? Die Forderung des Tages. (JA 4:224.)

¹² Die Welt ist voll Torheit, Dumpfheit, Inkonsequenz und Ungerechtigkeit, es gehört viel Mut dazu, diesen nicht das Feld zu räumen, und sich beiseite zu begeben. (Letter to Duke Karl August, July 5, 1781.)

learn something. But they don't even take the advice of those who know. "What! Counsel? When did ever men esteem it?"¹³ In a letter to H. C. A. Eichstädt (December 8, 1808) he says he had found out often enough "that fools learn and adopt from sensible men just as much as they need to be still more foolish."¹⁴ But it is better that the sage keep his knowledge to himself. For the world simply wants to go on "in its chaos." "Once and for all, we learn nothing, we understand nothing."¹⁵ With advancing years this bitter skepticism increases. This is in accordance with the course of Nature; but one cannot fail to see how passionately Goethe expresses himself, especially in conversation with his confidants in Weimar, as to the sufferings he undergoes at the hands of men and of life itself. Chancellor von Müller has transmitted such utterances, which have a still more caustic effect by virtue of their bitter humor and their Mephistophelian sarcasm. Here is one example:

The assertion of Gruithusen, the Munich astronomer, that he had discovered a fortification on the moon made him furious, he said, for to see nonsense disseminated, patent errors given out as plain wisdom, was the most fearful thing that could happen to a sensible man. But that was the way with men. God must have wanted them not to be otherwise, or he would have created them differently.¹⁶

On another occasion (June 11, 1822) he says in conversation that men are "only too silly, despicable, and methodically absurd," and one must have got to be as old as he in order to learn complete contempt for them. Such outbursts were mostly occasioned by experiences which Goethe had as a student of Nature. But it was not always because of academic narrow-mindedness, or the ill will of colleagues, that contemporary scientists contradicted his theories.

More important and interesting are the utterances of his last decades in which he speaks with skepticism about life itself. To live

¹³ Hat Rat bei Menschen je gegolten? (*Faust*, verse 8106.)

¹⁴ . . . dass die Toren von vernunftigen Menschen grade nur soviel lernen und annehmen, als sie brauchen, um noch nährischer zu sein.

¹⁵ Wir lernen und begreifen ein für allemal nichts. (Letter to Zelter, November 7, 1816.)

¹⁶ Gruithusens, des Münchener Astronomen, Behauptung im Monde eine Festung entdeckt zu haben, mache ihn wütend, denn den Unsinn verbreitet, offenbare Irrtümer für bare Weisheit ausgegeben zu sehen, sei das Schrecklichste, was einem Vernünftigen begegnen könne. So sei aber die Menschheit. Gott müsse sie wohl nicht anders haben wollen, sonst hatte er es anders mit ihr angefangen. (Conversation with Chancellor von Müller, March 22, 1824.)

long, he confessed to his friend Zelter, meant to outlive many, and in the end one didn't exactly know what was the meaning of the whole business. Still more bitter, however, and not even avoiding the gloomiest of expressions, were Goethe's utterances in conversation. Whoso lived, he said, must also learn to despair. "I am old enough to wish for rest. I have no faith in the world and have learned to despair."¹⁷ The great man, who has not only become familiar with the glamor of life, but also with the other, the dark side of it, and to a greater extent than the multitude, who live with less knowledge and duller emotions, he also knows better than they how incurably questionable is human existence, and how insoluble is the contradictoriness of life. One need only note the general complaints that Mephistopheles utters. It is precisely in such remarks that he is nothing but the voice of the utmost temptation, the voice of skepticism, of the charges raised against God, world, and man. He manages to use adroitly all the arguments which thinking, when it walks its isolated road, can bring forward in opposition to a belief in life. But who might therefore say that in the end Goethe came to be a man without hope? The melancholy of old age, the bitter, vespertine insight into the profound frailty and irredeemability of existence was to be sure not spared him. But only rarely does he permit such thoughts to appear in his work without mitigation. The stanzas *An Werther* of the year 1824 are one of the most striking examples—and so indeed is the entire *Trilogie der Leidenschaft* (see *Goethe the Poet*, pp. 243ff).

Without this dark element, without this temptation emerging from despair, Goethe's work would not have the depth and the totality which makes it incomparably great. But it is precisely in the works of his last period that this dark mode fails to serve as the leading theme. It is present and demands to be heard. But it fuses again and again—and those are the greatest moments—with the melody of triumphant life, and rises then to form the expression of a faith which embraces both the Yea and the Nay. It is as in the scene where Faust is tempted by Care. As Faust saves himself from her paralyzing demonism by the resolve not to acknowledge her power, so Goethe gave a great example by means of his own existence. Despite all doubts of life, all sufferings

¹⁷ Ich bin alt genug, um Ruhe zu wünschen. Ich habe keinen Glauben an die Welt und habe verzweifeln gelernt. (Conversations, with Chancellor von Müller, April 3, 1824, and June 6, 1830.)

at the hands of life, he kept his faith in life. In his very last works we also have his last word on the value of existence. He does not say that life is good, but he does say, "howe'er it be, this life, I find it good."¹⁸ A man who knows gives thanks to life—one who has come to know it down to the ground, who is acquainted with the light and the dark, with fortune and despair, and who nevertheless says Aye to the bittersweet aggregate.

If Goethe's production as a whole has any "thesis," if he as poet feels a responsibility, it is primarily this, that he should promote the courage and the force of existence and men's awe of life. He praised everything that serves that end—most of all the force which impels us forward, through adverse fate and suffering, even over dead bodies, and which leads us over and over again onto the road of living, venturing, and acting: the exalting power of Hope. On occasion, it is true, after the fashion of Greek poets, he called Hope an "empty being"; in *Faust* (verse 5441) he even repeats the accusation of Euripides that Hope and Fear are man's greatest enemies. Evidently what is meant in this case is empty expectation, which trusts in an external turn of events instead of in one's own strength, and thereby fails to achieve a resolve to action. But this skepticism is elucidated by what the eulogizer of the venturesome spirit of doing says in praise of the animating goddess, Hope. She is celebrated as lifelong impeller and consoler, who pours morning-glow into tempestuous night:

Hope continues in wedlock with life, as encouraging goddess,
Pleasant far above many of those who, as demons devoted,
Mortal humans escort throughout their days ever-changing.¹⁹

Goethe follows Theocritus in saying that Hope dwells with the living, but those without Hope are the dead. Life itself only seems to live by her aid; from despair and sorrow she leads us back to the pleasure and power of action. In the scenes of *Pandora* Hope appears to Epimetheus as the good spirit which approves of all that man wills and wishes—*Elpore thraseia*, as the Greeks called her, the bold, confident one. Again, among the Orphic *Urworte*, we have that splendid praise of the spirit (*Genius*) which bears us beyond the compulsion of neces-

¹⁸ Wie es auch sei, das Leben, es ist gut (JA 2:229.)

¹⁹ Hoffnung bleibt mit dem Leben vermählt, die schmeichelnde Göttin, / Angenehm vor vielen, die als getreue Dämonen / Mit den sterblichen Menschen die wechselnden Tage durchwallen. (JA 6:243.)

sity, the bounds of the moment. Upon his wings we hurry again and again toward the endless possibilities of life, the promises of the future.

The paralyzing counterforce is Care (*Sorge*). For Goethe she is the quintessence of "life terror" (*Lebensangst*) and of practical defeatism. This slinking demon pursues man on his way, embittering for him the pleasure of existence. It is with her that Faust, at the end of his indefatigable wanderings, has to fight the last decisive battle.

Whom I once possess, shall never
Find the world worth his endeavor.²⁰

The sister of Care is Rue. She too "attacks" man whenever his inner force is weakened. In Goethe's rejection of Rue he coincides with Spinoza, who refused to call her a virtue, because she paralyzes the soul still further, whenever our "will-ing" or doing has gone astray. This is always the basic principle of Goethe's view: only that can be called good and a virtue which increases for a man the power of will-ing and doing. Rue he counts among the emotions which only torture and depress, and are unfruitful.

Impatience serves no good,
Still less does Rue:
The former increases guilt,
The latter makes new.²¹

In old age, said Goethe, one is no longer surprised at having to atone for one's faults; one has learned that no fault can be put away, or that other faults put in an appearance if the old ones are suppressed. And so one finally ceases to regret, knowing that nothing is accomplished by it. Every day exists for itself. How can one meet its challenge, "unless one grants absolution to himself and others every night?" Religion, in Goethe's view, should indeed arouse the conscience when it is dull; but religion should likewise soothe it, if self-tormenting Rue threatens to embitter our life.

Eckermann tells (May 2, 1824) how Goethe, viewing the glory of the setting sun, quoted the words of the Greek philosopher Strato:

²⁰ Wen ich einmal mir besitze, / Dem ist alle Welt nichts nütze. (*Faust*, verse 11453.)

²¹ Nichts taugt Ungeduld, / Noch weniger Reue: / Jene vermehrt die Schuld, / Diese schafft neue. (*JA* 4:30.)

"Even in setting it's always the selfsame sun," and how he then spoke of the fact that the thought of death did not alarm him. "For I have the firm conviction that our spirit is an essence of quite indestructible nature . . . It is like the sun, which only to our terrestrial eyes appears to sink, but which in reality never sets, which goes on shining incessantly."²² Goethe's utterances about death issue from his conviction that death must be understood and accepted as a phenomenon of life. In the prose hymn to Nature (1781) he says that life is the loveliest invention of Nature, "and death is her device for having abundant life."²³ This points to the old conviction that what appears to us as end is in truth a transformation into new modes of existence; that every destruction is only a component part of the process whereby life goes over to new and higher productions. "Everything is transformed, nothing dies . . . There is therefore no death in Creation; there is a hasting away of that which cannot remain, the working of an ever young, restless, enduring force, whose nature cannot permit it for one moment to be idle, to stand still, to remain inactive." These sentences from Herder's *Gott* (1787) come close to the conviction which Goethe had acquired in the years of his study of Spinoza. Death and life form a unity after the fashion of a polar opposition; they are two functions which can only exist side by side and are interwoven with each other. In the drama *Prometheus* (1773), the highest moment of the positive urge to life, the love union, is identified with death. "Die and become," the formula of the poem, *Selige Sehnsucht*, points four decades later to the same mystery of life.

When Goethe speaks of the departure which is probably a crossing, but at the same time an anxious detachment of the soul from its embodiment and earthly existence, he does so by preference in such a way that death appears as a function of the never-ending process of life. He writes (in a letter to C. G. D. Nees von Esenbeck, September 27, 1826) that he likes to look at life from the side of death and turns his gaze toward the "eternal day-side . . . where death is always swallowed up by life."²⁴ But to death he sang no songs and offered no homage. To revel in the mysteries of death and to indulge in philo-

²² Denn ich habe die feste Überzeugung, dass unser Geist ein Wesen ist ganz unzerstörbarer Natur . . . Es ist der Sonne ähnlich, die bloss unsern irdischen Augen unterzugehen scheint, die aber eigentlich nie untergeht, sondern unaufhörlich fortleuchtet.

²³ . . . und der Tod ist ihr Kunstgriff, viel Leben zu haben. (JA 39:5.)

²⁴ . . . ewigen Tagseite . . . wo der Tod immer vom Leben verschlungen wird.

sophic speculation regarding the end, and, in general, the romantic cult of the nocturnal phase of life—all that was wholly remote from him. We have already seen how he seeks to avoid the sight of a dead body, how this peculiarity increases as he ages, and that it is a defense reaction of overly sensitive senses and an all too productive imagination (see *Goethe the Poet*, p. 284). One may speak, as Thomas Mann does, of Goethe's "endangered friendship" with life (what genius ever had any other kind of relation to life?), and say that an instinct of self-preservation was active there which sought to protect the soul against violent shocks caused by "macabre images." This is true also of the mind. Grave-mottoes, says Goethe, should properly be "life mottoes," a counterweight against the mood of death which seeks to overwhelm us in the neighborhood of graves. One of his favorites among Spinoza's sayings was surely this, that the free human being reflects upon nothing less than upon death, and that true wisdom consists in reflecting upon life. The maxim of the active man should not be *memento mori*, but "remember to live while you live" (*Gedenke zu leben*). The picture of death must not frighten the sage, as Goethe puts it in *Hermann und Dorothea*; it should point him back into life and teach him to be active. So it comes about that new existence arises from the contemplation of death.

In the years of his manhood Goethe declined to treat in his writings the question of survival after death. At forty he confesses (in a letter to Friedrich Leopold, Count zu Stolberg, February 2, 1789) that his demands are restricted to the sphere of life; that he holds more or less to the opinion of Lucretius, who tried to mitigate the fear of death by the doctrine that the soul is of material substance and therefore mortal. But in old age Goethe developed other views and expressed them repeatedly. True, he considers it to be no less useless than hostile to life to immerse oneself in the problem of immortality or, still worse, to surrender to the fascination of death. That, he remarked mockingly, was something for fashionable people and especially "for women who have nothing to do." A capable person who wished to achieve something worth while here on earth should let the future world alone and be valiant in this one. But as to forming a conception of the future destinies of our self, Goethe could no more refrain from that than could any thinking person. Our self wants eternity. But it looks as if along with the individual

existence the force were extinguished by which the person was organized. Goethe feels like every other man:

That each man, of self grown fonder,
Fain would see it perpetuated
As down here, so too up yonder.²⁵

In the poem *Höheres und Höchstes* (it is in the *Divan*) we read: the highest fulfillment of Paradise to be hoped for would be this, that one might enjoy the force and pleasure of earthly existence in a new youth; but especially this, that yonder, in a celestially perfect way, one should be that which one had been on earth. How decidedly then would the poet be able to say:

Tone and sound, however, vanish
From the Word in law unbending,
While transfigured mortals banish
Time and join the realm unending.²⁶

There is then some mention of the mystery whereby our self in the contemplation of eternal Love finally floats away and disappears. An ultimate secret is made visible for one instant. Where Goethe utters his thoughts more definitely, he always assures us that he has no doubt of our immortality. He believes like Leibniz that the monads are indestructible. But he also assumes a continuance of the personality, in that the spiritual power which was developed by our self during its lifetime cannot pass away nor cease to do work. "The conviction of our continuation arises for me from the concept of activity; for if I keep up unabated productivity to the very end, then Nature is under obligation to assign to me another form of existence."²⁷ The creative power developed within us is not sufficed by our short span of life, it demands fresh possibilities of production and bloom. Goethe remarks that he would not know what to do with eternal bliss if there were no new tasks and difficulties to overcome. But only to him who produces without letup is a continuation after death assured. "We are

²⁵ Dass der Mensch, mit sich zufrieden, / Gern sein Ich gerettet sahe, / So dadroben wie hienieden. (JA 5:126.)

²⁶ Ton und Klang jedoch entwindet / Sich dem Worte selbstverständlich, / Und unterschiedener empfindet / Der Verklärte sich unendlich. (JA 5:127.)

²⁷ Die Überzeugung unserer Fortdauer entspringt mir aus dem Begriff der Tätigkeit; denn wenn ich bis an mein Ende rastlos wirke, so ist die Natur verpflichtet, mir eine andere Form des Daseins anzuweisen. (Conversation with Eckermann, February 4, 1829.)

not immortal in the same way, and in order to manifest oneself hereafter as a great entelechy, one must *be* one."²⁸ Here again activity, fruitfulness, vigorous animation are the chief values; even in the eyes of the Eternal the only thing that counts is whether the individual, during his earthly existence, has led a full life of production and enjoyment.

"Ant monads" do not have the same value before God as "world monads." But Helena (*Faust*, Part II) dies her "own death" (as Rilke would say), and queens, we are told, are in the front rank even in Hades. Not only greatness, but "also loyalty preserves our person for us"; such is the reply of Panthalis, the leader of the chorus, to the maidens in it. She will be with her queen; but for the maidens who have not attained to the status of a really personal existence the statement holds:

Who hath not won a name, and seeks not noble works,
Belongs but to the elements.²⁹

Such is the event. Air, water, and fire absorb the maidens. That is a motif from ancient beliefs regarding the soul. Goethe knew it from the *Aeneid*. There it is said that a painful purification of the souls which are sullied by sins during their earthly life takes place in one of the three elements of the superterrestrial sphere. The idea that there are distinctions there is not so spectacular as some may think. Old and widespread is the belief that we reap over there what we have sown down here.

The Greeks also spoke of a judgment of the dead. Plato (in the *Republic*) mentions the idea that after death a court session takes place, and that death-judges separate the just from the unjust. The just then have their special fate in the afterworld. The absolutely bad and the absolutely good are ultimately excluded from the cycle of reincarnation. The former pay the penalty in Tartarus, the latter are rewarded in Elysium. Christianity developed the same belief. Only those souls attain to the contemplation of God who have endeavored in this life to love him and to obey his commandments. Only he who

²⁸ Wir sind nicht auf gleiche Weise unsterblich, und um sich künftig als grosse Entelechie zu manifestieren, muss man auch eine sein. (Conversation with Eckermann, September 1, 1829.)

²⁹ Wer keinen Namen sich erwarb noch Edles will, / Gehört den Elementen an. (*Faust*, verse 9981.)

has sought God will find him. The doctrine of a retribution, of the Last Judgment, and of hell as the place where the incorrigibly bad find a special, fearful kind of immortality, contains within itself the idea of a divergent treatment of souls after death. The Greeks gave to heroes and great men a special Elysium of their own, the Islands of the Blessed, where the chosen ones dwelt free of care in splendid gardens, preserving their souls, that is, their individualities. Pindar says that all good souls who have preserved the purity of their hearts through a threefold incarnation here on earth are transferred to this paradise-like island of the dead. In the *Æneid* the lovely picture of an Elysian place emerges again. There the souls of the good, the noble, and the brave, of pure priests, pure singers, and great benefactors, attain to a state of complete purity and advance from there into heaven. In India and Babylonia similar ideas were held.

So Goethe, with his view that life after death depends on the kind of life lived on earth, stands amid an old tradition, to which the Christian faith likewise bears a relation. But Goethe gives to the tradition a new turn, in which his conception of the mission of man is expressed. It is not a life according to the Commandments, not moral purity in itself, that gives one a right to personal perpetuation. It is the decisiveness of our will-ing and the force of our doing, the positive fruitfulness which we have developed during our lifetime, that wins us a personality on earth and preserves it for us after death.

Let us continue to be productive until we . . . are called by the world spirit to return to the ether! Then may the eternally Living One not deny us new activities, analogous to those in which we have already proven our mettle! . . .

The monad of our entelechy must maintain itself in unflagging activity; if this becomes second nature to it, then it cannot lack for occupation to all eternity.⁸⁰

Also the idea of metempsychosis, of a reincarnation and a migration of souls, which played so great a role in the beliefs of antiquity, is not foreign to Goethe. He touched upon it in conversations. To his

⁸⁰ Wirken wir fort, bis wir . . . vom Weltgeist berufen, in den Äther zurückkehren! Möge dann der ewig Lebendige uns neue Tätigkeiten, denen analog, in welchen wir uns schon erprobt, nicht versagen! . . .

Die entelechische Monade muss sich nur in rastloser Tätigkeit erhalten; wird ihr diese zur andern Natur, so kann es ihr in Ewigkeit nicht an Beschäftigung fehlen. (Letter to Zelter, March 19, 1827.)

friend Boisserée he remarks that everything Roman attracts him, and that that may result from the fact that he probably once lived under the Emperor Hadrian. The verses in the *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* ("Song of the Spirits over the Waters") may also point to such ideas: the soul of man oscillates eternally between celestial and terrestrial existence. Of Makarie, finally, the illumined seeress in the *Wanderjahre*, we are told that men hope she may once more long for life on earth and thereupon exert an influence "to the benefit of our great-grandchildren." Views of this kind readily link themselves with Goethe's conception of the indestructible and inalienable substance of the personality, which crystallizes about the monad, the entelechy. "For every entelechy is a bit of eternity, and the few years during which it is connected with the earthly body do not make it old."³¹ But these intimations and speculations as to a repeated existence never condensed into a definite doctrine. Perhaps they were only pious hopes.

The World of History

Shall here a thousand volumes teach me only
That men, self-tortured, everywhere must bleed—
And there and there *one* happy man sits lonely?¹

We all live on the past, and by the past we are destroyed.²

The best thing we get from history is the enthusiasm it excites.³

IT IS EASY TO ASSEMBLE UTTERANCES IN WHICH GOETHE EXPRESSES AN UNMISTAKABLE AVERSION TO THE WORLD OF HISTORY—PHRASES SUCH AS: "GLOOMY regions of history," "slag-piles of past centuries," or the assertion that

³¹ Jede Entelechie nämlich ist ein Stück Ewigkeit und die paar Jahre, die sie mit dem irdischen Körper verbunden ist, machen sie nicht alt. (Conversation with Eckermann, March 11, 1828.)

¹ Soll ich vielleicht in tausend Büchern lesen, / Dass überall die Menschen sich gequält, / Dass hie und da ein Glücklicher gewesen? (*Faust*, verse 661.)

² Wir alle leben vom Vergangnen und gehen am Vergangnen zu Grunde. (JA 4:207.)

³ Das Beste, was wir von der Geschichte haben, ist der Enthusiasmus, den sie erregt. (JA 4:229.)

world history is the absurdest thing there is, the greatest part of it being nothing more than gossip, at best a great euphemism. Or the skeptical utterance found in *Faust*, that the past will always remain for us an illegible "book with seven seals"; and the statement that from history, after all, nothing is to be learned but the truism "that at all times and in all lands things have been miserable."⁴ As to the credibility of that which is offered us by historians as the true depiction of the past, we read in *Faust*:

What you the Spirit of the Ages call
Is nothing but the spirit of you all,
Wherein the Ages are reflected.⁵

These verses were quoted by Goethe himself in a conversation with Heinrich Luden, who taught history at the University of Jena. The professor replied: if the historian shows us past times as mirrored in his mind (provided he has a mind), we may well be content with that. But that will hardly have satisfied Goethe.

His skepticism is pointed, so to speak, at the entirety of the occupation called the writing of history: its material, its procedure, its results, and the effect it has upon men. Even the phenomena to which it has reference seem problematic to Goethe. Among the sciences history appears to him to be "the most unrewarding and most dangerous field" (letter to F. H. Jacobi, July 7, 1793). How fragmentary is the material handed down to us, and how accidental that certain documents have been preserved. That which would be really decisive may often be no longer in existence, and so the actual record must fail to transmit what is precisely "the true character of *any* actuality." And then the subjectivity of the scholars. Goethe says the writer of history narrates "always just as if he himself had been present at the time, but not what went before and brought it about."⁶ But the duty of the historian, he remarked, was a twofold one: for himself he must determine exactly what could have happened, for the reader he must set forth what actually *had* happened. But is it not an essentially

⁴ . . . dass es zu allen Zeiten und in allen Landern miserabel gewesen ist. (Biedermann I, 434.)

⁵ Was ihr den Geist der Zeiten heisst, / Das ist im Grund der Herren eigner Geist, / In dem die Zeiten sich bespiegeln. (*Faust*, verse 577.)

⁶ . . . immer nur so, als wenn er damals selbst dabei gewesen wäre, nicht aber, was vormals war und damals bewegte. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 651.)

impossible task "to separate the true from the false, the certain from the uncertain, the doubtful from the inadmissible"?⁷ This critical activity can only refer to the historic facts, to the sources; by itself it is not yet the writing of history.

Difficult and indeed dubious as is even this first fundamental activity, the research, still more problematic is the presentation and interpretation of the facts. Properly, Goethe remarks, only the individual phenomenon, the fact, the single action, is interesting, and that "not because it is explainable or probable, but because it is true" (JA 16:208). He seems inclined to restrict the indubitably true to the isolated facts, as they are recounted by the chroniclers of old. But if one combines the single fact with others—which the writer of history must do—"then one necessarily alters and distorts it in the process of interpretation"; and in Goethe's opinion this was a way of treating truth which could not be considered objective.

But Goethe's skepticism goes further. If the impossible could be achieved and one could reproduce what had really happened—would something be thereby achieved which would make sense and have an influence upon the whole human being? "What is your ultimate objective in writing history, with all these historic truths, errors, and fictions?" Goethe inquires at the end of the conversation with Professor Luden. Goethe's own view of the productive value of historiography is contained in the epigram:

These historic weightinesses,
On their value fools insist,
Always searching emptinesses—
Teeming world is wholly missed.⁸

Textbooks and history are equally ridiculous for the man of action, Goethe writes in his diary for 1779. But he also said that history was able to excite enthusiasm, i.e., the force which impels to action. Here Yea and Nay stand facing each other, and the contradiction points to a distinction on a deeper level. The fact is evident that Goethe has two kinds of history in mind.

⁷ . . . das Wahre vom Falschen, das Gewisse vom Ungewissen, das Zweifelhafte vom Verwerflichen zu unterscheiden. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 295.)

⁸ Die geschichtlichen Symbole— / Törig, wer sie wichtig hält; / Immer forschet er ins Hohle / Und versäumt die reiche Welt. (JA 4:92.)

When he was young, what interested him in history was only the personality, the great character. *Götz* and *Egmont* have reference to this phase of historic phenomena, and only this one. Also his ideas concerning the demonic only make sense in this respect. The genre of historiography which concerns itself with personalities, i.e., biography, claimed his chief interest. Both in early and late years Plutarch was his favorite reading. Plutarch's *Lives* was one of the last books in which Goethe read. Goethe's own historiographic accomplishments are in the main of biographic nature: the story of his youth and his essay on Winckelmann, which is important as an attempt to size up a historic personality in a new and more spiritual sense. In connection with his work on *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe expressed his views as to how a true biography must be constituted. It should outdo narrative history, he says, by placing the individual before us as a living being, but at the same time also describing the age to the extent that it influenced the individual. The uniqueness of the historic person is in this case the object upon which the gaze of the observer is concentrated. "Biography should present life as it exists *per se* and for its own sake."⁹ But if the historian tries to concern himself more with that which arises from the individual existence as effect and consequence, i.e., with the results of it, such preoccupation will lose from view both the particular merit of the individual achievement and that of the individual person. But for Goethe the individual is the most important part of the recorded past, indeed the only part of it worth our consideration. In general, he remarks, the fact is that only from documents of such immediate kind as letters, diaries, and memoirs can the past be once more brought into view, and only thus can one attain to a conception of the real character of a vanished existence. Goethe calls this: transforming word and recorded idea into a "living concept." "One does not weary of reading biographies any more than of reading descriptions of travel: for one is then living with the living."¹⁰

But from such "history" the reference type of historiography is now critically distinguished, and, in the same breath, condemned: "History, even the best of it, always has something corpse-like in it,

⁹ Die Lebensbeschreibung soll das Leben darstellen, wie es an und für sich und um sein selbst willen da ist. (JA 24:268.)

¹⁰ Man wird nicht müde, Biographien zu lesen, so wenig als Reisebeschreibungen: denn man lebt mit Lebendigen. (JA 24:269.)

the odor of the tomb.”¹¹ So Goethe himself, when he had to write the history of a science, that of optics, did not present it as a history of problems and solutions. He has the scientists themselves step forward in their historic sequence, devoting a tiny monograph to each one. And as all this is rounded out into a comprehensive contemplation, and one becomes aware of how the individual, single figures join to constitute a community of capable, intelligent thinkers, Goethe feels that enthusiasm growing within himself which history is capable of arousing if one pursue it in the right way. Toward us, he says, come “out of every region of the dim past competent and excellent persons, brave, beautiful, and good, in glorious shapes. The human song of praise to which the Deity so gladly listens has never ceased to resound, and we ourselves feel a godlike happiness as we hear the harmonious emanations distributed over all ages and areas, now in single voices, in single choirs, now like fugues, now in a magnificent, full-voiced chorus.”¹²

The single personality, as it existed in its peculiar force, beauty, and greatness; all its achievements, whether as finished works or as deeds born of the totality of its character; and the ways in which, at the same time, it maintains a living connection with other significant personalities that went before or that were alive and at work at the same time—this is what Goethe likes to contemplate and to depict. And that was, moreover, what the ancient poets and history writers had done: “Man and everything human were esteemed the most, and all of man’s inner and outer relations with the world were presented in as grand a manner as they were seen.”¹³ History, when viewed thus, does not crush the living by means of the unhappy litany of how transitory everything is, and how vain. But the rest, after all, is not worth knowing.

When it was planned in 1817 to celebrate the Reformation, Goethe

¹¹ Die Geschichte, selbst die beste, hat immer etwas Leichenhaftes, den Geruch der Totengruft. (JA 24:269.)

¹² . . . aus der dunklen Vergangenheit überall tüchtige und vortreffliche Menschen, tapfere, schöne, gute in herrlicher Gestalt entgegen. Der Lobgesang der Menschheit, dem die Gottheit so gerne zuhören mag, ist niemals verstummt, und wir selbst fühlen ein gottliches Glück, wenn wir die durch alle Zeiten und Gegenden verteilten harmonischen Ausströmungen, bald in einzelnen Stimmen, in einzelnen Choren, bald fugenweise, bald in einem herrlichen Vollgesang vernehmen. (JA 40:148.)

¹³ Der Mensch und das Menschliche wurden am wertesten geachtet, und alle seine innern, seine äussern Verhältnisse zur Welt mit so grossem Sinne dargestellt als angeschaut. (JA 34: 13.)

found that in the whole business only Luther's character was still of interest, but all the rest was only "a confused pile of rubbish, such as that which is our daily burden still" (letter to Knebel, August 22, 1817). The very history of the church was to him merely a conglomeration of error and violence. Only in creative men, in prophets, religious leaders, poets, orators, artists, pulses the never-resting spirit as it incarnates itself anew. This is the fairest of certainties, which history teaches us "by a thousand examples." Interest in the individual manifestations of a creative mind dominates in Goethe so powerfully that ultimately it is only for the sake of the author that he cares to read a celebrated work of contemporaneous historiography. After reading Barthold Niebuhr's *Römische Geschichte* ("History of Rome") he confesses to his friend Zelter (in a letter of January 17, 1831) that he really cared nothing about increasing his acquaintance with "the gloomy regions of history." The Roman agrarian laws, the wars between Romans and Sabines, or the relations between Senate and people, all that was none of his concern. What interested him was merely Niebuhr's admirable method, the way in which he makes these complicated matters clear. "That is what helps me, what imposes upon me the duty, in the affairs which I undertake, of functioning in the same conscientious manner." Example, model, animation of one's own creative powers, that alone has value. One may recall Goethe's saying that everything was hateful to him which merely increased his knowledge.

After all, it is the present age and its life for the sake of which one recalls the past and seeks to understand it. Also, "a certain pleasure in the present" is requisite, if one wishes to save it from oblivion. "A chronicle is written only by him to whom the present is important."¹⁴ We live in conditions which come from yesterday and glide over into tomorrow; we are fitted into institutions and systems which have arisen in the course of the ages. In his Nature studies Goethe had found that the laws whereby the forms are shaped cannot be learned by us from them after they have ceased to develop and are finished. We must go from the completed form back to the process which produced it. "That which has finished becoming we do not understand."¹⁵ "Who can understand any phenomenon if

¹⁴ Eine Chronik schreibt nur derjenige, dem die Gegenwart wichtig ist. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 296.)

¹⁵ Das Entstandene begreifen wir nicht. (*JA* 39:76.)

he is not penetrated by the course of its advance?"¹⁶ As student of Nature Goethe was wholly bent upon the genetic method; in the development of an organism he saw the plainest manifestation of the underlying law; the story of his own youth he presented as a process of growth in which the temporal conditions from without and the person striving for development from within constituted the motive forces. How should he have lacked an understanding and a sense of the world of history and its phenomena?

But it appears that we cannot call Goethe's attitude toward history simply positive or negative. For one entire area of historical science he always felt repugnance, and only in definite phenomena of the life of history did he find a good meaning. Finally, Goethe's thinking and knowing is in general not so obviously historical as that of his contemporaries and successors in the nineteenth century. It was only in a modest degree that Goethe possessed the "historic sense." Except for the field of biography, he tried himself out only in the history of science and of art. The sections in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* which treat of the German literature of the epoch in which Goethe had grown up speak of general conditions and single authors; the development of literature is not set forth as such. In the Notes to his *Divan* Goethe attempted to understand the poetry and the poets of the Orient as a result of the history of Oriental civilization. He knew well how indispensable it is to begin by being acquainted with the era of a man of whom one wishes to form a conception. But understanding of the historic environment is to him simply one way of approach to the peculiarity of the individual.

In two cases Goethe attempted to give a survey of art history which was more than a history of artists. This was to be done, first, in the book about Italy which he intended to write (he never got beyond the stage of planning), and then in *Kunst und Altertum*. There he starts with the early German pictures which he had seen in the collection of the Boisserée brothers, and attempts to depict the fortunes of art in the early Christian eras, and medieval painting down to the Flemish artists. Even this is not a history of development in the modern sense. Goethe actually fails to equal Winckelmann, who had already presented a history of Greek art as a history of

¹⁶ Wer versteht irgend eine Erscheinung, wenn er sich von dem Gang des Herankommens nicht penetriert? (Letter to Zelter, June 3, 1830.)

styles. Nevertheless, ever since his stay in Italy, Goethe had continued to show much interest in the history of the arts, as indeed in all phenomena pertaining to the history of civilization. The history of law and its "advance" out of the conditions of its barbarous beginnings had always been an object of his interest, he assures the law faculty in Jena (November 24, 1825). For him it was also a matter of course that in the fields of natural science in which he was himself active he should inform himself as to the course which research had taken since classical antiquity.

The only historic work of larger scope which Goethe executed is the section in his treatise on optics which he calls "materials for a history of the theory of colors." "The history of science is science itself."¹⁷ In the shifting views of previous scientists, in their discoveries as in their mistakes, there is developed in this account little by little the totality of the problems, methods, and solutions which constitute the totality of the science in question. But Goethe finds that one cannot restrict oneself to the theory of colors; one must view it in connection with the general theory of Nature and with the history of philosophy. "One will only come to see what any individual thinks about a certain case when one knows what his general attitude is."¹⁸ Here that principle is stated and followed which a century later attained universal validity in the methods developed by the school of intellectual history. The single historic phenomenon is comprehended and interpreted by means of the entire mental life of the epoch. But the biographic element—reports on the lives of the most important scholars with concise sketches of their personalities—always remains in the foreground. The treatise is arranged, as aforesaid, as a running series of short biographies. Goethe thinks that when so regarded a history of the sciences is more alive and more instructive "than when discoveries and opinions are merely strung together" (JA 40:123). He does not wish to write a history of materials and problems, but of the men who recognized, explored, and solved the problems. Science itself, therefore, in its capacity of a disciplined search for the truth, i.e., intellectual stirring, motion, achievement, is more important to him than its results, the discoveries made. The

¹⁷ Die Geschichte der Wissenschaft ist die Wissenschaft selbst. (WA II.9:184.)

¹⁸ Wie irgend jemand über einen gewissen Fall denke, wird man nur erst recht einsehen, wenn man weiss, wie er überhaupt gesinnt ist. (JA 40:131.)

former is of human-moral type, an act, unproblematically positive and constant. But all results, as the history of the sciences shows, are by their nature questionable, hovering between truth and error, and subject to the process of aging and dying.

But in order to keep the individual, which is the focus of biographic interest, from dominating too greatly, Goethe inserted little essayistic passages which by means of reflections of philosophic kind seek to reach a standpoint above the historic process. It is these "inter-reflections" whereby Goethe's treatise transcends the special purpose for the sake of which it was undertaken. Thus for example in the chapter on Newton there is an excursus in which Goethe presents his theory of character. As a whole, these contributions to the history of color theory elude classification with any of the typical methods employed either in the contemporaneous or subsequent science of history. From this work one comes to know the unique character of Goethe's interest in history, his inclinations and disinclinations, his merits and his limitations, but at the same time also his views on the connection of man and method in the person of the scholar; and lastly his ideas about science in general, its weaknesses as well as its greatness. In this work Goethe also expressed important motifs of his view of Nature. Is it permissible, anyway, to reckon this many-sided structure among the works of professional historiography? In intention, certainly. Goethe wishes to present a bit of historic life. But what he produced is of unique kind, not comparable with any other attempt to set forth the history of a science. As it stands before us, it signifies at the same time a silent denial of the methods and objectives which the professional writing of history followed then and follows today.

In the history of literature and the arts, in which he manifested lifelong concern, Goethe could recognize a coherent output of work and will. There he perceived a progress toward summits on which entire groups and schools attained to mastery; and even if there was likewise descent and disintegration, in this development too an inner consistency showed itself. We have already spoken of the many positive views which Goethe derives from the contemplation of the history of science. But if he observed a friendly attitude toward these particular fields and the history of civilization in general, we are none the less justified in asserting that toward history as a scientific occupation, even as an object of scientific interest, he felt a manifest disinclination.

The principal field of learned historiography, that of political and social history, he viewed with distrust and aversion. His derogatory remarks refer in the first instance to what is called "world history," but also to the work of the scholars who are active in this sphere. Did the historiographic achievements of the eighteenth century and of his own age merit his having so slight an opinion of them? Voltaire, Montesquieu, Gibbon, Herder—these are names of importance for the development of modern historic science. In the works of these philosophizing observers there was more discussion of the great problems of the world than of special conditions and events: of the fates of great civilizations and peoples, of the development of mankind. The ideal of a universal history constituted in all cases the focal point for these large-scale speculations. Herder's *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* ("Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind"), his major work, which had originated under Goethe's eyes and with his active participation, gave a conception of what the universalistic mode of contemplation was able to achieve when it was animated and complemented, as in this case, by a new interest in that which is peculiar and individual in historic phenomena. But on the whole, in the age in which Goethe grew up, a feeling for what is historic in the proper sense, for the particular character of phenomena, had not yet developed. Not until the nineteenth century, as an outgrowth of romanticism, did it come into being. The interest of the eighteenth century was concentrated more upon the new, mechanistic interpretation of Nature, which nourished mightily the philosophic optimism of the age. A marked interest in history could not be achieved beside such a rival. The picture of Nature drawn by rationalistic interpretations was better able to confirm men's confidence in the beneficent make-up of the world and the wise organization of life than historic contemplation could have provided. Herder was the first to succeed in transferring the religious and moral optimism of his age to the process of history. If there was a God in Nature, it must be possible to discover him in history too.

But Goethe does not join in this shift to the world of history. In the years when Herder was proclaiming in his chief work that *Humanität* was the purpose of human nature and that from "the growing, true enlightenment of the nations" a progress of humanity would result—at just this time Goethe turned to the exploration of

Nature. If Herder's achievement pointed to the future, to romanticism and its enthusiasm for history and the nineteenth-century belief in progress, Goethe's preference for the phenomena of Nature corresponded more with the spirit of the eighteenth century. The insights into the organization of life which he obtained through research estranged him still further from an interest in history. The object of his astonished awe, the source of his deepest intellectual joy, was the revelation thus vouchsafed to him: how the infinitude of Nature, which is one with God, forms an organic whole that is founded on itself, a vast realm governed throughout by simple laws, an infallible, unbroken Order. In it there was no caprice and no chance. On the contrary, everything, even disintegration and death itself, served the one great purpose of constantly producing new life, in order that there should be no standstill. But if one gazed upon men and nations, upon their will-ing and doing—however the countries and the ages might be called, and whatever might happen in them—nothing made the impression of logic and rightness.

This was what deterred Goethe from contemplating the historic process. It depressed him and imperiled his confidence in the nature of life. The history of the world, he said, was incalculable and incommensurable. The tapestry of historic happening is woven of necessity and caprice, of logical action and chance, in a way which permits no unclouded view and no pious admiration. Anyone who, like Goethe, expected all the possibilities of a good life, all that could give meaning to existence, to flow from the existence of the individual, from the constant, productive activity of a personality—how could he regard as good and fruitful a point of view which was prone to regard the conflicts of national interests and power policies, and war, that "hereditary sickness of the world," as the normal and most important content of history? This kind of history could lead only to discouraging thoughts about man and his lot.

Again and again, and most of all, Goethe was repelled by the realization of how great a role chance itself has played in the principal actions of political history. To master chance by subjecting oneself to that which is unalterable in it, but converting the dispensation itself into the positive, was viewed by Goethe as basic wisdom for the individual who wishes to give form and consistency to his existence. But if practical reason in an individual can take from chance much

of its effect, in the life of nations this fateful, unpredictable entity will always maintain its power. Friedrich Meinecke thinks that in later years Goethe had a less fatalistic idea of the role of chance in history. To me it seems that he changed in this respect just as little as in his aversion to an intensive study of world history. What else could the "course of earthly things" teach, save that we "but rarely experience the realization of that which is beautiful and possible," because so often the senseless power of chance intervenes?

But there is no lack of indications of the fact that Goethe reflected on the question as to whether in the course of history some manifestations of law could be found which would be analogous to those in the realm of Nature. He remarks once that "in the higher sense nothing depends less on time than true art."¹⁹ This thinking resembles that of Winckelmann, for whom there was but one beauty, one absolute norm of aesthetic perfection. The development of art consisted in this, that in their works artists approached this norm or drew away from it. Had Goethe attempted to use the concept of "true art" in order to organize art history into epochs, he would indeed have arrived at a dogmatic interpretation of the development, but at the same time he would have understood the development itself as an ordered process. What is more important is that he made a definite attempt at applying the concept of polarity to historic development. If civilization had its origin in religion, as Giovanni Battista Vico and Herder taught, if therefore art likewise originated out of and with religion, then that pointed to an opposition of the same kind as that designated by the concept of polarity. It could be imagined that the course of art history had its inner dynamics in the contrast between a religiously governed and an autonomous, secular art. In the history of natural science, on the other hand, Goethe thought he saw that everything had developed "out of the progressive and regressive properties of the human mind, out of a striving and again self-retarding Nature."²⁰ Perhaps, he remarks, by starting with this polarity even "an aprioristic history" could be written.

For the modern historian it is of interest to note that Goethe tried

¹⁹ . . . in höherem Sinne nichts weniger von der Zeit abhängt als die wahre Kunst. (JA 35:67.)

²⁰ . . . alles aus den vor- und rückschreitenden Eigenschaften des menschlichen Geistes, aus der strebenden und sich selbst wieder retardierenden Natur. (Letter to Schiller, January 24, 1798.)

to characterize the epochs of history typologically. He does so, to be sure, not in the "unevaluating" fashion of modern type theories, but in such a way that at the same time qualitative differences are established. Once he makes the remark that "all regressive and disintegrating epochs" are subjective; all ascending epochs, on the other hand, have a tendency toward the objective (conversation with Eckermann, January 29, 1826). He also tried (and that is certainly Goethe's most interesting achievement in this field) to view art as a kind of organism and to comprehend its life according to the analogy of organic growth. In this fashion Winckelmann had already conceived of the development of style in Greek art. This led to a division into single epochs, which in their aggregate constitute a complete growth cycle: germination, flowering, ripening, decay. In the short but important article entitled *Geistes-Epochen* ("Spiritual Epochs"; 1817), which was occasioned by the controversy of contemporary philologists as to the oldest Greek mythology, Goethe describes such a development as is actually revealed in ancient civilization. But this characterization has at the same time the universal validity of the typical. Four great stages of development, four ages, are distinguished. The first has its intellectual center in religious poesy. "Naïve poetic art comes first in every nation, it is the foundation of all subsequent ones."²¹ The second age rests upon a theology which has risen to the stage of science; the next is founded upon an individualistic philosophy. But in the fourth period, which Goethe calls that of prose, thinking detaches itself from the forces of faith, from the sphere of the metaphysical, of imagination and speculative reason. This age reduces to triviality the content of the great tradition and destroys thereby the religious foundation of the civilization. And again dominance is gained by the chaos which preceded civilization. Superstition, unfaith, occultism, aimlessness, and vagueness of thinking characterize an age that is "dying off, passing over into decay." The children of the twentieth century know how apt is this characterization of the final period.

In this sketch, also, the great problem is touched upon by which the age of Goethe was fascinated: whether humanity's road through time leads upward. That there can be no standstill in history is for

²¹ Naïve Dichtkunst ist bei jeder Nation die erste, sie liegt allen folgenden zum Grunde. (JA 5:149.)

Goethe a matter of course. "Nothing is stagnant. Despite all apparent retrogressions, mankind and science must always advance, and even if at last each of them should bring itself to a conclusion."²² But by that he only means that the forces of life can never cease to work and to increase. As Nature cannot stop in her productivity, neither can history in its progress. Here too it is a question of a kind of constant metamorphosis, which however is not regulated by any law.

This advance or progress of which Goethe speaks is not the movement meant by the nineteenth century when it spoke of the progress of humanity. The faith in progress held by modern optimism assumes that continuous alteration is at the same time a continuous improvement. An age which put its faith in the rapidly ascending sciences and technology was convinced that social and economic conditions could likewise be improved by these new forces. Modern man was to owe his new fortune, paradise on earth, to his own intelligence and toil. There seemed to be no doubt that the great transformation would make of him a happier, indeed a better, being. Goethe did not live to experience the full unfolding of this religion of progress, though he saw its beginnings. But was there not a kinship between his philosophy of history and these boundless expectations? Goethe liked best to conceive of the process of historic development as analogous to that of organic growth. One should assume then that the great law of *Steigerung* which prevailed in Nature must likewise be manifested in the course of history. Ideas of this kind are indeed found in Goethe's thinking, but only in connection with the history of the arts and sciences. So he says that in the poetic arts one can always observe in the beginning long periods of a slow advance of artisan-ship. "One is often surprised in history at the slow progress of purely mechanical skills."²³

But such organic processes of development, which improve in steady progression to maturity, are thought by Goethe to be recognizable only in the sphere of science and art, i.e., of individual creations. The development of mankind he does not view with such confidence. His skepticism with regard to history is connected with the fact that

²² Nichts ist stillstehend. Bei allen scheinbaren Ruckschritten müssen Menschheit und Wissenschaft immer vorschreiten, und wenn beide sich zuletzt auch wieder in sich selbst abschliessen sollten. (JA 40:120.)

²³ Man wundert sich oft in der Geschichte über den langsamen Fortschritt nur mechanischer Fertigkeiten. (JA 29:323.)

he has no faith in humanity en masse. Mankind will increase in shrewdness and insights, he remarks—that is, gain in knowledge and understanding—"but not become better, happier, and more energetic, or at least only periodically" (conversation with Eckermann, October 23, 1828). "All truth was discovered long ago":²⁴ this realization had been confirmed for him once more by the wisdom of the Orient, which he had studied in connection with his work on the *Divan*. "New inventions can and will be made, but nothing new can be thought out that has reference to man as moral being."²⁵ But it was obvious to Goethe that only that may be called an ascent which comprises the betterment and *Steigerung* of the *entire* being. Just as for him there was no idea of civilization which did not include morality and religion. The false conceit of the nineteenth century, in so far as it had reference to economic, social, and technical improvements, was condemned in advance by Goethe's saying: "Men are productive in poesy and art only so long as they are still religious; after that they merely become imitators and repeaters."²⁶ The same idea is expressed in an *aperçu* to be found in the Notes to the *Divan*: that the proper and the profoundest theme of world and human history is the conflict between faith and unfaith. "All epochs in which belief prevails, under whatsoever form, are brilliant, heart-uplifting, and fruitful for themselves and posterity."²⁷ But the epochs of unfaith are unfruitful and vanish for that reason from the memory of nations.

From the rational self-confidence and the feeling of a great upsurge of civilization at the end of the eighteenth century the belief had arisen that the road of mankind led steadily upward. This conviction prevailed in the following century among scientists as well as among the political activists. Did Goethe believe in a steady progress of civilization? As to the conception he had formed of the process of historic development as a whole he did not express himself often or in detail. But what he does say about it shows plainly enough that he does not assume a continuously ascending movement, but rather cyclical sequences which are repeated, though not at regular intervals.

²⁴ Das Wahre war schon längst gefunden. (JA 2:245.)

²⁵ Neue Erfindungen können und werden geschehen, allein es kann nichts Neues ausgedacht werden, was auf den sittlichen Menschen Bezug hat. (1823. Biedermann II:661.)

²⁶ Die Menschen sind nur so lange produktiv in Poesie und Kunst, als sie noch religiös sind; dann werden sie bloss nachahmend und wiederholend. (Riemer, 321.)

²⁷ Alle Epochen, in welchen der Glaube herrscht, unter welcher Gestalt er auch wolle, sind glänzend, herzerhebend und fruchtbar für Mitwelt und Nachwelt. (JA 5:248.)

The theory of the cycle of the ages has a long tradition. A periodic return of ascent, flowering, decay, and death was taught by the Stoics. When such a development (which is organized into stages) is completed, then a new cycle of the same kind begins. This is as true of single civilizations as of the eras of the world. Machiavelli took over this doctrine from the Stoics. In the eighteenth century it lost ground, because its content of historic optimism was slighter than that of the belief in progress. Giovanni Battista Vico had renewed the cycle theory again in significant fashion at the beginning of the century. In his *Scienza Nuova* he undertakes to present "the ideal history of the eternal laws." He teaches that the movement of history proceeds in cultural cycles, and that each of these processes runs its course in three stages. When a cycle is concluded, then at another point the same sequence begins anew. In this eternal recurrence of structurally identical but individually different culture periods Vico thought he had found the "eternal law" of history. After each descent into barbarism a new civilization grows up in another nation. He also assumes a pervading trend, an enduring striving toward an ideal condition of Christian *Humanität*. Vico's work, with which hardly anyone outside his country was acquainted, had been read by Goethe in Italy. But he says himself that it was only a hasty perusal. And so he contents himself with a respectful obeisance toward the profundity and seriousness of the Italian. One may assume that Goethe's related views developed from his view of Nature, and that in that connection he had the cycle theory in mind.

The cycle which mankind has to complete is definite enough, and notwithstanding the great standstill caused by barbarism it has traveled its course more than once. Even if one would assign to it a spiral motion, still it always returns to that region which it had previously traversed. On this road all true views and all errors are repeated.²⁸

In a similar fashion he speaks in a letter of the "mobile terrestrial activity, always recurring in circles and spirals."²⁹ True, the treasury

²⁸ Der Kreis, den die Menschheit auslaufen hat, ist bestimmt genug, und ungeachtet des grossen Stillstandes, den die Barbarei machte, hat sie ihre Laufbahn schon mehr als einmal zurückgelegt. Will man ihr auch eine Spiralbewegung zuschreiben, so kehrt sie doch immer wieder in jene Gegend, wo sie schon einmal durchgegangen. Auf diesem Wege wiederholen sich alle wahren Ansichten und alle Irrtümer (JA 40:140.)

²⁹ . . . beweglichen, immer kreis- und spiralartig wiederkehrenden Erdetreiben. (Letter to Zelter, May 11, 1820.)

of man's experiences grows greater; but the insights and ideas derived therefrom are repeated in eternal recurrence. "Everything is new and still always the same."⁸⁰ Skepticism and faith, confidence and fatalism, unite in this view. And what could be more characteristic of Goethe's wisdom in old age than just this synthesis? History is like Nature: "She is always building and always destroying."⁸¹ If the cycle has ended in barbarism, at least it begins anew. Sometimes a long pause may intervene, as after the downfall of the Roman Empire. One should speak of "circumgression," not of "world progression," Goethe said to Jean Paul. In his last decades he uses the picture of the spiral in preference to that of the cycle (in his last studies on the metamorphosis of plants the "spiral trend" plays a certain part). It is a symbol of his confidence, one should think, in the slow ascent to higher civilizations. On Leibniz's coffin they had placed a spiral and accompanied it with the phrase: *Semper sursum revertor*. Eternal recurrence of identical, kindred phenomena, but not at the same spot, no, on a higher plane—i.e., a heightened repetition, a new thing arisen from the elevated elements of the old: this conception unites the chief ideas of Goethe's interpretation of the world. There is eternal renewal, but in such a way that the new develops from the preceding by metamorphosis, in continuity, according to law. But the law of *Steigerung* brings it about that the movement proceeds in an ascending direction.

Faith in a very slow, not easily recognized ascent of human civilization is also expressed in the fact that Goethe evaluates single historic phenomena as precious acquisitions. In the development of the sciences, for example, "the cult of knowledge by virtue of an inner impulse and for the sake of the thing itself, a pure interest in the object," is a supreme attitude, which has been striven for down through the ages and only attained in recent times. But is this precious acquisition our permanent possession? Can it not be lost again? In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe speaks of the development of the individual. What he says there holds true likewise for the processes of history. Growth, he writes, is not only a straightforward, unhindered development from the germ; the process is much more complex. The various "organic systems . . . follow each other, turn

⁸⁰ Alles ist neu und doch immer das Alte. (JA 39:3.)

⁸¹ Sie baut immer und zerstört immer. (JA 39:3.)

into each other, displace each other, even consume each other, so that of some emanations of force after a certain lapse of time hardly a trace is any longer to be found.”⁸² Another problem: why does artistic competence not hold its ground on the summit of the flowering eras, when after long periods of technical progress a kind of perfection is at last attained? Goethe thinks one might compare art with a cone or a pyramid, “whose tip is finally formed by one individual—Raphael, Sophocles” (Riemer, 311). The successors are not able to go beyond that. Instead of advancing they stand still, because they are content to equal the master in technical competence. They become imitators and repeaters. One sees: when Goethe speaks of concrete phenomena of historical development which interest him, he recognizes ascent and progress, but only within single, limited processes. This progress, like that of organic growth, only persists until the stage of maturity is reached. Then a standstill takes place, and finally a decline. The picture of the pyramid certainly expresses less historic optimism than that of the spiral.

It looks as if Goethe had been unable to reach any definiteness in his view of the direction of historic development, i.e., world history, as a whole, because the impulses of confidence and expectation were again and again disturbed by his skepticism regarding the nature of man. What Mephisto says must have been, at least in hours of painful stock-taking, Goethe’s insights too:

The little god o’ the world sticks to the same old way,
And is as whimsical as on Creation’s day.⁸³

But a historic development which should complete itself apart from individuals, in great objective currents, and lead upward purely by virtue of the consistency of its mechanical course—this idea does not lie within the sphere of Goethe’s historic view.

In the *Wanderjahre*, when he speaks of the threefold awe and the religions based thereon, Goethe calls Christianity an ultimate to which humanity could attain. He goes on then: one might say “that the Christian religion, since it has once made its appearance, cannot

⁸² . . . organischen Systeme . . . folgen einander, verwandeln sich ineinander, verdrängen einander, ja zehren einander auf, so dass von manchen Kraftäusserungen nach einer gewissen Zeit kaum eine Spur mehr zu finden ist. (JA 22:82.)

⁸³ Der kleine Gott der Welt bleibt stets von gleichem Schlag, / Und ist so wunderbar als wie am ersten Tag. (*Faust*, verse 281.)

disappear again, and since it has found divine embodiment it cannot be dissolved again." ⁸⁴ Here then an ascending development of religious and moral feeling is assumed which culminates in the appearance and teaching of Christ; but this is at the same time "an ultimate." If such unsurpassable peaks are possible, then there can be no endlessly progressive heightening of historic development, but only limited single processes, such as Goethe recognizes and acknowledges above all in the sphere of the arts and of faith. These processes culminate in a great personality or in a group of great individuals, who create something that is not to be surpassed and hence from then on is regarded as the highest norm in its sphere. So it is with the Greeks in art, so with Christ in religion. This way of viewing the process of history is just as genetic as it is normative. It would be a falsifying simplification if one would maintain in so many words that Goethe believed in *progress*. But an advance in a particular matter, an upward gradation to the attainment of fulfillments which in their realm have the significance of an "ultimate"—such *Steigerungen* in the cultural sphere, and especially in spiritual and moral development, he did acknowledge. Realistic as Goethe is in his urge to pure truth, he too must have been tempted by the "lovely dream-desire of mankind" (as Herder said) that one day "things might be bettered."

Against the spell of historic meditation, of a yearning immersion in the infinite realm of the past, Goethe warned in no uncertain terms. For the living, he said, the present must always be of supreme importance, and for the active no duty was more important than the "demand of the day." True yearning does not wish to recall what is past. History is supposed to show us what "competent and excellent men" achieved before our time, so that we may be incited to take up the endless task of civilization where it slipped out of their hands. That means "uniting the productive with the historic" (WA II:11:271), and that is what Goethe means by the saying which has become the best known of his utterances about history: that the best thing history can give us is the enthusiasm it excites.

Four decades after Goethe's death, Nietzsche began his battle against an excessively swollen historic interest and against the modern

⁸⁴ . . . dass die christliche Religion, da sie einmal erschienen ist, nicht wieder verschwinden kann, da sie sich einmal göttlich verkörpert hat, nicht wieder aufgelöst werden mag. (JA 19:183.)

science of history. He demands that history content itself with increasing the power of creating and doing. One must learn once more, he says, to make the study of history serve the purposes of life. In so doing Nietzsche appeals to Goethe, not without justification. Goethe had opposed the beginnings of a development which reached a dubious maturity in the historicism of the century's end.

Man

I am now in the midst of a study of the human form, which is the *non plus ultra* of all human knowing and doing.¹

Everything outside of us is but element, and I may even say everything about us, too; but deep within us lies this creative force, which is able to produce that which is destined to be.²

Freedom is nothing but the possibility of doing, under all conditions, that which reason approves.³

SHOULD ONE WISH TO SHOW HOW GOETHE SAW MAN IN HIS CONNECTION WITH THE ORGANIZATION OF THE WORLD, AND WHAT ANSWER HIS THINKING FOUND for the great question: What is man?—one should hark back to Goethe's literary work as a whole, above all to his poetic writings. For here, in his interpretation of life, the true hero everywhere is man, and man's existence is the real theme. All the means commanded by poesy seem to be evoked, in order to give a worthy picture of the nature of man and his place in the great Order. Art is a work of man, and it turns its face toward man. At bottom, man is likewise the chief and basic theme of all the productions of art. But the image of man which Goethe raised up in his poetic works cannot be dealt with here. Something simpler and more limited is all we shall attempt.

¹ Ich bin nun recht im Studio der Menschengestalt, welche das *non plus ultra* alles menschlichen Wissens und Tuns ist. (JA 27:187.)

² Alles ausser uns ist nur Element, ja ich darf wohl sagen auch alles an uns; aber tief in uns liegt diese schöpferische Kraft, die das zu erschaffen vermag, was sein soll. (JA 18:150.)

³ Freiheit ist nichts als die Möglichkeit, unter allen Bedingungen das Vernünftige zu tun. (Biedermann, III:404.)

Goethe's anthropological wisdom, the results of his reflections about man are to be assembled and discussed.

Goethe's interest in all the problems that have anthropological significance was uniformly active in all the periods of his life. In the story of his youth he tells how even then it was his foremost objective to get to know man. "Man is to man the most interesting of all things and should perhaps be the only object of interest to him,"⁴ remarks Wilhelm Meister, and in Ottilie's diary (in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*), we find this assertion expressed still more decisively: "The proper study of mankind is man."⁵ In this statement Goethe is merely strengthening a conviction which, ever since the Renaissance, is one of the bases of the new humanistic faith. "*La vraie science et la vraie étude de l'homme c'est l'homme*," says Pierre Charron; and the eighteenth century finds its profoundest interest confirmed by Pope's celebrated line, which Goethe quotes: "The proper study of mankind is man."

One should expect Goethe's scientific interests to have favored a mode of contemplation which would take a predominant interest in man as a natural being, as product and member of the physical world order. But such anthropological utterances as are contained in Goethe's writings on natural science are inferior both in quantity and importance to the material of like kind which can be derived from his literary works. There is no doubt in Goethe's mind as to where man has his place in the organization of Nature. As man is historically the latest product of the vast evolutionary process, the last of the creatures that Nature has produced, so he is qualitatively her last product as well: the most highly organized of beings. In man "the animal glorifies itself, up to the highest mobility and freedom." "Highest mobility" follows from the special constitution of the parts of the human forearm and hand. It is these members above all, Goethe remarks, which make of man, with respect to his physical organization, a human being. They permit him "the most perfectly dainty and skillful movement." From this area, vistas open into the other territory of which man is a part. Goethe adds, "There is no intellectual trait which does not pertain to this realm."⁶ What he means by that is ex-

⁴ Der Mensch ist dem Menschen das Interessanteste und sollte ihn vielleicht ganz allein interessieren. (JA 17:113.)

⁵ Das eigentliche Studium der Menschheit ist der Mensch. (JA 21:213.)

⁶ Es ist nichts Geistiges, was nicht in diesen Bereich fiel. (JA 39:239.)

plained by another saying, a "Greek dictum," as he puts it: "Animals are taught by their organs";⁷ i.e., in the animal body, the function of an organ follows with obvious necessity from its formation, is indeed identical with it. In saying this, Goethe remarks, we have at the same time said everything there is to say regarding the instincts of animals. Instinct, namely, consists in this, that the animals make of their organs every use of which there is any possibility in the constitution of those organs. Elsewhere Goethe brought out still more emphatically the element of compulsion to which the animals are subject in this regard by altering his statement to read: "Animals are tyrannized over by their limbs."⁸ Here the chief advantage which distinguishes the organization of man is clearly visualized. What raises man high above the animal is that he is not only instructed by his organs, but that he is also in a position to develop and even to master them. No animal can do that. This insight was achieved by Goethe in 1830 in connection with the controversy between Cuvier and Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire. He considered it to be so important that he communicated it to his friends. In the very last letter he wrote (to Wilhelm von Humboldt, March 17, 1832) he is still speaking of it.

Of the human skeleton Goethe says it stands out by virtue of the fact that in man it is not the teeth and jaws that are most fully developed, as in the animals, but the frontal bone. And though in many quadrupeds a tendency appears to develop the rear extremities more strongly than the front ones, man alone has attained to a "purely upright position." But it is correct to say that the surface of the human body "could be more sparingly endowed" because so much attention was devoted to man's inner organization.

When the point is to determine just what is the peculiarity of the human body, Goethe applies the procedure of comparative morphology, to the development of which he himself made so great a contribution. He shows that the old practice of anatomists, that of comparing animal and man unsystematically, could not lead to any valid results. One difficulty lies in the fact that "in man the animal nature has been intensified for higher purposes and put in the shade, as it were, for the eye as well as the mind."⁹ For that reason it is

⁷ Die Tiere werden durch ihre Organe belehrt. (WA II:13:114.)

⁸ Die Tiere werden von ihren Gliedern tyrannisiert. (WA II:7:203.)

⁹ . . . im Menschen das Tierische zu höheren Zwecken gesteigert und für das Auge, wie für den Geist, in Schatten gestellt. (WA II:8:8.)

better to begin with the dissection of the animal body, where everything is more clearly visible. But the most daring and significant of these ideas is that no single animal can be the osteological model of the entire genus, and hence man also cannot be the model of all the mammals, just *because* he possesses the most highly organized perfection of any of them. Man is not the model for the animal any more than the animal is the model for man. The ideal standard can only be supplied by the osteological type according to which both man and animal are formed; only with this primal form, the morphological norm, may one compare the individual animal species and thus establish a sequential order whereby the series of organic beings mounts to ever more perfect creatures. That which makes man the most highly organized being in this ascending series "can only then be realized in the clearest and most satisfying fashion when we . . . do not direct our contemplation from the higher to the lower and seek man in the animal, but when we begin at the bottom and ascend, to rediscover at last the simpler animal in the complex human being."¹⁰ The perfection of the human organism lies in what Goethe calls "the complete decisiveness of the limbs." "Here in man, in the most regular kind of organization, everything has a definite form, position, and number, and no matter what deviations the manifold activity of life may bring forth, the whole of man will always revert again to its equilibrium."¹¹

All this is conceived in the spirit of evolution, but not in the sense of the subsequent Darwinian theory. The ascent in the series of organisms does not come about, in Goethe's view, by means of processes of selective heredity. The process presents itself to his mind in this way: that Nature produces indefatigably new variants of the morphological type. But the resulting new species is no repetition of the old one, merely a more highly organized variant. The universal natural law of *Steigerung* brings about this ascent. According to Goethe's idea, then, the process of evolution, which goes on working to infinity, is not caused by forces working mechanically from without

¹⁰ . . . kann nur dann am deutlichsten und schönsten eingesehen werden, wenn wir . . . unsere Betrachtungen nicht von oben herab anstellen und den Menschen im Tiere suchen, sondern wenn wir von unten herauf anfangen und das einfachere Tier im zusammengesetzten Menschen endlich wieder entdecken. (WA II:8:67.)

¹¹ Hier hat in der regelmässigten Organisation alles bestimmte Form, Stelle, Zahl, und was auch die mannigfaltige Tätigkeit des Lebens für Abweichungen hervorbringen mag, wird das Ganze sich immer wieder in sein Gleichgewicht stellen. (WA II:8:86.)

(as Darwin maintained). It is the manifestation of a primal phenomenon, an inquiry into the cause of which makes no sense. Riemer reports an utterance made in conversation which summarizes in a simple fashion Goethe's views on the morphological position of man:

In order to attain to man, Nature performs a long *Praeludium* of beings and forms, which lack very much of what is needed for man. But in each one is seen a tendency toward another and superior one. The animals carry, as it were, that which subsequently furnishes the formation of man, very daintily and beautifully arranged as ornament, concentrated in disproportionate organs, such as horns, long tails, manes, etc., all of which drops away in the case of man, who stands there unadorned, beautiful in and by virtue of himself, perfected; man who *is* everything that he has, in whom use, necessity, utility, and beauty are all one and components of one harmony.¹²

Goethe's contemplation ascends to the human form and finds in it the highest product of creative Nature. It becomes for him the real "text" for everything he undertakes to say about man outside and alongside of physiological anthropology. For what morphology teaches with regard to the human form is not the whole of what is to be said about it. Here too Goethe does not think and see historically. To write about the descent of man could not even occur to him, for the simple reason that he does not assume *homo sapiens* to have stemmed from one of the higher species of mammals. The "whence" and "why" of the origin of man, as well as of his close kinship with definite species of animals, he leaves undisturbed. But he did say to Eckermann (October 7, 1828) that it could be assumed that when "the epoch of man-making" had begun Nature did not produce a single couple, but brought forth "men by the dozens, nay the hundreds." But he adds that while it is common sense to assume that this took place, "to puzzle over *how* it took place I regard as a useless occupation which we will leave to those who like to busy themselves with insoluble problems, and who have nothing better to

¹² Die Natur, um zum Menschen zu gelangen, führt ein langes *Präludium* auf von Wesen und Gestalten, denen noch gar sehr viel zum Menschen fehlt. In jedem aber ist eine Tendenz zu einem andern, was über ihm ist, ersichtlich. Die Tiere tragen gleichsam das, was hernach die Menschenbildung gibt, recht zierlich und schön geordnet als Schmuck, zusammengepackt in den unverhältnismässigen Organen, als da sind Hörner, lange Schweife, Mähnen usw., welches alles beim Menschen wegfällt, der schmucklos, durch sich selbst schön, vollendet dasteht; der alles, was er hat, auch ist, wo Gebrauch, Nutzen, Notwendigkeit und Schönheit alles eins ist und zu einem stimmt. (Riemer, 258.)

do."¹³ Goethe's interest is claimed solely by the process which he never wearies of admiring and exploring: how Nature succeeds, from a single primal form, "which only oscillates more or less to and fro in its very constant parts, and by reproduction develops and varies itself every day,"¹⁴ in producing the infinite multiplicity of her forms. He conceives of Nature as an artist, indefatigable in her productivity and inexhaustible in her new ideas. This anthropomorphic analogue seems to him to carry us furthest. As the artist seeks in ever new designs to attain to the vision which strives, from within his soul, to develop into a finished work, so it was only after "thousands of different attempts" that Nature was able to produce the human shape, the most perfect form there is in the realm of organisms. In this rare structure, the spiritual potency which is at work in the heart of Nature, the "Idea," reaches pure outward manifestation. Indeed, in the whole realm of life it is only in the human form that man can actually contemplate the Supersensual. Neither the Good nor the True ever appears in ideal purity. For it must be made a reality by man, and is therefore always encumbered by an earthly residuum. But the perfect shape is a work of the form-creating Deity itself, and for that reason too the Beautiful, transcending all human purposes, remains "its own bliss."

God made man after his image, the Bible teaches. The "human creature," says Goethe, bears "in itself the likeness of the Deity at its finest and most unique" (*JA* 21:213). What gives the beautiful figure its unique rank and its magic effect (as Goethe describes it in the *Pandora* scenes) is that it is the purest symbol of the creative Deity to make itself known in the sphere of sensory experience. He who has come to this realization may say without hesitation that that which is worthiest of human concern is the human figure, and that the study of it is the *non plus ultra* of all human knowing and doing. Goethe remarks that nude man, as represented in Greek plastic art, is "man proper." Man's capacity for freedom is based upon his shape no less than upon his reason. This explains why Goethe can say that even in his shape the dignity of man is manifested.

¹³ Allein darüber nachzusinnen, wie es geschehen, halte ich für ein unnützes Geschäft, das wir denen überlassen wollen, die sich gerne mit unauf lös baren Problemen beschäftigen, und die nichts besseres zu tun haben.

¹⁴ . . . das nur in seinen sehr beständigen Teilen mehr oder weniger hin und her weicht und sich noch täglich durch Fortpflanzung aus- und umbildet. (*WA* II:8:71.)

What Nature can produce but rarely, and only for brief moments, man succeeds in doing more frequently and lastingly in the work of art. That he is capable of approaching perfection in his works is attested most convincingly by his artistic creations. "Men are rarely capable of the Beautiful, quite often of the Good."¹⁵ If one should define man as *homo artifex*, i.e., as the being which is able to produce works of art, then to be sure only one of his peculiar capabilities would be brought out, but certainly one of his most positive ones. But one who like Goethe sees everything in its totality knows well that Prometheus and Epimetheus, symbols of the world of work and utility and the world of the inner life, must come together to make the entire human being. *Homo faber*, "the tool-making animal," as Karl Marx was to say, was described by Goethe in *Pandora* as indispensable for a vigorous, assured existence. But to believe that everything has been said about man when one calls him "the tool-making animal"—this is a stupidity which may not be ascribed to Goethe.

At the time when, under the moderating and moralizing influence of Charlotte von Stein, the unquiet existence of his youth became humanized, Goethe himself had oversimplified the essence of man in a different way. That which is celebrated in man in the hymn entitled *Das Göttliche* ("The Divine") is his capacity for being unselfish, loving, just, and of good will (all of which Nature is not). This alone, we are told, distinguishes man from all other beings. If one sets over against that the wisdom of Goethe's old age, the doctrine of the three types of awe, how much more complex and grand appears this mode of contemplating man. Awe is not identical with the moral sense nor with humaneness. It is more comprehensive, more significant, it is the presupposition and foundation of religion, moral order, civilization. Of it we read that it is nothing less than that "upon which depends everything that enables man to be a human being in every respect." The feeling of pious awe and reverence must be everywhere in evidence if man is to reveal himself as *homo sapiens*.

Like Kant, Goethe also thinks that a predisposition to morality is part of the nature of man and cannot be further derived. On the sections in Kant's *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in which the doctrine is set forth that man as moral being is the final purpose of creation, Goethe

¹⁵ Des Schönen sind die Menschen selten fähig, öfter des Guten. (JA 19:51.)

comments that in the conception of God "our feeling of the dignity of man" takes shape. "What man reveres as God is his own inner being turned inside out."¹⁶ The whole inner being is meant, not moral force alone. So Goethe praises the Greeks as the first

. . . whose devotion began
To shape the high Gods in the image of Man.¹⁷

In regarding himself as "the best" that "God and Nature" have produced, man feels himself impelled to do those works which are assigned to him as the highest creation of Nature: the works of civilization.

There are utterances enough which show that Goethe thought highly of man. He is the highest of living creatures, the first conversation, as it were, which Nature has with God. He stands independent at the side of Nature, because his mind too is a reflection of the primal light of the Divine. Hence he can take a "law-giving" position with regard to Nature, can command her, "in order to free himself and his fellow men from the violence of necessity" (*JA* 4:225). "What are the elemental phenomena of Nature herself as compared with man, who must first tame and modify them all in order to assimilate them in some measure to himself?"¹⁸ Time itself is only matter for him, "an element which only acquires worth and worthiness through the thinking of man" (letter to C. G. von Voigt, March 29, 1818). Everywhere man is praised as the only creative being there is on earth. For that reason he is destined, as the Bible says, to be the lord of the earth.

However much of good by Nature is bestowed,
The mind of man improves it always, lifts it up;
All things that gave but pleasure, were of use,
He heightens to more usefulness, to higher ends.¹⁹

The creating man, for whom everything that meets him from without turns into material for his animating, intensifying power, is the one

¹⁶ Was der Mensch als Gott verehrt, ist sein eigenstes Innere herausgekehrt. (Riemer, 336.)

¹⁷ . . . die Göttergewalt / Aufstellten in würdiger Menschengestalt. (*Faust*, verse 8301.)

¹⁸ Was sind die elementaren Erscheinungen der Natur selbst gegen den Menschen, der sie alle erst bändigen und modifizieren muss, um sie sich einigermaßen assimilieren zu können. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 708.)

¹⁹ Doch so viel Gutes reichlich auch Natur verliehn, / Des Menschen Geist verbessert's immer und erhöht's; / Was alles nur genossen ward und was genutzt, / Zu grösserm Nutzen steigert er's, zu höherm Zweck. (*JA* 9:286.)

Goethe has in mind whenever he sings the praise of man. But the truly great and significant is possible for the creative man only when he utilizes the entirety of human nature.

Man can achieve much by the efficient use of single powers, and he can do the extraordinary by combining several abilities; but he only achieves the unique and wholly unexpected when all properties are uniformly united in him. This last was the fortunate lot of the ancients, especially of the Greeks in their best period.²⁰

Where the rare, supreme achievement takes place, and the healthy nature of man is realized "as a whole," there the universe, says Goethe, "if it could have a sensation of itself," would believe it had reached its ideal goal and would "admire the peak of its own becoming and be-ing" (JA 34:12).

For what purpose is served by all the expenditure of suns and planets and moons, of stars and milky ways, of comets and nebulae, of worlds that have become and are becoming, unless in the end some happy human being might take unconscious pleasure in his own existence?²¹

Man the highest creature, image of God, lord of earth, in the highest manifestations of his species even the being for which God seems to be instituting the vast spectacle of the universe—is it not a challenging effrontery for man to think so greatly of himself? The children of the blood-stained twentieth century, which has lapsed into barbarism in such a fearful way, will contemplate Goethe's bright visions with incredulous sorrow. For it is indeed an ideal picture that he draws here, a product of the mind which is capable of perceiving in the inadequacy of the actual the features of the intended perfection—traits of the idea which stands before us in the nature of a demand, as goal toward which man strives in his search for perfection. Poets like Goethe, great poets, outdo not only as artists the crowd of the mediocre. Their high rank is likewise revealed therein, that they set up concepts of heightened possibilities, goals of higher existence.

²⁰ Der Mensch vermag gar manches durch zweckmässigen Gebrauch einzelner Kräfte, er vermag das Ausserordentliche durch Verbindung mehrerer Fähigkeiten; aber das Einzige, ganz Unerwartete leistet er nur, wenn sich die sämtlichen Eigenschaften gleichmässig in ihm vereinigen. Das letzte war das glückliche Los der Alten, besonders der Griechen in ihrer besten Zeit. (JA 34:11.)

²¹ Denn wozu dient alle der Aufwand von Sonnen und Planeten und Monden, von Sternen und Milchstrassen, von Kometen und Nebelflecken, von gewordenen und werdenden Welten, wenn sich nicht zuletzt ein glücklicher Mensch unbewusst seines Daseins erfreut? (JA 34:12.)

Without being didactic, they proclaim to the wavering, always endangered race of men what it could be, what it should become in order to be wholly human.

Along with all the lofty images and words whereby in his poetic work Goethe glorifies the worth of man stand the utterances in which he expresses the doubts and sufferings caused by men. In his youth he rebelled against the teaching of Luther and the Pietists, which would "see the sinful as predominant in man" (*JA* 24:78; see the chapter on "Christianity" above); later he was agitated by Kant's assumption of a radically evil strain in human nature, but then in old age he himself spoke of it, while at the same time maintaining the theory of an innate "hereditary virtue." Of skeptical sayings about the intellectual and moral qualities of man there is certainly no lack in Goethe's writings. One need only recall Mephisto's sarcastic remarks about "the little god of the world." But that is also the role of the contrary spirit which is not capable of seeing man as a whole and allowing validity to his great and good qualities together with his base ones. The bitter and ironic complaining in Goethe's conversations and letters to close friends—the irritation and disgust expressed there—will not be taken by anybody as final, valid views. In the last analysis Goethe resembles the Hypochondriac in the poem of that title:

And scarce do I see a human face
But it's once more dear to me.²²

A mind of Goethe's rank certainly knows all that can be said against man, and he himself expressed much of it. But just as he does not reject life on account of its distress and torment, so also he finds, as he contemplates man, the strength for an affirmation which contains in itself sufferings, despair, and everything that is problematic. To know life and say Yes to it ("however it be"), to know people and still love them, to see through human nature in its indissoluble linking of good and evil and still cling to the confidence that man can know the right way and can strive toward perfection—Goethe had ripened to the stage of this ultimate wisdom. However much resignation the wisdom of this last phase may have included (and who could estimate it?), however much of bitterness and despair he may have had to experience, he permitted none of these feelings to destroy his con-

²² Und kaum seh' ich ein Menschengesicht, / So hab' ich's wieder lieb. (*JA* 2:163.)

fidence in life and his faith in man. That it is an inborn law for man to wish for perfection, this positive, confident saying derives from the last years of Goethe's life. It puts man on a high plane, but it separates him at the same time from the highest. Faust's end shows that perfection is the sole prerogative of heaven. For so it is with the nature of man, with his fate and his existence, and so he will always be: great and small, longing for the absolute but limited in his actions and results, the most perfect and the most imperfect, the most fortunate and the most unfortunate of creatures, lord of the earth and yet wholly uncertain of his lot. The contradiction which is not to be resolved in the existence of the individual can also not be annulled in the life of the species.

What constitutes the worth of the individual? His good qualities, his morality? Goethe tries to begin with life, not with the mind, in order to gain a measure. There he finds something, at the bottom of the ego, so to speak, which is earlier than mind and morality, but not identical with the elementary instincts. This thing which is a postulate of the individual life itself, which cannot be derived from something else, Goethe calls *Charakter*. He understands by that not the moral quality of the individual, but the definite peculiarity, the *daimon* in him, which reaches out into the world "with unconditioned will-ing," the indefatigably vital activity and obstinacy whereby the monad seems to make its personal existence a reality. Goethe speaks often of that "which is appropriate to man." He means the power of the individual to seize what suits his nature and to ward off what he cannot assimilate. Up to the intellectual sphere, up to ideas and convictions, this power extends. One's personal fate is also connected with it. For: "That which every human being customarily encounters is repeated more than one would think, because his own nature supplies the most immediate disposition for it."²³ Or: "Every man is led and misled in his own way."²⁴ Goethe thinks one can even say that the individual only understands that which is appropriate to him. This *daimon* in us is what makes the greatness and power of the personality. It also determines its activity and gives to single actions a common stamp and an inner consistency. This is what Goethe means when he

²³ Was einem jeden Menschen gewöhnlich begegnet, wiederholt sich mehr, als man glaubt, weil seine Natur hiezu die nächste Bestimmung gibt. (JA 21:287.)

²⁴ Jeder Mensch wird auf seine eigene Art geleitet und verleitet. (JA 22:192.)

says, "The history of a man is his character."²⁸ Man will in all cases try to work "in his own way," and he inclines to identify the right with that "which is appropriate to himself." In this power is rooted the tenacity with which to maintain oneself against all the blows of fate; in it are likewise rooted the prejudices and aversions of the individual. A phenomenon which is as natural as it is necessary eludes the moral order. It is beyond good and evil, for it is the condition of personal existence.

Goethe's conception of character leads to the question as to what measure of freedom he allowed the human being. Here too one can cite utterances which seem to betray an unresolved contradiction or even a vacillation in Goethe's views. Was not his philosophic master Spinoza a determinist, who taught that the mind does not act freely on its own initiative, but is always determined in the impulses of its will by a cause which in turn goes back to another cause, and so on *ad infinitum*? But Spinoza also spoke of a possibility of practical freedom: man is free if he educates himself so as to follow the clear ideas of rational thinking and not the blind ones of sense or the impulses of the emotions. But more than this: should the researcher who seeks everywhere in Nature the traces of the great order in which everything originates and perishes according to law, and who reveres in this the revelation of God—should he not be inclined to include in this universal order the totality of the organization of man? Goethe speaks at times of the great necessity whereby our existence as well as that of the other beings must complete itself; or he speaks of how our will, at bottom, is always a Must or a Shall, whereas what we call freedom is an illusion. However, one must remember that the organization of Nature, as Goethe pictures it, is itself a "mobile order," an interplay of polarities, "of power and restriction, of caprice and law, of freedom and measure" (JA 2:251). Of a tyrannical compulsion we can only speak when we are forced to act against reason, heart, and conscience; but the stern Deity steps down from its throne when our moral will accepts what confronts it as commandment.

With the philosophic problem of the freedom of the will Goethe did not concern himself seriously. In a letter to Schiller (July 31, 1799), he makes in passing some comments on free will, as to which,

²⁸ Die Geschichte des Menschen ist sein Charakter. (JA 18:186.)

he says, he otherwise doesn't usually rack his brains. If one should assume man to be by nature good, then free will would ultimately be only "the silly power" to commit bad acts and incur guilt out of free choice; but for anyone who believed in an originally evil nature, or assumed that man was controlled by his sensual impulses like the animals, free will would be "a high-toned person who presumes to use Nature in order to act against Nature." But there are also utterances in which Goethe concedes freedom of will and tries to determine what that is. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* we read, "The word freedom sounds so beautiful that one could not do without it, even if it designated an error."²⁶ Goethe too cannot do without it. The idea of a man with freedom of decision is an integral constituent of his anthropological thinking. Of the animals he says: though they stand so close to us in the order of Nature, yet they are "separated from us by an infinite gulf and are assigned to the realm of necessity" (JA 25:8)—to which, then, man is not entirely subject. The reason why Nature does not restrict him so closely is that he has intellect. Goethe too, like Kant, Schiller, and the other idealistic philosophers of his epoch, regards reason as the only power whereby freedom can be realized. This freedom has nothing to do with arbitrariness. A severer norm than that of moral reason cannot exist. Of this Goethe said, "the higher organizations have less freedom, and are much more conditioned and limited . . . reason allows the minimum of freedom and is despotic."²⁷ But it is an inner despotism; the authority resides in the person himself. "He who has the insight has the will."²⁸

Unresolvable as the conflict between the idea of determinism and that of freedom of the will may be for pure thought, it resolves itself as soon as one attempts to deal with it in action. Then man finds out "that aside from inclination there is something else in us which can counterbalance it, so that we are capable of renouncing any wonted good and of putting away from us even our most ardent desires."²⁹

²⁶ Das Wort Freiheit klingt so schön, dass man es nicht entbehren könnte, und wenn es einen Irrtum bezeichnete. (JA 24:53.)

²⁷ . . . dass die höhern Organisationen weniger Freiheit hätten, sondern viel bedingter und eingeschränkter waren; die Vernunft lasse die wenigste Freiheit zu und sei despotisch. (Riemer, 350.)

²⁸ Wer einsieht, der will. (Letter to Zelter, January 21, 1826.)

²⁹ . . . dass ausser der Neigung noch etwas in uns ist, das ihr das Gleichgewicht halten kann, dass wir fähig sind, jedem gewohnten Gut zu entsagen und selbst unsre heissesten Wünsche von uns zu entfernen. (JA 16:236.)

The mind has the power to confront the wishes, even the interests, of Nature in us; it can reject and prefer, it can act from within itself, free of any external compulsion. Man, said Max Scheler, is the being that can practice asceticism. Goethe said: man is the being that can renounce, that is expected to renounce. He often spoke of the significance of renunciation. It was in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* that he gave it the finest presentation and glorification. Renunciation is the foundation of all discipline, the means whereby the bestial and destructive traits in us are transformed into civilizing forces. What Goethe means has nothing to do with the rejection of world and life, according to the "blasphemous saying" that all is vanity. Renunciation means for him voluntary restriction; the effect of it is that the inner force becomes more concentrated and definite. Renunciation wins for the individual full control over himself, and thus the freedom to act according to his own decisions. It is a means, not an end. "Nothing in the world is lovelier than inclination guided by reason and conscience."⁸⁰ Only he who is able to act freely can hope to encounter and withstand the forces which press in upon us and from which we cannot escape. Late in life Goethe once speculated as to how the interplay of polar forces, the inner ones which desire autonomy, and those which come from without and have determinative effect, can reach a balance within us:

If we contemplate ourselves in every situation of life, we find that we are externally conditioned, from our first to our last breath; but that all the same the highest freedom has been left to us to develop within ourselves, in such a way that we can place ourselves in harmony with the moral order of the universe, and, no matter what hindrances may offer, thereby achieve peace with ourselves.—This is quickly said and written, but it merely stands before us as a task, to whose completion we have to devote our days throughout life. Every morning cries out: to do what is proper and await what is possible.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Schöneres ist nichts in der Welt als Neigung durch Vernunft und Gewissen geleitet. (JA 16:239.)

⁸¹ Betrachten wir uns in jeder Lage des Lebens, so finden wir, dass wir äusserlich bedingt sind, vom ersten Atemzug bis zum letzten; dass uns aber jedoch die höchste Freiheit übrig geblieben ist, uns innerhalb unsrer selbst dergestalt auszubilden, dass wir uns mit der sittlichen Weltordnung in Einklang setzen und, was auch für Hindernisse sich hervortun, dadurch mit uns selbst zum Frieden gelangen können.—Dies ist bald gesagt und geschrieben, steht aber auch nur als Aufgabe vor uns, deren Auflösung wir unsre Tage durchaus zu widmen haben. Jeder Morgen ruft zu: das Gehörige zu tun und das Mögliche zu erwarten. (Letter to Count C. F. M. von Brühl, October 23, 1828.)

Then freedom in the highest sense would be no more than this, that the individual, out of his own urge and his own force, brings himself into agreement with the moral order of the world, while belonging of necessity to Nature and the social order. The expression, "moral order of the world" (which derives from Fichte), Goethe used only in the last decades of his life, and even then not without reservations. Thus we read that men believe they "ultimately" perceive such an order, which is helpful to a good and competent person. But he also says more positively, "A higher influence favors the steadfast, the active, the sensible, the regulated and the regulating ones, the humane, and the pious. And here the moral order of the world appears in its finest revelation, namely, where it comes directly to the assistance of the good and valiant one who suffers."⁸² He who holds out bravely and bestirs himself vigorously "calls to his aid the arms of the gods."

Of fate, however, which Goethe often cites in the works and letters of his youth, there is little mention after his classical period. Unmistakable is Goethe's reserve when he does happen to speak of it. Schiller's fate fixation and the kindred fashion in romantic literature were as alien to Goethe as Greek belief in the gloomy, all-powerful *moira*. In none of Goethe's dramas is fate the hostile superpower which strikes home from above. One's own individuality, one's inborn power and peculiarity—what Goethe designates as *Daimon* in the *Urworte*—this alone is for him the highest type of necessity, which is called fate. But man can cope with what presses on him from without and even strikes him. What Goethe thinks about this finds its most significant expression in the passage of the *Lehrjahre* ("Apprenticeship"; book I, chapter 17) where (as Christian Sarauw once wittily observed) the mature Goethe accidentally meets young Goethe on the highway and reprimands him because of the tendency of young persons to subsume for their wishes and desires the will of a higher power. An undertone of serious admonition is not to be overlooked in these words. They are addressed to the young of a nation which was only too much inclined to fall back upon fate in order to evade the harsh, simple demand of the day and the necessity of arguing its

⁸² Ein höherer Einfluss begünstigt die Standhaften, die Tatigen, die Verständigen, die Geregeltten und Regelnden, die Menschlichen, die Frommen Und hier erscheint die moralische Weltordnung in ihrer schönsten Offenbarung, da wo sie dem guten, dem wackern Leidenden mittelbar zu Hilfe kommt. (JA 38:59.)

case with the world in realistic fashion. Wilhelm Meister too is a German of this kind. To his astonished question as to whether he did believe in a power "which rules over us and directs all things for our best good" (JA 17:77), the sensible humanist with whom he is talking replies that the point is not to make for ourselves plausible conceptions of incomprehensible things. That the fabric of the world is woven of necessity and chance. That the rational will of man must regard this situation as a practical task and try to master both powers and thus assure himself of his freedom. That what we must do is to use chance and to accept the necessary as an unalterable aspect of the active life we are called upon to live. That one may neither regard the necessary as an element of divine caprice, nor the accidental as the effect of a hidden reason. That everything depends on one's standing fast and unshakable, and determining one's own life as far as one finds it feasible to do so. "Every man has his own fortune in his hands, as the artist has some raw material which he plans to transform into a figure or shape."⁸⁸

Fate, we read in another passage in the novel, is a distinguished but expensive tutor; it is better to cling to the rationality of a human master; man should make his own determinations as far as possible and let himself be determined by circumstances as little as possible. In Goethe's discussion of the differences between novel and drama (book V, chapter 7), fate is allowed only for the drama; fate being the power which urges man toward a catastrophe without contributing action or external circumstances on his part; in the tragedy this power shows itself most fearfully in the fact that it brings guilty and innocent deeds into connection with each other in fateful fashion. But even this interpretation lacks any mythical element; it is not maintained that fate is identical with a higher will which one must piously accept. The unforced reaction of the acting human being is not called in question. Even in the tragic situation everything depends on man's ability to find his way from necessity back to freedom.

Goethe knew very well that this was a view and attitude that is characteristic of modern man, but unknown to the Greek poets. The real master in the ancient tragedy is a despotic Shall; but a free will-ing is "The god of the new age." Shakespeare is the only one

⁸⁸ Jeder hat sein eigen Glück unter den Händen, wie der Künstler eine rohe Materie, die er zu einer Gestalt umbilden will. (JA 17:78.)

among modern poets who presented the "linking of Shall and Will in the individual character" (JA 37:44). As character the person is determined and limited by his inborn peculiarity. "As human being, however, he *will*." ³⁴ Whereas the heroes of Greek poetry only will what is possible for man, the modern hero seeks to drive the freedom of his will-ing as high as it will go. It is from this substance that the sublime heroes of idealistic tragedy are made. In them, modern man confronts fate as an equal rival, free, in the consciousness of his power and worth.

But one would not be giving the entirety of Goethe's views of man if one were to refer only to what he said about man as a well-rounded being, independent and detached. The person who is productive from within the core of his entelechy is to be sure in Goethe's view the basic factor of social life and of civilization generally. But he does not think that the individual can stand by himself or even that he exists for his own sake. Goethe's gaze does not embrace (to use a happy phrase of Martin Buber's) merely one part of man, after the fashion of the individualist, but he also does not take one part of man as the whole, as the collectivistic way of thinking does. It is obvious to him that only in a life with others can the individual fulfill his destiny. Human totality, without which there is no true humanity, requires the social feelings and achievements as well as those in which the individual realizes and maintains his own type. Nay more: the individual can only enjoy and complete himself when he lives with and for others. "Alone, who fain would laugh, who fain would weep?" ³⁵ Moreover, the individual can only know himself when he knows the world. "Man is a gregarious, talkative being." ³⁶ In no single member can Nature realize the totality of the species. It is not a depressing but a delightful feeling, says Goethe, when we realize "that only all of humanity is the true human being, and that the individual can only be joyous and happy when he has the courage to feel himself in the midst of all." ³⁷

Goethe does not mean that the individual should be absorbed in

³⁴ Als Mensch aber *will* sie. (JA 37:44.)

³⁵ Einsam, wer möchte lachen, möchte weinen? (JA 5:38.)

³⁶ Der Mensch ist ein geselliges, gesprächiges Wesen. (JA 19:87.)

³⁷ . . . dass die Menschheit zusammen erst der wahre Mensch ist und dass der Einzelne nur froh und glücklich sein kann, wenn er den Mut hat, sich im Ganzen zu fühlen. (JA 23: 208.)

society or any other collective. As moral person, everyone belongs to himself. About certain things, Goethe once said, he could only speak with God. The clearest line he draws between the individual and the social sphere is found in a comment on Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau*:

Nobody belongs to the world as a moral being. These fine, general demands are to be made by each of himself; whatever is lacking in them he should make right with God and his own heart, and he should convince his neighbor of what is true and good in him. On the other hand, in the character which Nature has given him in particular, as a man of force, activity, intellect, and talent, he belongs to the world. Everything that is excellent can work only for an infinite sphere, and so let the world accept it with gratitude and not imagine that it is entitled to sit in judgment in any other sense than that.³⁸

What is more, the hope of civilization rests upon the creative genius of single, uncommon men. Great new works are created always, and only, by gifted individuals. This is true in the world of science as in that of the arts. It is, says Goethe, "in the last analysis only the individual who has original, primary conceptions, the really estimable ideas and those that count. The others get their ideas only as reflected light. They dress themselves in certain ideas, scientific or moral, as in the costumes of fashion."³⁹ But on the other hand the fact is that even the original artist lives in a cultural space, in which past and present, with all their social, ideal, and national forces, bestir themselves mightily and affect him. A truly creative, independent mind will, of all that presses in upon him, accept only that which suits his character, and by appropriating it he will transform it.

As social being man appears to be no less problematic than as individual. From Goethe's youth and the first years of his humanitarian ethics there are indeed utterances which point to an optimism

³⁸ Niemand gehört als sittlicher Mensch der Welt an. Diese schönen, allgemeinen Forderungen mache jeder an sich selbst; was daran fehlt, berichtige er mit Gott und seinem Herzen, und von dem, was an ihm wahr und gut ist, überzeuge er seine Nächsten. Hingegen als das, wozu ihn die Natur besonders gebildet, als Mann von Kraft, Tätigkeit, Geist und Talent, gehört er der Welt. Alles Vorzügliche kann nur für einen unendlichen Kreis arbeiten, und das nehme denn auch die Welt mit Dank an und bilde sich nicht ein, dass sie befugt sei, in irgend einem andern Sinne zu Gericht zu sitzen. (JA 34:192.)

³⁹ . . . am Ende nur das Individuum, welches originäre, primäre Vorstellungen hat, das eigentliche Schätzbare und das was zählt.—Die andern erhalten ihre Vorstellungen nur als Reflex, als Widerschein. Sie kleiden sich in gewisse Vorstellungen, wissenschaftliche oder sittliche, wie in Modetrachten. (Riemer, 311.)

that can vie with that of Rousseau. Thus we have the verse in *Tasso*: "He only feareth men who knows them not."⁴⁰ But in the same drama we also read that man is not born to be free (verse 930). The repulsive impression which the greatest social movement of the century, the French Revolution, made upon Goethe is reflected in the sarcastic remarks he made in the *Venezianische Epigramme* (Venetian Epigrams) concerning the people and the "apostles of liberty." Confidential utterances of the same period show how skeptical Goethe had become at this time. "The farther one gets about in the world, the more one sees that man is born to servitude."⁴¹ This is in a letter of September 1792 (to Voigt). At that time all Europe was deeply alarmed by the cruelties of the Parisian Terror. But as late as 1826 Goethe published a statement which risked the challenging paradox of praising despotism as the promoter of individual independence (*JA* 4:219). This experienced man of years knows, too, that man is as ready for enmity and self-seeking as for kindness and love. "The whole world is full of poor devils who are more or less afraid. . . . None will reveal to the other the tricks of an art or a trade, and least of all those of life."⁴² It is hard enough for men to know each other, even if they are well disposed. "Then ill will enters in and distorts everything."⁴³ But anyone who wishes to comprehend as a whole Goethe's view of man as social being must place beside these utterances of resignation and skepticism the others as well, from the poems and aphorisms, from the *Divan*, the *Wanderjahre*, and the second part of *Faust*—the fine verses and statements in which love of one's immediate life partners and of one's fellowman in general, the good will to help and to share with others the best of one's own inner life, and finally, also, the confidence in a free people on a free soil, find strong and unqualified expression. Goethe thinks it is the destiny of man to make himself the lord of the earth, by thought, plan, and action, and he knows that every man desires to enjoy in all its fullness the existence granted to him. But the one as well as the other he can realize only in community with others.

⁴⁰ Die Menschen furchtet nur, wer sie nicht kennt. (Verse 310.)

⁴¹ Je weiter man in der Welt herumkommt, desto mehr sieht man, dass der Mensch zur Leibeigenschaft geboren ist.

⁴² Die ganze Welt ist voll armer Teufel, denen mehr oder weniger angst ist . . . Es verrät keiner dem andern die Handgriffe einer Kunst oder eines Handwerks, geschweige denn die vom Leben. (Riemer, 322.)

⁴³ Nun tritt noch der böse Wille hinzu, der alles entstellt. (*JA* 4:202.)

In his *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, at the end of the first part, Herder shows where man has his place in the entirety of the world order. The animal, he says, realizes its inner purpose completely. It is what it can be and should be by its nature. "Only man is in contradiction to himself and to the earth." The cause, Herder thinks, lies evidently in the fact that the nature of man is twofold, and that he represents two worlds at once. "His state, the last for this earth, is at the same time the first for another existence." On this Goethe's view is the same. "Man would not be the most distinguished being on earth were he not too distinguished for it."⁴⁴ Man is the being that belongs to two worlds. This is also the teaching of Kant. In so far as he belongs to the realm of Nature, of the sensory world, man is "a necessitous being," subject to natural necessity. But that he "can have the self in his ideation raises him infinitely far above all other beings living on earth. By virtue of that he is a person." And as personality he is independent of the mechanism of natural processes—in which the other phenomena of Nature are included. The will of man is free, but in the sense that in his actions he is determined by nothing but the moral law within him. Schiller is also Kant's pupil in this point. "Man alone among all the known beings has the privilege, by means of his will, of reaching into the ring of necessity which for mere beings of Nature is inviolable" (*Über Anmut und Würde*). Will is the racial characteristic of man, and man is the being-that-wills—whereby, however, as we have said, a will is meant which is directed by moral reason. If Kant was the first philosopher who saw the essence of man to lie in the fact that in him prevails the conflict between natural necessity and moral autonomy, he merely brought to a conclusion, in this doctrine, a speculation which had been active in philosophy since the time of Descartes and Spinoza. The thinking of Descartes is dualistic in the strict sense. Body and soul, thinking substance and the physical world which fills space, are different in their essence. Man too, who alone has thinking substance, consciousness (for the animal is a body with life but without soul), appears as composed of two substances which are in mutual coöperation with each other.

The final source of this dualistic view of world and man is Chris-

⁴⁴ Der Mensch wäre nicht der Vornehmste auf der Erde, wenn er nicht zu vornehm für sie wäre. (JA 4:204.)

tian teaching and the philosophy connected with it. The Christian is a child of the world and of heaven. His soul has immediate intercourse with God; but the way to God leads through the overcoming of the world. There is something in man which strives out beyond the reality of Nature and demands redemption from that which, for all other beings, is an unproblematic way of life. *Tota vita Christiani boni sanctum desiderium est* (Augustine). As soul-endowed and moral person man has a personal relation to God; in this way he departs from the coherence of Nature. Thomas Aquinas called man an *animal rationale*. He is composed of spiritual and material substance, and he has a share in the finite as well as in the infinite. Here Aristotle was the source. He teaches that the animals have both a vegetative and a sensitive soul, but man alone has also a rational soul.

If Goethe's thinking started, as it certainly did, with these ideas of the Christian tradition and of idealistic philosophy, his view of the position of man is nevertheless quite distinct, and significantly so. True, he too conceives of man as citizen of two realms, and derives from this both his greatness and his frailty. In *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* especially he set forth how the moral personality is constituted and is at the same time threatened with dissolution by the circumstance that in man Nature and Supernature meet (cf. *Goethe the Poet*, p. 188). But here too Goethe sees no irreconcilable conflict, whereas the ascetic trends of Christian philosophy, and the thinking which expressed itself in idealistic rationalism, could not overcome a dualistic conception. It is clearly evident in Kant, too. In his *Anthropologie* (1798) he says that man is by nature good in so far as he has an "intelligible" character, i.e., is a being furnished with moral reason and the consciousness of freedom. But with respect to his "sensible" character man must be considered to be evil.

Goethe cannot contemplate the nature of man under such a separation. Where the others assumed an irreconcilable antagonism, he saw polarity—that is, a twoness which is rooted in an inner oneness, or which is oneness in the form of an opposition. Of the same nature, too, is the conflict between sensuality and reason. The necessity of Nature is no less to be revered than the moral law in us. We are "twin-natures single grown." "Our condition we ascribe now to God, now to the devil, and are wrong in both cases: in ourselves lies the riddle, since

we are the offspring of two worlds.”⁴⁵ The highest inner culture to which man can develop himself lies in this, that we keep the faith with the earth and the kingdom of the spirit at one and the same time. Goethe explains somewhere in his *Geschichte der Farbenlehre* that under the impression of the discovery that mind and matter, soul and body, are different, and that we must win and maintain the freedom of our will-ing in opposition to Nature, man accustomed himself in the Christian eras to depreciate Nature, nay, even to look at her “as something hostile and burdensome.” But now, he says, the hour has come when man must reëstablish a harmony between the opposites of his nature, which are in any case of polar character and long for reconciliation. “We live in an age when we feel ourselves more impelled every day to regard the two worlds of which we are a part, the upper and the lower, as linked, to recognize the Ideal in the Real, and to assuage our occasional discontent with the Finite by an ascent into the Infinite.”⁴⁶

Man belongs to and is part of the order of Nature, and earth attracts him powerfully. But at the same time he lifts his gaze “searchingly and with yearning toward the heaven which arches above him in immeasurable spaces, because he . . . feels that he is a citizen of that spiritual realm.”⁴⁷ Our roots reach down into the vegetative fundament of life, and therefore we flee again and again into the unconscious realm. But at the same time we have a share in the spirit which creates the world of light, the world of figures. It is with us as with the world which lies before our eyes: in us idea and reality, mind and matter, essence and external appearance, enter into a synthesis with each other. To be the being in which Above and Below meet and unite, that is the way of man, and from that follows the mode of his existence.

But that does not mean that man is destined to be eternally torn back and forth between the two spheres, without having to decide

⁴⁵ Unsere Zustände schreiben wir bald Gott, bald dem Teufel zu und fehlen ein- wie das anderemal: in uns selbst liegt das Ratsel, die wir Ausgeburt zweier Welten sind. (JA 39:64.)

⁴⁶ Wir leben in einer Zeit, wo wir uns taglich mehr angeregt fühlen, die beiden Welten, denen wir angehören, die obere und die untere, als verbunden zu betrachten, das Ideelle im Reellen anzuerkennen und unser jeweiliges Missbehagen mit dem Endlichen durch Erhebung ins Unendliche zu beschwichtigen. (JA 39:101.)

⁴⁷ . . . forschend und sehndend zum Himmel auf, der sich in unermesslichen Räumen über ihm wolbt, weil er . . . fühlt, dass er ein Bürger jenes geistigen Reiches sei. (Biedermann II:418.)

on one of them. Aristotle taught that man has a medial position in the Cosmos. But the modern poet of the Occident cannot assume man to be an unproblematic child of Nature, with his unalterable place in a closed universe. And yet it looks as if it was in Goethe's anthropological views that his kinship with Greek thought revealed itself with especial clarity. In the picture of life which the Homeric poems paint he had encountered his own views. There seems to be no cleavage, in that world, between the moral and the physical powers. Man and Nature exist in complete harmony with each other. This charming agreement seemed to Goethe the quintessence of that which man should achieve by virtue of his destiny and could achieve by virtue of his nature. This was the eternally valid goal of true civilization, both individual and universal. Between the order of the world and the inner cosmos of the self, but also between the physical and the psychic sides of our nature, Goethe saw no incurable conflict. But like Socrates he too knew that harmony between the two sides of our nature is only realizable when the person is able to govern himself. Only that he does not mean by that a dictatorship of reason, or the tragic Either-Or which Schiller described in his theory of the sublime and glorified in the spiritual struggles of his heroes.

Is Goethe really so close to the Greeks in his view of man, especially to the Greek tragedians and thinkers? The philosophic pessimism of Plato and Aristotle, which predominates likewise in the poetry of later ages, the melancholy wisdom as to the valuelessness of all the goods of this earth, the view that the soul suffers because it is chained to the body—these dark traits are lacking in the picture of Greek life which the disciples of Winckelmann formed for themselves. They are also lacking in Goethe's views of man and his existence. Of Greek philosophy Goethe did not know very much. He certainly understood just as little as Schiller or Hölderlin how strong its pessimistic element is. The antique statues proclaimed a controlled grandeur and a spiritual calm which could only be the expression of inner harmony. Besides, one hardly has the right to call the Greek view of life and man downright pessimistic. Along with the gloomy words about the vanity of earthly goods and the valuelessness of life in general, along with the praises of an early death and man's fear of fate, there is also "the decided optimism of the Greek temperament, which from its deepest depths upward is a plastic, creative one, with its face turned

toward the world." ⁴⁸ It was this mood which Goethe met in the poets of antiquity, and to it he held fast. How much he was subject to the influence of Winckelmann's ideal picture of Greek man, even in his old age, is shown, e.g., by his remark in *Shakespeare und kein Ende* ("Shakespeare and no End"; 1813) that in all the heroes of Greek poetry one finds an admirable equilibrium of volition, obligation, and accomplishment.

On the whole one may say that Goethe had a brighter view of life, and more faith in man, than the great minds of ancient Greece. In that respect too he is a child of the eighteenth century—of the age in which the confidence of man in his force and his destiny, and his faith in a kindly organization of the world, was greater than at any previous time in occidental history. But he shows himself a denizen of the Christian era in the fact that he regards the idea of the morally autonomous self as a foundation of *Humanität*, and that he sees in this ethic a great advance over the trammled state of Greek man—and probably as well over the Greek ideal of the morally free personality, of which we find the first mention in Aristotle. Foreign to him is every mode of thought which presupposes a radical dualism in the structure of man and Nature, and therefore he does not subscribe to the doctrine of the soul as found in Plato and Aristotle. Nor was it his doctrine that the contemplative attitude of the philosopher, the viewing of the highest Good, is more valuable than an active existence. In the daring and incessant drive of modern activism he saw the destiny of man magnificently realized. Only in creation and action does the son of earth attest his kinship with the creative spirit which has produced and is moving the universe. And only in this way does man call into existence that which lies within him as possibility and destiny, in him as the being which is part of both worlds. That which among the works of man has greatness and duration is a synthesis of Nature and Supernature.

At the peak of the epoch in which modern, secular civilization flowered for the last time, Goethe erected a portrait of man in which the classical ideal unites with the picture of man created in the Christian era. The moral *Humanität* which is founded on the autonomy of

⁴⁸ Jakob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte* (Zweite Auflage; Berlin und Stuttgart, 1898), p. 389.

the conscience enters into a marriage with the spirit of Homeric antiquity, which showed man as still enjoying his original oneness with Nature. Certainly, in this respect, Goethe completes a long development. Here too the streams of great traditions, coming from many sides, find a confluence in his work. But the originality and grandeur of Goethe's anthropological thinking stands out strongly when one considers what views of the essence and destiny of man are thereby outdone or overshadowed. Goethe's view is irreconcilable with the decided dualism of all ascetic trends in Christianity as in other religious and moral codes, with the spiritual devaluation of the physical and the natural generally, with the rational simplifications of life, as well as with every kind of moral rigorism—and in general with all theories and interpretations in which the "Above" is separated from, and is exalted and sanctified at the cost of, the "Below." It is obvious, too, that every materialistic world view, and every sensualistic ethics, is thereby rejected. Furthermore, for Goethe the body is not the prison of the soul, from which it must be freed, and the mind is no unappeasable antagonist of Nature—just as little as the infinite and the finite, essence and phenomenon, conflict in the organization of the Cosmos. Here too (as we have said) the idea of polarity forms the foundation. The two natures of man always exist together and only function together. Only in common do they make up the organization of man and his life. Who would distinguish between the two poles, in a contrast of this kind, declare one to be more important than the other, or part one from the other?

But that which forms a whole in the organization of Nature drifts again and again, in the reality of existence, into an insecure, vacillating, mutual relationship. Man does not have, like the animal, a fixed place in the great order of the world. "The first freedman of creation," as Herder calls him, has freedom along with reason, but with freedom he has received the necessity of choosing and evaluating. Hither and thither the mind drives him, toward Nature or the opposite, toward earth or heaven. He is the only one among all creatures who can abandon his physical existence at will; indeed, he can even break the laws of his being and destroy his moral personality (one will recall what happens to Ottilie in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*). But the synthesis of Above and Below, the totality of world and super-world, is

the highest possibility for man, and it is the highest mission of the individual to realize this totality.

If he thinks aright forever
He's forever fair and great.⁴⁹

Can the thinking "aright" which is mentioned here refer to anything other than the harmony of Nature and Supernature in us? "To move these two worlds toward each other, to manifest their several properties in the transient phenomena of life, this is the highest form to which man has the duty of developing himself."⁵⁰

Aesthetics

The beautiful is a manifestation of secret laws of Nature, which without such visible evidence would have remained forever hidden from us.¹

The most faithful imitation of Nature is not enough to produce a work of art, but in a work of art almost all Nature can have faded away and it can still deserve praise.²

True poesy proclaims itself in this way, that by inner gaiety, by outward cheerfulness, it can contrive, as a secular gospel, to free us from the earthly burdens which oppress us.³

THAT MAN CAN PRODUCE WORKS OF ART AND POETRY
IS ONE OF THE CAPABILITIES THAT DISTINGUISH HIM.
AMONG ALL HIS CREATIONS, THOSE OF ART ARE THE
most valid testimony to the fact that he is impelled by the yearning

⁴⁹ Denkt er ewig sich ins Rechte, / Ist er ewig schön und gross. (JA 2:127.)

⁵⁰ Diese beiden Welten gegen einander zu bewegen, ihre beiderseitigen Eigenschaften in der vorübergehenden Lebenserscheinung zu manifestieren, das ist die höchste Gestalt, wozu sich der Mensch auszubilden hat. (JA 20:209.)

¹ Das Schöne ist eine Manifestation geheimer Naturgesetze, die uns ohne dessen Erscheinung ewig wären verborgen geblieben. (JA 35:305.)

² Durch die treueste Nachahmung der Natur entsteht noch kein Kunstwerk, aber in einem Kunstwerk kann fast alle Natur erloschen sein, und es kann noch immer Lob verdienen. (JA 33:232.)

³ Die wahre Poesie kündigt sich dadurch an, dass sie, als ein weltliches Evangelium, durch innere Heiterkeit, durch äusseres Behagen uns von den irdischen Lasten zu befreien weiss, die auf uns drücken. (JA 24:161.)

for perfection, and that by means of his works he is really able to approach the perfect. (See what was said on this point in the chapter on "Man.") The talent for poetry is "a gift of the world and of peoples"; it did not originate in the process of civilization and is anything but a product of learned training. This important insight had first been conveyed to Goethe by J. G. Hamann and Herder. In every human being dwells a feeling for art. But the productive gift is especially prominent in certain individuals, whom we call artists or poets. And both exist in barbarous ages as well as in the flowering periods of civilization. "For there is properly only *one* poesy, the genuine one, and it belongs neither to the folk nor to the aristocracy, neither to the king nor the peasant; he who feels himself to be a true human being will practice it; it emerges irresistibly amid a simple, even a crude people, but it is also not denied to cultured, even highly cultured, nations."⁴

From the point of view of the poet, artistic productions are "involuntary confessions" of his inner life. But the true poet utters, together with that personal confession, something universal which concerns all men. One who only manages to express his particular, subjective sensations has not yet attained to the plane of art. "But so soon as he knows how to appropriate and express the world, he is a poet."⁵ This is what Rainer Maria Rilke means when he says that verses are not feelings, as people think; they are experiences. Only objective poetry can hope to communicate the truth of things. True works of art originate out of the immediate contemplation of the actual; they reveal the reality of things, life, the world, as the artist becomes aware of them in beholding, feeling, thinking them. In *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe quotes with approval something that J. H. Merck had said about the poems of his youth: it had been Goethe's instinctive endeavor "to give a poetic form to reality," whereas the others only sought to make a reality of "the so-called poetic," the imaginative; but this only resulted in stupid stuff. The so-called creating-from-within-oneself, remarks Goethe, usually produces only false originals or mannerists. "Reality must give the in-

⁴ Denn eigentlich gibt es nur *eine* Dichtung, die echte, sie gehört weder dem Volke noch dem Adel, weder dem König noch dem Bauer; wer sich als wahrer Mensch fühlt, wird sie ausüben; sie tritt unter einem einfachen, ja rohen Volke unwiderstehlich hervor, ist aber auch gebildeten, ja hochgebildeten Nationen nicht versagt. (JA 38:55.)

⁵ Aber sobald er die Welt sich anzueignen und auszusprechen weiss, ist er ein Poet. (Conversation with Eckermann, January 29, 1826.)

ducement and the substance too . . . I think nothing of poems snatched out of the air.”⁶ But we are not to understand that the poet receives everything from without. We can only see what we know, Goethe frequently said. In the poet lives the intimation, the intuitive knowledge of that which he encounters as reality in the external world. Indeed, one may say that “the elements of the visible world” lie in him, and that this hidden aptitude is developed gradually by means of encounters with reality. “Had I not already carried the world within me by way of anticipation, I should have remained blind with seeing eyes.”⁷

If it is correct that the artist must live in the world, because his talent can only unfold in constant intercourse with the world, the converse is also true: that he must be alone with his spirit, unhindered and unconfused, if his work is to succeed. “One sometimes persuades oneself that the most excellent works of this kind were produced by lonely men.”⁸ But Goethe decides that this is only self-deception. Only in intercourse and in competition with the great works of the past, and only by imagining an audience that is able to understand him, can the artist create anything. “Solitude amid an animated, full, cultural circle,” that is the best situation for him.⁹

That in art there is much more that can be taught and transmitted than is customarily believed—this is an insight which Goethe acquires in Italy. In Rome, in association with painters, he comes to understand how important are the “tricks of the trade” in the plastic arts. For poetry he never made such a claim. But of poetry, as of all art, it is also true that only the capacity for it is inborn, and the rest must be achieved by training. In poetry, too, there are strict demands and definite laws of form. It is precisely the genius, Goethe remarks, who is the first to comprehend this, and who is willing to respect the laws. But he knows too that the “discretion” (*Besonnenheit*) of the poet, and in general every skill practiced with delibera-

⁶ Die Wirklichkeit muss die Veranlassung und den Stoff dazu hergeben . . . Von Gedichten, aus der Luft gegriffen, halte ich nichts. (Conversation with Eckermann, September 18, 1823.)

⁷ Hatte ich nicht die Welt durch Antizipation bereits in mir getragen, ich wäre mit sehenden Augen blind geblieben. (Conversation with Eckermann, February 26, 1824.)

⁸ Man überredet sich manchmal, als seien die trefflichsten Werke dieser Art von einsamen Menschen hervorgebracht worden. (JA 25:233.)

⁹ Einsamkeit in einem lebendigen reichen Kunstkreise. (Letter to W. von Humboldt, October 28, 1799.)

tion, can only involve the form. "The world gives him [the artist] his substance only too generously, but the content arises voluntarily from the abundance of his soul; the two meet each other unconsciously, and in the end one does not know to whom all the wealth really belongs."¹⁰

"The world gives the artist his substance only too generously": i.e., not everything which streams toward him can he master and form, and not the whole of reality can be made the subject of artistic representation. At the time when Goethe developed his classical aesthetics and published it in the periodical *Die Propyläen*, in order that the German artists should be led into the right road, that of an emulation of the Greeks—at this time he emphasized again and again the point that everything depends on the *Sujet*, on the object which the artist or poet chooses, but that "subjects for true works of art are found less frequently than people think."¹¹ The Greeks knew this and therefore moved constantly within a limited group of subjects. Those subjects which "contain a certain ideality" are the right ones for art. (See the chapter on "Principles of Classic Art," in *Goethe the Poet*.) Such a doctrine is found in every classical theory of art; whereas naturalistic schools contend that all of reality can and indeed should be the object of artistic presentation. At times Goethe also expressed himself in a way which seems to classify him rather with the school of the realists. Thus he writes in 1797 that in art the principal factor is the treatment, and hence artists can choose as *Sujet* any object drawn from experience. But he adds immediately that some subjects are more convenient to treat and more easily to be "overcome" by art than others. At another time he admits that the productivity of the poet must show itself precisely in the fact that he understands how to present an interesting phase of an ordinary subject (conversation with Eckermann, September 18, 1823). But this is only intended to mean (as Goethe sets forth in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*) that a masterful talent "can make everything out of anything and tame the most refractory matter." What results, to be sure, is more artifice than art. "The dignity of the subject," he remarks, is after all "the begin-

¹⁰ Den Stoff gibt ihm die Welt nur allzu freigebig, der Gehalt entspringt freiwillig aus der Fülle seines Innern; bewusstlos begegnen beide einander, und zuletzt weiss man nicht, wem eigentlich der Reichtum angehört. (JA 5:212.)

¹¹ . . . die Gegenstände zu wahren Kunstwerken seltner gefunden werden, als man denkt. (JA 29:5.)

ning and the end of art." There are subjects which offer themselves to the artist, and others which resist presentation. In old age, too, Goethe clung to and expressed this doctrine. "All talent is squandered if the subject is worth nothing."¹² "The most careful treatment will not save an unfortunate subject matter."¹³ A well-chosen subject, on the other hand, gives the opportunity of heightening the form, and in general of transforming reality more purely into what we call art.

All these reflections, however, as to choice of matter, technique, and form, i.e., as to the share which "deliberation" (*Besonnenheit*) has in artistic production, do not signify that Goethe assigns to consciousness the chief role in the process of creation. Unconsciously, he says, matter and content meet each other in the soul of the poet. The process of creating is shrouded in night; uninvited and uncontrollable is the formation of the decisive inspiration, and often of the entire work. In the first place, everything depends on the conception, and this is inspiration, a flash of thought, nothing else. It shares the nature of all good ideas: they are like "free children of God," who suddenly "stand before us and cry out: here we are!" (conversation with Eckermann, February 24, 1824). Goethe observed often enough in himself how much of "somniaambulism" there is in artistic creation; he reported repeatedly that single poems of his had presented themselves unexpectedly, rounded out and complete, and that he only had to write them down rapidly. In his autobiography he tells how in the years of youthfully luxuriant fertility ideas for poems came to him "involuntarily, indeed against his will," at times upon awaking at night, and how he would have to run quickly to his desk, lest the spiritual complex should dissolve before he had held it fast. Sometimes, he says, it happened that he "did not take the time to straighten out a sheet lying obliquely, but wrote down the poem from beginning to end, without stirring from the spot, on the bias."¹⁴ To Eckermann he also spoke of such miraculous births. "I had absolutely no previous impressions or intimations of them, but they suddenly came upon

¹² Alles Talent ist verschwendet, wenn der Gegenstand nichts taugt. (Conversation with Eckermann, November 3, 1823.)

¹³ Die sorgfältigste Behandlung rettet nicht einen unglücklichen Stoff. (Letter to C. G. D. Nees von Esenbeck, December 17, 1824.)

¹⁴ . . . nicht die Zeit nahm, einen quer liegenden Bogen zurecht zu rücken, sondern das Gedicht von Anfang bis zu Ende, ohne mich von der Stelle zu rühren, in der Diagonale herunterschrieb. (JA 25:10.)

me and wanted to be done instantaneously, so that I felt myself impelled to write them down on the spot as by instinct and in a dream.”¹⁶ And to Boisserée he confessed that it was a misfortune if ever he could not hold fast immediately such a gift of the moment. “As soon as he would have to stop to think, it would not turn out well. Nor did he often alter anything.”¹⁶

But in such cases the impressions which wanted to transform themselves into a poem, as Goethe himself says, had probably been quietly at work in him for a long time. In one special case, that of the poem *Um Mitternacht* (“At Midnight”), he repeatedly referred to its miraculous origination and said that that made it especially dear to him. And actually the spontaneity in this case is very striking, as it is an especially beautiful, artistically formed poem. “Let me confess that I, returning at the stroke of midnight under the brightest full moon from the company of good, moderately animated, wittily spirited friends, wrote down the poem impromptu, without having had the slightest previous suggestion of it in mind.”¹⁷ The ultimate truth is, he remarks, that everything the genius does as genius takes place unconsciously. Whatever is done deliberately in connection with it is only a side issue. He adds that even the genius could only “raise itself gradually by means of reflection and achievement” to the production of model works and to mastery (letter to Schiller, April 3, 1801), and says that of poetic works this is generally true: “the more incommensurable and the more incomprehensible to the understanding . . . the better.”¹⁸ That this was no dogma for Goethe is shown by another statement which gives to the irrational and to deliberation in poems a more carefully weighed share: “Everything lyrical must be as a whole very rational, in detail a little irrational.”¹⁹ Artistic pro-

¹⁶ Ich hatte davon vorher durchaus keine Eindrücke und keine Ahnung, sondern sie kamen plötzlich über mich und wollten augenblicklich gemacht sein, so dass ich sie auf der Stelle instinktmässig und traumartig nieder zu schreiben mich getrieben fühlte. (Conversation with Eckermann, March 14, 1830.)

¹⁶ Sobald er sich besinnen müsste, würde es nicht wieder gut. Auch ändere er selten etwas. (Biedermann II, 322.)

¹⁷ Man lasse mich bekennen, dass ich, mit dem Schlag Mitternacht, im hellsten Vollmond aus guter, mässig-aufgeregter, geistreich-anmutiger Gesellschaft zurückkehrend, das Gedicht aus dem Stegreif niederschrieb, ohne auch nur früher eine Ahnung davon gehabt zu haben. (JA 37:222.)

¹⁸ . . . je inkommensurabler und für den Verstand unfasslicher . . . desto besser. (Conversation with Eckermann, May 6, 1827.)

¹⁹ Alles Lyrische muss im Ganzen sehr vernünftig, im Einzelnen ein bisschen unvernünftig sein. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 130.)

ductivity resembles our life generally: it is rooted in the unconscious. But a root is not yet a plant. However it may have originated, ultimately the work of art does not spring from a single region, but from the totality of the inner man. And it is moreover directed to the whole man.

Man is not only a thinking but also a feeling being. He is a whole, a union of manifold, intimately connected forces; and to this totality of man the work of art must speak, as it must correspond to this abundant unity, this unified diversity in him.²⁰

The everlasting lie about the linking of Nature and art misleads everybody.²¹

On no aesthetic problem did Goethe ponder so much, about none did he speak so much, as on that of the mutual relation of Nature and art. How could it have been otherwise? The great poet was at the same time passionately devoted to the exploration of Nature; yet his way of viewing the organization of Nature was that of the artist. In her he saw a spirit at work to which the creative power in him felt itself closely akin.

There are still other statements which sound as if Goethe were denying any connection between art and Nature. Thus: art is called art precisely because it is *not* Nature. Or: Nature is separated from art by a vast gulf. "Art: another Nature, mysterious too, but more understandable; for it springs from the understanding."²² On one occasion in conversation he even says provocatively that Nature is a goose and that it is man who must make something of her (conversation with Chancellor von Müller, April 25, 1819). If in these utterances the independence of art is asserted, others form a transition to the question as to the kind of relation art has to Nature, if indeed it is not allowable to speak of independence. First of all the problem of the fundamental distinction between Nature and art. It is generally held that art is a work of man for man, whereas man finds Nature

²⁰ Der Mensch ist nicht bloss ein denkendes, er ist zugleich ein empfindendes Wesen. Er ist ein Ganzes, eine Einheit vielfacher, innig verbundener Kräfte; und zu diesem Ganzen des Menschen muss das Kunstwerk reden, es muss dieser reichen Einheit, dieser einigen Mannigfaltigkeit in ihm entsprechen. (JA 33:175.)

²¹ Die ewige Lüge von Verbindung der Natur und Kunst macht alle Menschen irre. (Letter to J. H. Meyer, May 20, 1796.)

²² Kunst: eine andere Natur, auch geheimnisvoll, aber verständlicher; denn sie entspringt aus dem Verstande. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 1105.)

already existing and cannot conceive of her as instituted for his use or pleasure. Without respect to him, Nature does her work for her own sake. Her goal is always to produce new life and existence, and then to preserve and keep on reproducing her creatures. She does not concern herself as to whether her creatures are beautiful or ugly. The products of art are of another kind. The artist brings forth something which to be sure possesses only illusory reality (not the actual reality of life), but which by compensation has spiritual significance, an ideal value.

Art does not undertake to vie with Nature in her breadth and depth, it clings to the surface of natural phenomena; but it has its own depth, its own power; it holds fast the highest moments of these superficial phenomena by recognizing that which responds to law in them, the perfection of efficient proportion, the acme of beauty, the dignity of significance, the height of passion.²³

These sentences are found in Goethe's comments on Diderot's *Essai sur la peinture*. They contain in a nutshell his theory of art and its relation to Nature. In order to be understood, art uses in its productions the familiar phenomena of reality, but as symbols, as signs with which it expresses its own intentions. For his means therefore the artist is dependent upon Nature; and yet at the same time he is her master. Ultimately everything we perceive with our senses is only raw material for us; it is we who make out of it something which has sense and significance, and in this way we make reality become understandable to ourselves. There is no passive awareness, but every experience is produced by us. This is particularly true of the artist. "No portrait can be worth anything except as the painter, in the most proper sense of the word, creates it."²⁴ The artist takes from Nature and adds to Nature. Before he can represent an object in Nature, he must first have produced it anew within himself. "Indeed, one can say that the artist creates it in this moment."²⁵ He may not

²³ Die Kunst übernimmt nicht, mit der Natur in ihrer Breite und Tiefe zu wetteifern, sie hält sich an die Oberfläche der natürlichen Erscheinungen; aber sie hat ihre eigne Tiefe, ihre eigne Gewalt; sie fixiert die höchsten Momente dieser oberflächlichen Erscheinungen, indem sie das Gesetzliche darin anerkennt, die Vollkommenheit der zweckmässigen Proportion, den Gipfel der Schönheit, die Würde der Bedeutung, die Höhe der Leidenschaft. (JA 33: 214.)

²⁴ Kein Portrait kann etwas taugen, als wenn es der Maler im eigentlichsten Sinne erschafft. (JA 33:180.)

²⁵ Ja man kann sagen: dass der Künstler ihn in diesem Augenblick erschaffe. (JA 33:112.)

imitate what he conceives by means of his senses, but must represent that which is evoked in him by the sense impression; but in such a way that he presents it as an aspect of the perceived object. In competition with Nature he must bring forth "something spiritually organic," a form made by his mind, "and give to his work of art such a shape, such a form, as makes it appear at once natural and supernatural."²⁶ But no product of Nature is seen like that. It holds true of the perfect work of art that it is "above Nature, by comprising in *one* the scattered objects, whereby even the commonest ones are grasped in their significance and dignity."²⁷ The truth of art is wholly different from the reality of Nature. The conscientiousness of the artist must be directed not to Nature but to art. And only in this sense is a work of art at the same time a work of Nature: ultimately it too derives from the spirit which is operative in Nature.

Another thesis of the classical theory of art reads that Nature, as we perceive her, cannot be imitated at all. "She contains so much that is unimportant and unworthy, and so one must select; but what determines the selection? One must seek out the significant; but what is significant?"²⁸ The answer is that that is significant which appears so to a significant artist. The Greeks, says Goethe, did not copy a complete actuality of Nature, but "with personal grandeur turned their attention to Nature" (conversation with Eckermann, October 20, 1828). Only a mind capable of great contemplation and creation can heighten to perfection the impurely realized intentions in real Nature. The view that the phenomena of Nature are not all beautiful or significant for us, and that even in her "greatest phenomena" Nature does not equal her working idea, gives to art a superior position. "I know quite well that Nature often displays an unattainable charm; but I am by no means of the opinion that she is beautiful in all her manifestations. Her intentions indeed are always good, but not the conditions which are necessary to make these intentions in all cases realized to perfection." The "entirety" of the work of art, whereby the artist wishes to speak to his fellow men, he does

²⁶ . . . und seinem Kunstwerk einen solchen Gehalt, eine solche Form geben, wodurch es natürlich zugleich und übernatürlich erscheint. (JA 33:108.)

²⁷ . . . über die Natur . . . indem es die zerstreuten Gegenstände in Eins gefasst und selbst die gemeinsten in ihrer Bedeutung und Würde aufgenommen werden. (JA 33:90.)

²⁸ Sie enthält so vieles Unbedeutende, Unwürdige, man muss also wählen; was bestimmt aber die Wahl? man muss das Bedeutende aufsuchen; was ist aber bedeutend? (JA 23:58.)

not find in Nature. "It is the fruit of his own spirit, or, if you will, the reception of a fertilizing divine breath."²⁹

The significance of Goethe's ideas as to the relation of art and Nature stands out more clearly when one looks back at the traditional formulations of this problem. It was the chief problem of aesthetics from the earliest beginnings of aesthetic speculation. The Greeks thought they had determined in general the essence of artistic production by setting up the doctrine that art is imitation; in the opinion of Aristotle, art originates in the impulse, peculiar to all men, to imitate that which pleases. But the formula of Aristotle, which has played an eminent role throughout all the ages in the art theory of the Occident, does not say that the artist must copy natural objects and processes outright. It is only since the Renaissance that man has always thought of the imitation of Nature in speaking of the relation of the arts to reality. But as to the make-up of Nature herself the changing ages had changing views. For Boileau, for example, Nature was essentially rational; and so he could equate the perfection of art, when it seeks to imitate Nature, with intellectual perfection, i.e., with truth. Aristotle, as he compared the poet and the historian, had found that poetry is more philosophic than history, because it represents rather the universal and typical. This limited the principle of imitation. For in this case we are clearly speaking of selection, of the omission of unimportant details, and in general of alterations whereby that is attained which is called style. In the eighteenth century men had decided that only beautiful Nature might be imitated; in artistic practice it came down to this, that the artist no longer produced anything but cleansed and elevated pictures of life, and that in so doing he was guided by the fashionable taste of contemporaneous society.

Of Charles Batteux, the author of *Les Beaux-Arts réduits à un même principe* (1746), Goethe says contemptuously that he is the "apostle of the half-true gospel of the imitation of Nature which is so welcome to all who merely trust their senses and are not conscious of what lies behind" (JA 34:157). But this was not really correct. Like his predecessors, the doctrinaires of French classicism, Batteux

²⁹ Ich weiss wohl, dass die Natur oft einen unerreichbaren Zauber entfaltet; allein ich bin keineswegs der Meinung, dass sie in allen ihren Ausserungen schon sei. Ihre Intentionen sind zwar immer gut, allein die Bedingungen sind es nicht, die dazu gehören, sie stets vollkommen zur Erscheinung gelangen zu lassen . . . Es ist die Frucht seines eigenen Geistes, oder, wenn Sie wollen, des Anwehens eines befruchtenden göttlichen Odems. (Conversation with Eckermann, April 18, 1827.)

was not thinking of a naturalistic reproduction of actual phenomena. His theory was a reflection of the artistic practice of his age. In French art and literature of the eighteenth century man appears as the being which stands above Nature by virtue of his reason. How seriously it was thought that reality must be changed, and wild Nature made "beautiful," is shown clearly enough by the French park of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Only the more realistic feeling the English had for Nature, and then Rousseau's radical critique of rationalized civilization, began to diminish the distance between Nature and man.

The statement that art is an imitation of Nature took on shifting meanings in the progress of time. It served to substantiate the most diverse attitudes toward reality and to justify the most varied styles in art. It was a frame in which the main concepts, Nature and imitation, could be altered at will. Things had gone on in this way until the middle of the eighteenth century. It was the anti-intellectualistic movement which dethroned the old theorem. If the ability which made the artist, his genius, was active in a primal way, then the concept of imitation lost its sense and its justification. He who has within himself the ability to create independently like Nature, he who is spirit of her spirit, does not need to imitate her. Artistic production was now no longer a copying of visible phenomena; it was a process of bringing forth, as independent and autonomous as that of Nature herself—an analogue, but no copy of her.

The other cause for the elimination of the old doctrine was the discovery that art is not only the representation of actual forms and phenomena, as the mimesis theory of Aristotle and his disciples assumed, but has in addition a function of different type, namely that of expressing the formless world of the inner life. Young Goethe confesses to Herder how important it was for him to comprehend that in lyric poetry the word is the medium of expression, that it is the personal idea, the personal feeling, which forms the expression. In that case, what sense can there be in talking of an imitation of Nature? In every single instance the point was to produce something new and spontaneous.

Goethe describes the style of Leonardo da Vinci as shown by the celebrated "Last Supper" in Milan. Nature, he says, works "from within outward" (*JA* 35:34), drawing on her productive force as

directed by an "idea." Only after countless attempts did she succeed in outdoing herself to the utmost so as to produce the figure of man. This figure reveals in the visible beauty of its structure "the highest inward perfections." For beauty of appearance can only be the actualization of a perfect idea. But now we are told that this revelation does not solve the riddle. There is need of the artist to recognize the secret of Nature, her "inner being," which she herself does not betray, and to make it visible by means of art. "To represent the inner in the external was the highest and sole desire of the greatest masters; they strove not only to reproduce in striking veracity the concept of the object; the reproduction was to take the place of Nature herself, indeed to excel her in respect to outward appearance."⁸⁰

This means that the arts are a kind of intellectual supplement to Nature. They speak of the invisible inner being of Nature and seek to make it understandable. "Poetry points to the secrets of Nature and tries to unveil them by means of pictures."⁸¹ The work of art is a product of the form-creating mind and at the same time, if it can raise itself to the representation of the highest beauty, a revelation of the divine power which operates in Nature and gives every creature a shape. In its highest achievements, art even succeeds in excelling Nature. The form-shaping process of Nature is subject to fixed laws; but the beauty of art is a product of the human mind, which can freely follow its highest inspirations and produce a beauty of ideal perfection. The great artist does not confine himself to reproducing the object faithfully, as it presents itself to his senses and his intellect; it cannot satisfy him merely to stammer Nature's letters after her. He wishes to create a form which has indeed the truth and necessity of a natural object but has at the same time a higher perfection. Thus Nature is outdone by means of a heightening of her own creative process. In Italy Goethe discovered the secret of Greek art. The Greeks, he remarked, created their art works by obeying the laws which are operative in the origination of natural organisms. Oneness, definiteness, a rounded whole—these are the qualities of the living organism,

⁸⁰ Das Innere nun im Äussern gewissenhaft darzustellen, war nur der grössten Meister höchster und einziger Wunsch; sie trachteten nicht nur, den Begriff des Gegenstandes treffend wahr nachzubilden, sondern die Abbildung sollte sich an die Stelle der Natur selbst setzen, ja in Absicht auf Erscheinung sie überbieten. (JA 35:35.)

⁸¹ Poesie deutet auf die Geheimnisse der Natur und sucht sie durchs Bild zu lösen. (JA 39:114.)

as also of Greek works of art. The artist, we read in the introduction to the *Propyläen*, can only vie with Nature if he learns "at least to some degree" from her "how she proceeds in the making of her works" (JA 33:110). Goethe says it holds true of both art and Nature that shaping is their "highest and only operation" (letter to Zelter, October 30, 1808). However, the shape which the artist creates should not be an imitation of the reality of Nature, but should have ideal truth. It completes in this way the intentions, as it were, which seek realization in the processes of Nature.

The highest kind of representation to which the artist attains is called "style" by Goethe. The possession of style differentiates a work of art formally from the phenomena of Nature. The capacity for style is based "upon the deepest foundations of cognition, on the essence of things, in so far as it is allowed us to recognize this in visible and tangible shapes."⁸² But Goethe has no use for inventions and intentions which have no relation to reality. Mastery will be attained only by the artist who studies the phenomena of Nature closely and with devotion. He should surrender himself to objects, not force his prejudices and conceits upon things and "merely see himself in things." Everything depends upon unaffected contemplation. Just as he himself could comprehend nothing without "immediate contemplation," and could complete an artistic shaping only in "constant converse with things," so Goethe always emphasized the idea that only from the union of imagination and object, of forming productivity and penetrating observation, could a work of art originate which is able to give a true picture of the hidden essence of being. The true artist grasps nature in immediate contemplation; his thought "glides along the phenomenon" and penetrates it with his individuality. He takes from Nature and he adds to it. But the observation of detail (which Goethe says was never his forte) may never be the goal. What counts is to advance through the individual phenomena to the idea, whose symbolic representation is the ultimate objective. "The spirit is more rapidly elevated to the universal when one views objects more closely and sharply."⁸⁸ The artist, like the student of Nature, must develop

⁸² . . . auf den tiefsten Grundfesten der Erkenntnis, auf dem Wesen der Dinge, insofern uns erlaubt ist, es in sichtbaren und greiflichen Gestalten zu erkennen. (JA 33:57.)

⁸⁸ Das Gemüt wird schneller zum allgemeinen erhoben, wenn man die Gegenstände genauer und scharfer betrachtet. (Letter to Charlotte von Stein, February 7, 1787.)

an exact kind of imagination, "an imagination of the truth of the actual," as Goethe puts it (conversation with Eckermann, December 25, 1825). For the spirit of the actual is the true ideal thing, and only in a sensory manifestation can we grasp it. Goethe was wont, as he puts it, "to make as poet the expression derive from the object."³⁴

It need not be stressed that what is meant here is not a subordination of the artist to reality. In the synthesis of man and reality, mind and object, man always remains the active, dominant partner. His creative force presses forward into the inner sphere and appropriates to itself the idea which is to be grasped there. "It is a revelation, developing from the inner in touch with the outer, which gives man a premonition of his likeness to God."³⁵ Goethe regarded naturalism in art as a primitive preamble or an aberration. "The Muses' lie is fairer truth," said Herder. True art does have an actual foundation, but art itself is not realistic, rather ideal as to both origin and direction. "Art has an idealistic origin; one can say that it originates from and along with religion."³⁶ Goethe never wearies of emphasizing, over and over, the superiority of art to Nature. To be sure the poetic, like everything that is artistic, rests upon the actual; but only in such a way that it is poetry which first gives significance to the actual. In Goethe's aesthetic views art is not treated as an isolated phenomenon, nor as a theoretical problem which one can settle by means of philosophic speculation.

Just as little is art for him, in the reality of life, something which exists by itself or for its own sake (even so, beauty is a primal value). The importance which art has for civilization and society is never lost to Goethe's sight in any of his aesthetic reflections. Here too he sees the single thing in connection with the whole of life. Art only gets its rank by means of that which it accomplishes for man. It has to prove its value by collaborating in the great and never-ending task of preserving and increasing the force of life, of heightening the purity of feeling and will-ing, and of promoting the humanization of man. Art is not only play and pastime. It leads man to the depth

³⁴ . . . als Poet den Ausdruck am Gegenstand zu machen. (WA II.13.40.)

³⁵ Es ist eine aus dem Innern am Äußern sich entwickelnde Offenbarung, die den Menschen seine Gottähnlichkeit vorahnen lässt. (JA 19:70.)

³⁶ Die Kunst hat einen idealischen Ursprung, man kann sagen, sie sei aus und mit Religion entsprungen. (WA I:48:135.)

and abundance of life. It makes the heavy lighter for him, the turbid clearer. But the highest gift it has (as Nietzsche says) is "its completion of existence, its bringing forth of perfection and abundance." In his art works, even in the gloomy, tragic ones, man affirms and glorifies existence. There is no pessimistic art, remarks Nietzsche. This is true in the sense that art, even where it expresses the suffering and despair caused by life, or represents the dark side (*Nachtseite*) of existence, still contrives to make, from the gloomiest substance, works of beauty.

Goethe too says that art should lead to the affirmation of life and strengthen man's faith in himself. Parodies and travesties he could not endure. This "filthy brood," he remarks, wants to belittle the beautiful and the great in order to destroy it (letter to Zelter, June 26, 1825). Of the satirists he said that he who could make wine should not make vinegar (Biedermann, II:53). And concerning the ugly as the object of art, "the divine art which knows how to ennoble and exalt everything" (letter to F. K. L. Sickler, April 28, 1812) should not shrink from this task, either. But art can only become master of the ugly by treating it humorously. Presentations, on the other hand, which were in any way negations of life, such as gloomy landscapes and pictures of churchyards, Goethe would not allow to be valid. "The highest task of any art is to give by means of illusion the make-believe of a higher reality."³⁷ To make visible the productive idea in reality, and thus to give us the feeling of our higher destiny, this is what art attempts to do in its supreme utterances.

Such a view of the essence and the task of art arises from the conviction that God and existence are one, and that they relate to one another as inside and outside, but in such a way that the one can never exist without the other.

Seeming, what is it, when it lacks a being?

Being, what were it, did it ne'er appear?³⁸

That is, in its basic character, a symbolic world view. Primal concepts like the true, the divine, we cannot recognize directly; just as we

³⁷ Die höchste Aufgabe einer jeden Kunst ist, durch den Schein die Täuschung einer höheren Wirklichkeit zu geben. (JA 24:49.)

³⁸ Der Schein, was ist er, dem das Wesen fehlt? / Das Wesen, wär' es, wenn es nicht erschiene? (*Die natürliche Tochter*, verse 1066.)

cannot perceive light itself, but only the things illuminated by it. Only in the example, in the symbol of single phenomena, can we perceive the Absolute. Everything that *is* becomes in this way representative of the super-real (see the remarks on this matter in the chapter on *Pandora* in *Goethe the Poet*, p. 174). Here we are not talking of conceptual definition; it is in the shape itself that the idea is grasped, if we look with the eyes of the body and the mind at once. This is also the way in which the arts have to proceed. They are not to clothe abstract ideas in pictures, but to make the idea visible in actual forms, the universal in individual phenomena. A single case, if only it is sufficiently "eminent," can become the "representative of many others" (letter to Schiller, August 16, 1797). Goethe's realization that poetic art, and indeed all art, is symbolic in its intentions as in its means is clearly expressed in the statement: "Poetry points to the secrets of Nature and seeks to reveal them by means of pictures."³⁹ That in this case the inner being, the idea, is communicated in a visible manner—it is this wherein the incomparable importance of the arts consists. They alone proclaim "the secrets of Nature" in the same way as the Divine reveals itself to us in Nature. "That is true symbolism, when the particular represents the more general, not as dream and shadow, but as vitally immediate revelation of the unexplorable."⁴⁰ The highest symbol of the organization of Nature is the primal phenomenon, "because it comprehends all cases" (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 1369). It is such a universal validity that the classical poet seeks to attain in his presentation. Every work of art in classical style is symbolic in intent and effect.

Goethe was at pains to clarify the significance of the symbol in art by distinguishing it from allegory more precisely than the art criticism of the eighteenth century was wont to do. First of all he established the fact that the allegorical points directly to the idea which is to be designated, the symbolic indirectly. This distinction seemed to Goethe so important that by means of it he thought himself able to characterize that which had separated himself, artistically speaking, from Schiller.

³⁹ Poesie deutet auf die Geheimnisse der Natur und sucht sie durchs Bild zu lösen. (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, no. 1002.)

⁴⁰ Das ist die wahre Symbolik, wo das Besondere das Allgemeinere repräsentiert, nicht als Traum und Schatten, sondern als lebendig augenblickliche Offenbarung des Unerforschlichen. (JA 38:266.)

Goethe says that where something particular merely serves as an example of the general, the result is allegory; but he goes on to say that whereas in the symbols of poetry something particular is expressed, it is done in such a way that the poet does not point to the universal. Without noticing it one becomes aware of the universal, the idea, if only one takes in the totality which the particular thing represents. Goethe thought that in this statement he had found the correct formula: in the symbol, idea and phenomenon coincide and are grasped as one. But the idea retains something many-sided and mysterious. "The very finest symbols are those which allow a multiple interpretation, while the visible object portrayed always remains the same."⁴¹ The symbol has no meaning that could be abstracted from it; it is "a picture assembled in the mirror of the mind, and yet identical with its object" (WA I:49:142). In the allegory, on the other hand, the meaning is but externally combined with the picture and can be abstracted from it, as in a picture puzzle. The allegory turns a concept into a picture; there is no thought of ambiguity and mystery. Here the individual case, the particular, is viewed in a way which one might even call didactic, as an example of something universal. But this universal idea can be expressed abstractly; just as the allegory, at bottom, appeals not to visual contemplation but to reflection.

Goethe's ideas on art cluster about the concept of the beautiful as about a center. But for Goethe in this case it is not a question of a phenomenon which is restricted to the field of the aesthetic, although beauty certainly designates the ideal of formal perfection. For him it is a cosmic phenomenon, pertaining no less to the realm of Nature than to the sphere of civilization. For man the highest beauty appears in the human figure. "He who perceives it can be blown upon by no evil wind; he feels himself in agreement with himself and with the world."⁴² In the scenes of *Pandora* Goethe sang the song of praise of the human figure (see *Goethe the Poet*, p. 175). To represent it in pure perfection is "the highest purpose of art." By works of art we are brought to the full realization of what beauty is. When art has opened

⁴¹ Dies sind gerade die schönsten Symbole, die eine vielfache Deutung zulassen, indes das dargestellte Bildliche immer dasselbe bleibt. (JA 35:205.)

⁴² Wer sie erblickt, den kann nichts Übles anwehen; er fühlt sich mit sich selbst und mit der Welt in Übereinstimmung. (JA 21:52.)

our eyes, we shall become more than ever aware of the beauty of the living creations of Nature.

Young Goethe had thought it not possible to say what beauty is. It comes toward us, he said, from the works of the great poets and painters as a glorious dream vision, which could not be captured by any concept. A work of art should make the impression of truth and intensify the glow of life in us—in the period of his enthusiasm for Nature this seemed to him the ultimate. "Characteristic art" is the only true art, he writes in his rhapsody on Gothic architecture. The vigorous expression of an original personality, even if it is "harsh," he finds more beautiful than regularity and clarity of form. Then, when Goethe studied Winckelmann's writings in Weimar and came to understand ancient art after the manner of that great man, he became acquainted with an idea of beauty which contrasted sharply with the subjectivistic ideal of the characteristic style. But at the same time, by virtue of its symbolic significance, this idea did away with all stylistic realism as well as with the formalism of traditional art criticism. The physical beauty of ancient statues, to be sure, was understood by Winckelmann too as the expression of inner beauty. Because the Greek had strength of mind and a great but calm soul, he was able to produce works of art which were beautiful in a grand way. But the personal element in the beauty of art is only one element. From the "accidents of individuality" (as Jean Paul said) a formal perfection of so lofty a kind could never have issued. Art, according to Winckelmann's theory, should overshadow by its creations the forms of Nature; it should bring forth a supreme beauty which has the ideality of the absolute norm. There is only one Good, one Truth, and so too only one Beauty. The purity and elevation of this objective perfection can only be attained by the artist if he presents his ideal vision in a way which has the universal validity of the typical. A form which is so perfect that it is withdrawn from any accidental and clouded reality appears (like the "primally beautiful" of Plato's teaching) to be lifted at the same time out of the changefulness of time. It stands there in an atmosphere of divine perfection and timelessness, bearing its measure and its value in itself. "The highest beauty is in God, and the conception of human beauty grows to be perfect in proportion as it can be thought of as appropriate to and in agreement with the highest being" (J. J. Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, chapter iv).

In his speculations on the beautiful in art Goethe started with Winckelmann (see the chapter on "Italy" in *Goethe the Poet*). But he gave Winckelmann's theory a new argumentation. What was explained there after the manner of Platonic philosophy was derived by Goethe from the symbolic conception of reality. This conception came to clarity and strength in him by way of his Nature studies just at the time when his classical theory of art was taking shape. In the essay of Karl Philipp Moritz, *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen* ("On the Imitation of the Beautiful in Art"; 1788), which had originated in discussions with Goethe, we read, "Every beautiful totality from the hand of the formative artist is on a small scale a counterpart of the highest beauty in the great totality of Nature." The beauty of the art works produced by man is a symbolic representation of the world of form, of which we can probably have an ideal conception, but no sensory view. This idea was developed further by Goethe when he came to know the way in which Nature brings forth her shapes. He understood then that the beautiful was a primal phenomenon that manifests itself everywhere in Nature as in the sphere of man, but without ever appearing directly. For that reason the artist may not imitate the external appearance of things; he must go back to the spiritual force that guides Nature in her actions.

What is beauty? Everyone feels its effects; but can its essence be defined? Kant said there was no objective concept of beauty. When Winckelmann and his disciples spoke of beauty, they thought that it was identical with the oneness of the structure, with the coherence of the parts in one totality. Goethe gives concrete visibility to this abstract formula by referring to the morphological process of Nature. Beauty, he says, is the phenomenon in which the invisible inner side of Nature, the law-like reason which governs the processes of life, is perfectly revealed. "For beauty there is required a law that manifests itself.—The rose as example. In the flowers the vegetal law reaches its highest manifestation, and so the rose is only the peak of that manifestation."⁴⁸ The beautiful meets us as objective norm, in which we "behold the law-governed phase of life in its greatest ac-

⁴⁸ Zum Schönen wird erfordert ein Gesetz, das in die Erscheinung tritt.—Beispiel von der Rose. In den Blüten tritt das vegetabilische Gesetz in seine höchste Erscheinung, und die Rose wäre nur wieder der Gipfel dieser Erscheinung. (JA 35:325.)

tivity and perfection" (JA 28:185). Goethe refuses to content himself with the contemplative effect. Here too we are summoned to try to vie productively with the Perfect whenever it emerges. From this urge arises artistic production, and this revelation of the normative element in life is its greatest achievement. "He to whom Nature begins to unveil her open secret feels an irresistible longing for her worthiest interpreter, art." "It is not a question of concepts, but of symbolism. Without dissecting or reflecting, we experience in the contemplation of the beautiful work of art the idea of the most perfect form there is: that splendor of the regulated cosmos which is sung by the Archangels in *Faust*. In beauty, there appears to us in immediate sensoriness the divine force which gives form and shape to everything that lives, to the individual as well as to the Whole.

If the beautiful, as it appears in the work of art, is supposed to be a symbol of the Beautiful as a universal phenomenon, then it must have the purity of the absolutely valid, the ideality of the norm. The classical artist seeks to represent perfection, which is a phenomenon of the mean and of calm, of a balanced tension. He must take care not to deviate either downward or upward. Downward: i.e., toward subjectivism of expression and toward stylistic realism. The representation of the actual in its individual make-up and any subjective reaction to the object are both and equally forbidden. Winckelmann had ascertained that a beautiful statue does not represent a definite person, nor express any personal sensation. The beauty of Greek statues, he says, shows a minimum of individuality. Beauty must be like the water which is dipped up at the source; it has almost no specific taste.

This theory was further developed in the aesthetics of the eighteenth century, namely, in debates over the contrary doctrine of "characteristic art." There, the truth of the living moment was the supreme law; force and immediacy of expression were most highly valued. These views, as aforesaid, young Goethe shared with the other poets and doctrinaires of the Storm and Stress movement. The highest thing in art, in the opinion of these young naturalists, was not regularity of form, but the sensory truth with which the individual character of the object was brought to expression. This art did not wish to be symbolic. It wanted to be the mediator of a feeling for the unique,

⁴⁴ Wem die Natur ihr offenbares Geheimnis zu enthüllen anfängt, der empfindet eine unwiderstehliche Sehnsucht nach ihrer würdigsten Auslegerin, der Kunst. (JA 35:306.)

personal life of the object, or it wanted to express the personal sensation immediately.

If one compares the theory of the classic style established by Winckelmann with the concept of characteristic art, it is clearly seen how strong in classical theory was the tendency toward objectivity and idealizing abstraction. At the time when Goethe formulated his own theory of art in the essays which he published in the *Propyläen*, he was induced by the writings of a German critic, Aloys Hirt, to express with greater definiteness the points in which his own concept of beauty in art differed from that of the Winckelmann school. The discussion of "characteristic art," in which Heinrich Meyer, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Schiller likewise took part, cannot be repeated here. For himself Goethe arrived at the result that the Characteristic relates to the Beautiful as the skeleton to the living person. As the bony structure does indeed determine the shape, but is itself not the shape, so it also does not produce the highest phenomenon, which we call Beauty. But Goethe speaks only of the make-up of the object which the artist represents. The representation itself may not only express the personal feeling of the artist or reproduce the individual, specific quality of the object. It is to "lift the object out of its restricted reality and in an ideal world give it measure, bounds, reality, and dignity."⁴⁵ In this process the individuality of the artist becomes important only in so far as he must have thorough knowledge and a "lofty mind," i.e., he must be both sensually and spiritually equal to his subject. Goethe points to the Laocoön group. Its subject is certainly exciting. But the representation of it unites in a harmonious manner calmness and movement, symmetry and diversity, and so the group arouses "an agreeable sensation" and tempers "the storm of sufferings and passion by means of grace and beauty" (*JA* 33:127).

The other danger to the unity and harmony which find representation in the symbol of the beautiful consists in an upward deviation, toward the super-great, the sublime. Ever since the discovery of Longinus' essay by the theorists of French classicism, along with speculation about the beautiful a debate on the idea of the sublime had developed more and more decidedly. In this idea, what finds expression is the self-consciousness of modern man, his will to autonomy,

⁴⁵ . . . aus seiner beschränkten Wirklichkeit herausheben und ihm in einer idealen Welt Mass, Grenze, Realität und Würde geben. (*JA* 33:126.)

and his demand for unlimited freedom. A dream vision of heightened grandeur comes to prominence, the ideal of a demigod who would be a match for fate and could overcome the terrors of death. A will-ing which exceeds the forces of the individual, a cult of the superman, exists only in the modern world, says Goethe. "For all the heroes of ancient poetry *will* only that which is possible for man."⁴⁶

This idealistic heroism was so in keeping with the lofty conception which the European had of the dignity of man, and with his high-tension will, that out of it develops a new aesthetic ideal. The traditional aesthetics was a science of the beautiful. The sublime was introduced by Edmund Burke and Kant as the other "primal and fundamental concept." The structure of Kant's aesthetic system is supported by two main pillars: the idea of the beautiful and the idea of the sublime. Schiller joins him in this. The painful yet grand feeling of the sublime, Schiller says, is called forth by experiences which procure us the consciousness of the "absolute moral capacity," upon which the freedom and the dignity of man is founded. But the way to this summit leads through suffering and death. For only in the irreconcilable conflict between our physical and our moral nature does the "holy" in us manifest itself, the power of free self-determination. When Schiller compares the beautiful and the sublime, one cannot fail to see that his deepest admiration is directed to the capability of man to lift himself above the realm of the law-fulness of Nature into that of the freedom of the will. "The sublime," he says, "procures us an exit from the sensory world, in which the beautiful would fain keep us captive forever."

This was not the way Goethe felt, not the way he spoke. The sublime, he remarked, does indeed lie above the beautiful, at the outer limit of that which our power of comprehension can reach. But he also finds that while the feeling of the sublime is agreeable to great and energetic natures, it is felt "not without a certain apprehension" (JA 40:168). Goethe loves great, calm sensations more than he does intensifications and tensions; he prefers a state of the soul in which the pure feeling "rises up to the brim, without running over" (letter to Charlotte von Stein, October 3, 1779). Beautiful phenomena of

⁴⁶ Denn alle Helden des dichterischen Altertums wollen nur das, was Menschen möglich ist. (JA 37:44.)

Nature, like the rainbow, reveal the sublime "in a gratifying manner." In all cases the great is to him only the highest, purest intensification of the true. The ancient artists never ceased to be natural, and if they were great they were so in what is natural. The Greek poets, too, for all their grandeur, always keep themselves within the bounds of the human power of comprehension. "The sublime embodies itself in the beautiful."⁴⁷ The preference for the sublime under all circumstances, Goethe remarks, is an attribute of youth, both in nations and individuals, an age-level on which one inclines to indefinite, extravagant feelings. "Formless, or shaped in incomprehensible forms" (JA 23:10), it surrounds us with a grandeur to which we feel ourselves unequal. In the twilight and the night, when shapes melt into each other, we are seized by such moods. The poetry of the northland, such as the *Nibelungenlied*, sets before us such colossal pictures, which we cannot assimilate. "He who does not speak clearly to the senses fails likewise to speak clearly to the soul."⁴⁸ But in the light of day, which allows the shapes to step forth in detachment, when a ripe intellectual culture prevails, then the super-greatness disappears, "if it is not fortunate enough to flee to the beautiful and form with it an intimate union, whereby both are made equally immortal and indestructible" (JA 23:11).

By thus including the sublime within the bounds of the beautiful and allowing it validity only as the highest augmentation of the latter, Goethe speaks in favor of the Apollonian ideal of form, as he encountered it in the works of the Greeks. He does not want a sublime style, he wants the grand style, which (as Nietzsche says) arises "when the beautiful triumphs over the monstrous." Goethe understood perfectly that under this new ideal of a superhuman power and a boundless greatness the old dualism, the antagonism of Nature and mind, formed the foundation, and that in this case a superhumanity was glorified, whose emergence does arouse admiration, but at the same time, like the tragic, discomfort as well, and even fear. But the sight of the beautiful figure brings us into harmony with ourselves and the world. Faust, Euphorion—in good as in evil they are impelled by the longing for a greatness which exceeds the measure of

⁴⁷ Das Erhabene verkörpert sich im Schönen. (Letter to S. Boisseree, November 11, 1827.)

⁴⁸ Wer zu den Sinnen nicht klar spricht, redet auch nicht rein zum Gemüt. (JA 33:

the natural and the beautiful. "What lightly falls to me, That I detest." ⁴⁹

In the fact that Goethe recognizes sublime greatness in the sphere of action as well as in that of artistic production, but not as an ideal superordinated to or even equated with the beautiful, he is most clearly distinguished from Schiller, as also from Kant. The position which Goethe takes toward the phenomenon and the aesthetic theory of the sublime shows anew how his reserve regarding the tragic is connected with the innate direction of his mind and with his relation to life. If on one occasion he presented a destiny of unreconciled tragedy, as in the *Wahlverwandtschaften*, he was at pains to keep the great and the heroic within the bounds of the sphere to which the beautiful belongs. Only the second part of *Faust* occupies a special position in this respect in Goethe's work.

If art is symbolic in its essence and meaning, and if the supreme task of the artist is the production of the beautiful, art cannot at the same time have a moral or didactic purpose. It is true that great art and literature affect cultural life as a "secular gospel," but not by direct attempts to instruct. Art gives pictures of life which are interpretations of life. "All poetry should be instructive, but imperceptibly so; it should make man attentive to things in which it would be well for him to get instruction; he must however derive the teaching from it himself, as he does from life." ⁵⁰ A true work of art has no moral purpose; but the effect which it exerts will have moral consequences. For art shows man what he is and what he can be. "It does not approve, and it does not censure, but it develops states of mind and actions in their sequence, and in this way it illuminates and teaches." ⁵¹ (See what was said in the chapter on *Wilhelm Meister's Travels in Goethe the Poet*.) Goethe praised Kant for having taught that we cannot assert of art, any more than of Nature, that it has any objective effectiveness. Like Nature, art is productive. But it produces from the inside out. It creates because

⁴⁹ Das leicht Errungene, / Das widert mir. (*Faust*, verse 9781.)

⁵⁰ Alle Poesie soll belehrend sein, aber unmerklich; sie soll den Menschen aufmerksam machen, wovon sich zu belehren wert ware; er muss die Lehre selbst daraus ziehen wie aus dem Leben. (*JA* 38:71.)

⁵¹ Sie billigt nicht, sie tadelt nicht, sondern sie entwickelt die Gesinnungen und Handlungen in ihrer Folge, und dadurch erleuchtet und belehrt sie. (*JA* 24:172.)

that is its natural procedure, but not because it would fain show itself as useful and intentionally elicit definite effects. "Nature and art are too great to go in quest of purposes."⁵² Artists, Goethe remarks, have always recognized the moral law; but if they should feel themselves to be servants of morality it would be all over with their art. In the album of a pious lady he wrote:

Not distinct at heart is the Fair from the Good; the Lovely
Is but a phase of the Good, clad in a beautiful veil.⁵³

Kant had said that the beautiful was the symbol of the morally good.

As the arts do not serve moral education, although they have a formative effect in every sense, so too it is not their function to give direction and content to the existence of the individual. Even the person who is endowed with a strong feeling for art must learn to understand, lest he become a sterile aesthete, "that the Muse does indeed willingly escort life but by no means knows how to guide it."⁵⁴ But the one who in his actions restricts himself and learns to submit himself to the necessities of life, in order that his force may come to be all the firmer and stronger—to him the Muse will be a companion, making his nights bright and his days lighter. In this sense alone does it hold true that the poet lives the dream of life as the conscious and knowing one, and that he participates in the unconscious activity of life as teacher, helper, and soothsayer, the confidant of the Eternal, and a friend to man.

⁵² Natur und Kunst sind zu gross, um auf Zwecke auszugehen. (Letter to Zelter, January 29, 1830.)

⁵³ Unterschieden ist nicht das Schöne vom Guten; das Schöne / Ist nur das Gute, das sich lieblich verschleiert uns zeigt. (JA 3:105.)

⁵⁴ . . . dass die Muse das Leben zwar gern begleitet, aber es keineswegs zu leiten versteht. (JA 38:242.)

Present and Future

IN THE LAST DECADES OF HIS LIFE GOETHE HAD BECOME THE MOST POWERFUL REPRESENTATIVE OF EUROPEAN CULTURE. BUT HE LIVED OUTSIDE OF AND ABOVE THE age, which in so many respects was no longer his. He was certainly not lacking in sympathy with the happenings of the day, the events in the field of the arts and sciences—even though some utterances and peculiarities point to the fact that unhappy encounters with the spirit of the time drove him further into the shell of his patriarchal existence. There was so much around him that he did not wish to share, often was not even able to share. He felt the danger that he might find himself at the periphery of the epoch and be driven into a sterile hostility to his environment, and he sought to reach the stage where he would let pass more tolerantly things that he could not approve, to be sure, but also not change. To his friend Zelter, who thought in the same way, he wrote, "At eighty-two one does really take things more seriously in and for oneself, by letting the poor sick world go its way, in God's name, in its multimillennial fool's paradise. It is terrible to see men, time after time, making a fresh boast of their errors."¹ The very last letter he dictated (to Wilhelm von Humboldt, March 17, 1832) complains of how absurd and confused the present world is. "Confusing doctrine on top of confused action rules over the world."²

But Goethe knows, too, how hard it is for the living to get the right view of their own age. "Sometimes the spirit of partisanship lifts [the age] too high, but still more often it values it far too low."³ In the end it is as necessary as it is wise to live and let live. "For where a human spark glints out only halfway, I am happy to approve."⁴

¹ Mit zweiundachtzig Jahren nimmt man es wirklich ernster in sich und für sich selbst, indem man die liebe leidige Welt in ihrem vieltausendjährigen Narrenleben in Gottes Namen fortwandeln lässt. Es ist schrecklich, wie sich das, ein über das andere Mal, wieder in seinen Irrtümern brüstet. (June 9, 1831.)

² Verwirrende Lehre zu verwirrtem Handel waltet über die Welt.

³ Manchmal setzt sie der Parteigeist zu hoch, aber noch öfters viel zu tief herab. (JA 25:245.)

⁴ Denn wo nur halbweg ein menschlicher Funke hervorleuchtet, mag ich gerne beifällig sein. (Letter to Zelter, February 19, 1831.)

Many things can exist side by side, even though they would like to dislodge each other. "The world spirit is more tolerant than people think."⁵ Despite all critical comments, his outbursts of wrath, and (what was more important) the isolation in which he lived, both as artist and because he was an old man whom another age had shaped—in spite of everything, even in old age Goethe did not stand in a hostile relation to his own age, like Nietzsche and other "untimely" persons at the end of the nineteenth century. One cannot say of Goethe that he had a home elsewhere than in his own age, nor that he, like Stefan George, took it to be his mission to look down "from a high mountain" and see "how they are faring in the valley." To quote Schiller, even in his old age he was probably a son of his era, but not its disciple or its favorite.

Did Goethe feel that things in Europe were beginning to move downward toward a great crisis? There is in him no lack of approvals of his age. Thus he remarks, "the present condition of the world, which is clarity in all relationships," is favorable to the individual, if the latter will have the good sense to fall back upon himself and to exert a quiet influence all by himself. "I for my part should not wish to have lived in any other age."⁶ Or he relies upon the belief that now, after the long period of war-making has ended, a mode of thinking directed toward purity and calm will prevail, and that out of it a "supreme civilization" will develop. This flowering of spiritual life, he thinks, would consist in this, "that everything which is worthy and really of value to men must be able to exist in different forms side by side, and that therefore different modes of thinking, without trying to supplant each other, should thrive together quietly in one and the same region."⁷ But he adds that "in the actual world of earth" things would not go on so peacefully, because in this case two powerful parties are in conflict: that of the traditional authorities and that of revolutionary liberalism. But when he speaks of the achievements of art and science, Goethe is full of confidence. He does see the isolating of the individual which impels toward anarchy, the increase

⁵ Der Weltgeist ist toleranter als man denkt. (Letter to C. F. von Reinhard, May 12, 1826.)

⁶ Ich meinestheils möchte in keiner andern Zeit gelebt haben. (Biedermann III, 122.)

⁷ . . . dass alles Würdige, dem Menschen eigentlich Werte, in verschiedenen Formen neben einander müsste bestehen können und dass daher verschiedene Denkweisen, ohne sich verdrängen zu wollen, in einer und derselben Region ruhig neben einander fortwandelten. (JA 39:356.)

of individualism. But he believes that it is precisely this alteration "which must gradually drive us out of vastness into restriction, out of dispersal into union" (JA 40:141).

Confronting such utterances of confidence in the good forces of the day are others which sound critical enough. In conversation with Eckermann Goethe said that conditions in Europe had grown too artificial and too complicated. "One would often wish to have been born on one of the South Sea islands as a so-called savage, merely in order to enjoy human existence for once in absolute purity without any false off-taste."⁸ In hours of depression, he added, it might well seem to us as if the world would soon be ripe for the Last Judgment. A few months later he says it again: he sees the time coming when God will no longer take any joy in mankind, "and he must once more smash everything to bits to make a rejuvenated Creation."⁹ Such apocalyptic visions may be put aside as specters of care-laden moods.

But there are also utterances of a more realistic and definite critique of the age, which are based upon historical considerations. All deteriorating epochs, he says, are subjective, and this is precisely the character of the present (conversation with Eckermann, January 29, 1826), whereas in ascending ages man is directed toward the world and outward things. The assertion that the conflict between unbelief and faith is the profoundest theme of world history, and that in epochs of decline unbelief prevails, "whatever form it might take"—this assertion is elucidated by what Goethe says about unbelief in the *Geschichte der Farbenlehre*. One sees from these remarks that he does not mean the lack of dogmatic ecclesiastical faith, but something more general: the pettiness and baseness of a point of view which no longer believes in the divine in Nature, nor in the great and good in the will-ing and in the deeds of man. For Goethe, unbelievers are the contemporaries who think too slightly of man and his mission. "A noble deed is ascribed to selfishness, a heroic action to vanity, an undeniably poetic production to a feverish condition; nay, what is still more odd, the most excellent thing that occurs, the most re-

⁸ Man sollte oft wünschen, auf einer der Südseeinseln als sogenannter Wilder geboren zu sein, um nur einmal das menschliche Dasein ohne falschen Beigeschmack durchaus rein zu geniessen. (March 12, 1828.)

⁹ . . . und er abermals alles zusammenschlagen muss zu einer verjüngten Schöpfung. (October 23, 1828.)

markable thing that is encountered, is denied as long as possible." ¹⁰ Superstition itself seems to him better than "this madness of our age," which neither recognizes nor acknowledges the great, the good, and the beautiful. When Barthold Niebuhr, the great historian, under the impression of the July revolution of 1830, predicted in the preface to his *Römische Geschichte* that Europe was drifting toward a cultural catastrophe such as the Roman world had suffered in the third century of our era, Goethe agreed. But he had his own argumentation: "Niebuhr was right when he saw a barbarous age approaching. It is already here, and we are in the midst of it; for in what does barbarism consist save in the fact that excellence is not acknowledged." ¹¹ That an "iron age," an age of violence, was immediately imminent was evidently not so certain for Goethe as for the gloomy historian. But the poet knew at least what kind of thing such an age would be. In the *Maskenzug* ("Masquerade") of 1782 he had written:

On me alone is tyrannous power bestowed;
O'er high and low I march upon my road.
My prey is innocence and gaiety,
I trample wealth and talent equally.¹²

The downfall of ancient civilizations had taught Goethe to understand the character of a terminal age. In the essay *Geistes-Epochen* ("Spiritual Epochs"; 1817) he says that at the end a complete chaos sets in. "But not the first, fertilized, birth-giving chaos, but a moribund one going over into corruption, out of which even the spirit of God himself could hardly create once more a world that would seem worthy to him." ¹³

If one reviews the comments on his own epoch which Goethe made

¹⁰ Eine edle Tat wird dem Eigennutz, eine heroische Handlung der Eitelkeit, das unleugbare poetische Produkt einem fieberhaften Zustande zugeschrieben; ja was noch wunderlicher ist, das Allervorzüglichste, was hervortritt, das Allermerkwürdigste, was begegnet, wird so lange, als nur möglich ist, verneint. (JA 40:168.)

¹¹ Niebuhr hat recht gehabt, wenn er eine barbarische Zeit kommen sah. Sie ist schon da, wir sind schon mitten darinne; denn worin besteht die Barbarei anders als darin, dass man das Vortreffliche nicht anerkennt. (Conversation with Eckermann, March 22, 1831.)

¹² Gewalt und Macht sind mir allein verliehen; / Ich schreite über Hoch und Niedrig hin. / Unschuld und Fröhlichkeit wird mir zum Raub, / Reichtum und Gaben tret' ich in den Staub. (JA 9:315.)

¹³ Aber nicht das erste, befruchtete, gebärende, sondern ein absterbendes, in Verwesung übergehendes, aus dem der Geist Gottes kaum selbst eine ihm würdige Welt abermals erschaffen könnte. (JA 37:104.)

in old age, one sees clearly enough that there is indeed much rejection and critical reaction, and occasionally a pessimistic utterance; one sees also that gloomy visions of the future of Europe disquiet him. But suffering caused by the present age and the inclination to historic pessimism are balanced by a confidence in the unbreakable power and boldness of the productive mind—a feeling in Goethe that is of just such elemental character as his faith in the never-ending productivity of Nature.

And ever circulates a newer, fresher blood.

.
From Water, Earth, and Air unfolding,
A thousand germs break forth and grow,
In dry, and wet, and warm, and chilly! ¹⁴

This likewise holds true of the living spirit which impels man and makes him capable of performing the works of civilization. Here there can be as little of standstill as at the loom of creative Nature, and no real end. Of terminal melancholy and defeatism of life there is no trace in Goethe.

The future hideth
Joyance and sorrow.
Stepwise progressing,
Yet still undaunted,
Forward we're striving. ¹⁵

The works of Goethe's old age show, though in unequal measure, that he was not interested in playing a public role in Germany or in Europe. But they also show that, now more than previously, he was intent on speaking to his contemporaries. The anxiety of the seer and the love of the patriarch urge him to step out of the magic circle of a spirit that is sufficient unto itself. In the journal *Kunst und Altertum*, in the rhymed aphorisms, and above all in his last prose work, *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*, which is weighted with wisdom, Goethe shows himself to be the anxious teacher and warner. We cannot speak again

¹⁴ Und immer zirkuliert ein neues, frisches Blut. / . . . / Der Luft, dem Wasser, wie der Erden / Entwinden tausend Keime sich, / Im Trocknen, Feuchten, Warmen, Kalten! (*Faust*, verse 1372.)

¹⁵ Die Zukunft decket / Schmerzen und Glücke. / Schrittweis dem Blicke, / Doch ungeschreckt / Dringen wir vorwärts. (*JA* 2:231.)

here of the extent to which the most important problems of the day are discussed in this half-novel, or of Goethe's attempt to gain a universally valid view from them. Goethe saw clearly that a process had got under way which was bound to change life in Europe more extensively than even the French Revolution had changed it—a process whereby the old forms of production would be overthrown, the social order transformed. The whole mode of existence, the way of life which had remained constant for centuries, would become different, and also the moral and spiritual life of the individual.

Goethe felt the unavoidable necessity of these changes. How by altering the processes of labor one could master the new situation and at the same time save the individual and his social and moral independence, and preserve the high values of a ripe *Humanität*—Goethe expressed his views on all these outstanding problems in the works of his last period, and especially in his last novel. How swiftly and with what a range the applied sciences, technology and its child, the mass production of industry, would expand—of this to be sure he did not dream. But the gigantic threat it contained he recognized in its first beginnings. He said in the *Wanderjahre* that the incipiently dominant machine alarmed him; that it was like a storm which approaches slowly but irresistibly. "It will come and strike."¹⁸ Goethe also foresaw that the pace of civilian life would be accelerated thereby, and that a new human type would be demanded for the new conditions. An age of *l'homme médiocre* was setting in, in which the climate would not be favorable to *l'homme supérieur*. In a private utterance Goethe described clairvoyantly the coming European: "Riches and rapidity are that which the world admires and for which everyone strives; railways, fast mails, steamships, and all possible facilities for communication are the field in which the civilized world is intent upon outdoing and out-training itself, thereby persisting in mediocrity. And that is of course the result of universality, that a culture of the mean becomes common . . . It is properly the century for capable brains, for quick-grasping, practical men, who, equipped with a certain adroitness, feel their superiority to the crowd, even if they themselves are not gifted for the highest achievement." He writes this to Zelter (June 7, 1825), and adds stoically, "Let us hold as far as possible to the state of mind in which we have come thus far;

¹⁸ Es wird kommen und treffen. (JA 20:190.)

we shall be, with perhaps a few others, the last of an epoch which will not so soon recur."¹⁷ And so indeed it was. Let it be recalled that steamships had been in use since 1807, but that the first considerable railroad was not inaugurated till 1830, in Germany not till 1835.

But here too hope and confidence overgrew the perplexing feelings of concern. Indeed it is both moving and impressive to see that the old man dreams of coming deeds of world-conquering temerity, of bold undertakings such as were first made possible in the age of technology. When he read in an essay by Alexander von Humboldt of the possibility of cutting through the Isthmus of Panama, he was fascinated by the prospect of being able to sail from the Gulf of Mexico into the Pacific Ocean. That would have, he remarked, "quite incalculable results for the whole civilized and uncivilized world." He also foresaw the development of the coast of California, and other great projects such as the linking of the Danube with the Rhine, and the Suez Canal. In the "forefeeling" of such fulfillments he cries out, "I should like to live to see these three great things, and for their sake it would probably be worth the trouble of holding out for another fifty years."¹⁸

What Goethe thought about the relation of the modern citizen to property is said by him in the *Wanderjahre*. That the individual wants to have possessions seems to him as natural as it is right, and he demands that each person shall have and hold as much as Nature and good fortune afford. But only in such a way that he regard himself as a kind of trustee and administer his private property as a communal good. More important than all possession is that which man does and achieves. In his writings Goethe did not express himself as to the first theories of socialism, which made their appearance

¹⁷ Reichtum und Schnelligkeit ist, was die Welt bewundert und wornach jeder strebt; Eisenbahnen, Schnellposten, Dampfschiffe und alle mögliche Fazilitäten der Kommunikation sind es, worauf die gebildete Welt ausgeht, sich zu überbieten, zu überbilden und dadurch in der Mittelmässigkeit zu verharren. Und das ist ja auch das Resultat der Allgemeinheit, dass eine mittlere Kultur gemein werde . . . Eigentlich ist es das Jahrhundert für die fähigen Köpfe, für leichtfassende praktische Menschen, die, mit einer gewissen Gewandtheit ausgestattet, ihre Superiorität über die Menge fühlen, wenn sie gleich selbst nicht zum Höchsten begabt sind . . . Lass uns soviel als möglich an der Gesinnung halten, in der wir herankamen; wir werden, mit vielleicht noch wenigen, die Letzten sein einer Epoche, die sobald nicht wiederkehrt.

¹⁸ Diese drei grossen Dinge möchte ich erleben, und es wäre wohl der Mühe wert ihnen zu Liebe es noch einige fünfzig Jahre auszuhalten. (*Conversation with Eckermann, February 21, 1827.*)

during the last period of his life. Only once, in a conversation with the young Swiss, Frédéric Soret, did he mention the Saint-Simonites (Biedermann, IV:301). He understood that the new doctrines tended to sacrifice individual claims to those of the mass. Goethe remarks that the welfare of the whole can only be indirectly promoted, by having the individual take care of his affairs by his own decision as well as possible, and by having him seek to perfect himself as moral and intellectual being. As a consequence of the individual achievement an improvement of the whole would then come about. But one could not make the welfare of the mass into an objective individual effort and a principle of individual action. A few days later (October 31, 1830) Goethe entered in his diary, as the result of a conversation with Chancellor von Müller, the statement that the Saint-Simonites were merely repeating "general demands, which could not even be called ideal, without the least conception of the conditions which must be taken into consideration, conditions which were inescapably prerequisite." Here too Goethe defends, as he had done forty years before against the Jacobinism of the French Revolution, the basic right of the individual to lead his life according to the necessity of his own interests and the freedom of his own conscience. "*Je soutiens que chacun doit rester ce qu'il est, travailler et produire d'après sa conviction intime.*"¹⁹ But, as we read as early as the *Lehrjahre*, the individual must learn at the same time "to live for others, and to forget himself in a duty-governed activity" (JA 18:255).

As Goethe lived to experience the beginnings of Socialism, so also the rise of political thinking in the life of Europe. The traditional scorn which the educated German had for the entire sphere of politics, access to which was in practice denied him and which incidentally was in a pitiable state in his native land—this scorn had been felt by Goethe throughout his entire life. Nor did he abandon it in old age. In the "pedagogical province" of the *Wanderjahre* (cf. *Goethe the Poet*, p. 260) the young men are educated to be practical humanists, the cultivated members of a society founded on labor, but not to be politicians. In the conflict of the political parties Goethe sees nothing at work but egotism and envy, and in the apostles of freedom he detects propagandists of lawlessness. A radicalism which

¹⁹ I maintain that every man should remain what he is, and labor and produce in accordance with his own personal conviction. (Biedermann IV:302.)

is not destructive was unknown to him. Only he did not wish, he said, like the reactionary governments of the Metternich period, to summon stupidity and obscurantism to help against the demons of revolution, but intelligence and light (conversation with Chancellor Müller, September 18, 1823). We have already spoken of how conservative he was in his political thinking, also of the fact that in his attitude toward the German nation he was no out-and-out patriot, but a citizen of the world. He has no other thought than that great art and true science do not restrict themselves to a single people, but belong to the whole world ("like everything good"), and that only by means of an "unimpeded interaction of all living men" (*JA* 33:277) can they be developed and brought to flower. The hope that ultimately mankind will meet in a conception of tolerance and humanitarian communion can only be fulfilled "if the particular quality of individual persons and nationalities is untouched, but the conviction is held fast that what distinguishes all truly meritorious things is that they are the property of all mankind."²⁰

For every stage of life, Goethe remarks, there is a definite, corresponding philosophy. Thus, it is characteristic of the old man that he inclines to mysticism, for as one having experience of life he knows how often the success of human striving depends on chance, and knows that fortune and misfortune sometimes cancel each other. And since it has always been so, advanced age, he said, takes comfort "in him who is, was, and will be" (*JA* 4:249). But as Goethe praises life and activity down to the last hour as the behavior most worthy of man, so even now he does not allow himself to evade the tasks of present life, nor to retreat into the contemplation of the eternal. In the years when he still had the strength to unite with the present by means of action, Goethe had his face turned more to the moment than to the future. His planning and striving was not determined by an inclination to utopistic expectations, such as played so great a role in romanticism and in the nineteenth century. But as age took from him the power to share in contemporaneous action and conflict, he was fascinated by visions of coming fulfillments and impending catas-

²⁰ . . . wenn man das Besondere der einzelnen Menschen und Völkerschaften auf sich beruhen lässt, bei der Überzeugung jedoch festhält, dass das wahrhaft Verdienstliche sich dadurch auszeichnet, dass es der ganzen Menschheit angehört. (*JA* 38:141.)

trophes. Now he became an anxious seer. To children and grandchildren, before he must leave them, he would show the way which leads past the abyss to a great goal. In the *Wanderjahre* we read that religious feeling also must now adapt itself to an age which was seeking to produce a culture founded on community and social living. True, piety of the private kind—Goethe calls it “home piety”—had given security to the existence of the individual, and to that extent had also served as foundation for the solidity and dignity of the whole. But that was no longer sufficient, he thought. “We must form the concept of a world piety, expand in a practical relationship our sincerely human attitudes, and not only help our neighbors but take all mankind along with us.”²¹ “World piety”—by this Goethe does not mean the pantheistic feeling which seeks to grasp God in the world. What he means is an all-embracing humanitarian disposition, in the form of feeling and accomplishment, which presses forward beyond the bounds of private life to reach the whole human race. Goethe says “all humanity,” not class or nation. It is the future of human civilization that concerns him, and his world piety is really the same as the old idea of *Humanität*; only that Goethe now has a more realistic conception of it.

Goethe's last works have their ideal summit in pictures in which an enthusiasm that strives for the great and the general conceives of its fulfillments. Faust's last vision, or the emigrants in the *Wanderjahre*—these are symbols of this point of view. That which affects all and is common to all now occupies the place of the *summum bonum*. Allegiance to world citizenship had been regarded by Goethe ever since his classical period as the only position suitable for the poet. In the *Propyläen* he wrote that such a cosmopolitanism existed “perhaps nowhere more purely than in arts and sciences” (JA 33:124). In his last decades he expressed this conviction more and more definitely. The higher forms of art, he now says, must renounce the expression and representation of the national character. “Language study and recognition of values in neighboring spheres is to be promoted, in order that one flock be assembled under one shepherd.”²² Mutual

²¹ Wir müssen den Begriff einer Weltfrömmigkeit fassen, unsre redlich menschlichen Gesinnungen in einen praktischen Bezug ins Weite setzen und nicht nur unsre Nächsten fordern, sondern zugleich die ganze Menschheit mitnehmen. (JA 19:185.)

²² Sprachstudium und Anerkennung des Nachbarlichen ist zu befördern, damit eine Herde unter einem Hirten versammelt sei. (Letter to C. L. von Knebel, December 14, 1822.)

understanding and esteem among the peoples are best promoted "by means of talented persons on both sides, who become aware of each other sooner than does the great mass of people" (letter to C. L. F. Schultz, November 28, 1821). When an honor is bestowed upon him by his native city, Goethe does not answer by affirming loyalty to his homeland, but states that his existence had always been directed to a universally valid *Humanität*, and that he had fulfilled in just this way the mission which was assigned particularly to the German of that day. He goes on to say, in this important letter (to J. L. Büchler, June 14, 1820), that he had "sent neither eyes nor feet into foreign lands, save with the intention of getting to know the universally human elements that are distributed over the entire earth in the most varied forms, and of rediscovering, approving, and promoting the same in my fatherland. For it is unquestionably the mission of the German to lift himself up so as to be a representative of all citizens of the world."²³

From the conviction that the time had come when the poet must speak to mankind about that which underlies all cultures and therefore unites all men, and that the voice of great poetry must now be the voice of pure *Humanität*—from this conviction, this dream of a union of the nations in a single, world-wide humanity, derives Goethe's last attempt to give to present and future a lofty, cosmopolitan objective. This is his programmatic idea of a European literature which should ultimately become a *world literature*.²⁴ Such a universal literature finds mention from 1827 on in Goethe's writings, letters, and conversations. To the end of his life he never ceased to cultivate this favorite idea. He often put into words the conception he had of it. He says that things have now got to the point where a universal world literature is developing, that an epoch of world literature is about to set in, and that everyone must help to bring it about. In the long war years, the European peoples had come into

²³ . . . weder Blick noch Schritt in fremde Lande getan, als in der Absicht, das allgemein Menschliche, was über den ganzen Erdboden verbreitet und verteilt ist, unter den verschiedensten Formen kennen zu lernen und solches in meinem Vaterlande wiederzufinden, anzuerkennen und zu fördern. Denn es ist einmal die Bestimmung des Deutschen, sich zum Repräsentanten der sämtlichen Weltbürger zu erheben.

²⁴ This important idea is treated more thoroughly than is possible here by Fritz Strich in his book, *Goethe und die Weltliteratur* (Bern: A. Francke Verlag, 1946). In this admirable work one will also find set forth in detail what Goethe owed to the poets of other nations, and how he himself influenced the literature of other peoples.

closer contact than before; "neighborly relations" had sprung from this, and the desire to inaugurate "free trade of the mind." Of course it could not merely be a question of having the various nations exchange their literary productions for each other, or of promoting translation of one literature into the other. That had always existed. Before Goethe's eyes rises the picture of a literature which lifts itself above the sphere of national life, just because it is the highest flower of the creative mind of the nation—a picked lot which has a rank of its own, and, like all supreme things, belongs to all mankind, not only to the nation in which it was produced. So it had been with mysticism. In the seventeenth century, when the Christian churches were in conflict with each other, mysticism brought an ecumenical piety to reality. It presented a rent and torn Christianity with what was originally its common possession and preserved for it the consciousness of the one invisible Church. Something similar is now to be achieved by literature. In league with the forces of faith it is to unite "the entire world on its deeper, earnest ground" (JA 37:124) and help to spread a spirit of mutual recognition. The age, eager for such fulfillments, will bring forth an ecumenic literature, in which the voices of the individual peoples, different as they are, will unite as in a chorus. In this way the nations would learn to speak *to* each other, and finally *with* each other, of the One, Highest thing, which they have in common and which forms the foundation of all great cultures: of the spiritual and moral attitude which is called *Humanität* and rests upon man's respect for himself. Ultimately, perhaps, men will also realize "that only mankind in the aggregate is the true human being."²⁵

Certainly Goethe knows the type and value of the national character. He does not dream of attempting to do away with the differences in the character and culture of the nations. To him it is obvious that one must not tamper with the peculiarity of what Nature has put asunder. It is the basic law of life that the universal can only make itself a reality in individuations. But the productive life which is realized in the polarity of the universal and the particular can produce phenomena which come closer to the "idea," reproduce it more purely, than others. This is what the art of the classical style undertakes to do in its works. In order that a spirit of toleration and

²⁵ . . . dass die Menschheit zusammen erst der wahre Mensch ist. (JA 23:208.)

unification, perhaps even of love, can show itself among the various nations, all too often parted by misjudgment and hostility, that which is individual in each nation must be understood and appreciated by the others. "They are merely to become aware of each other, to understand each other, and, if they will not love each other, at least learn to tolerate each other." ²⁶ And would not a nation be able to accept more rapidly, in this way, what another has to give it? The ideal goal would be this, that the nations should at last learn to recognize what is valuable when it appears in alien shape, and in that case too to allow it validity and the right to live.

From the time when the new century had been violently and powerfully ushered in by the French Revolution, Europe had been shaken by wars for two entire decades. Now that the blood-stained age was finally over, all who felt themselves to be good Europeans must desire nothing more than that the spirit of the eighteenth century, as directed to the universally valid and the rational, should emerge again and reign in a renewed form. In Germany there were representatives of a world citizenship in both the classical and the romantic party. But more and more strongly, toward the end of the romantic movement, a trend emerged which would recall the interest of the educated from the vastness of cosmopolitan feeling and thinking and concentrate it upon the nation, upon everything national in history and contemporary life. What had at first revealed itself as pure love of all that was nearest and one's own—this degenerated in the course of the century into a monomania of national self-deification. Out of a natural loyalty there developed all over Europe a truculent chauvinism which helped in the end to destroy the peoples of old and their communal life. When the ideal and noble beginnings of this development began to appear more clearly after the Wars of Liberation, Goethe felt at once how gigantic a danger for European civilization was on the march there. The conviction, which Goethe had expressed as early as 1801, that there is no patriotic art and science, but that both belong to the whole world, was one of the forces that produced his program of a world literature. It now seemed time to summon those of like mind and bring them into touch with each other.

²⁶ Sie sollen nur einander gewahr werden, sich begreifen und, wenn sie sich wechselseitig nicht lieben mögen, sich einander wenigstens dulden lernen. (JA 38:170.)

And were there not in all nations men of such cosmopolitan faith? Thomas Carlyle, the great Scottish writer, had been in touch with Goethe since 1824; he had translated Goethe's works and given the English public an idea of the greatness of the German poet. He himself owed an inestimable debt of gratitude to Goethe, and revered him as a model of the sage, as incomparable teacher of the nations. In one of his letters to Goethe Carlyle confesses, "It is you more than any other man that I should always thank and reverence with the feeling of a Disciple to his Master, nay of a Son to his spiritual Father." It was through Carlyle that cultivated Englishmen were won for Goethe's works and for German literature generally. Carlyle also published a book on Schiller in 1830. Goethe gave it his authorization by writing a preface for the German edition.

The activity of such men as Carlyle seemed to confirm Goethe's hopes that a world literature was growing up in Europe. So it was natural that in a letter to his British admirer (July 20, 1827) he should put into concise expression the program of this world literature, a literature of supreme and universally valid rank. Later Goethe communicated this manifesto to the German people by printing it in *Kunst und Altertum*. It reads as follows:

It is evident that the effort of the best poets and aesthetic writers of all nations has for some considerable time been focused upon that which is universally human. In every particular item, be it historic, mythological, fabulous, or more or less arbitrarily invented, one will see that universal element shining and shimmering through all nationality and personality.

Since now in the practical conduct of life, as well, a like quality prevails and weaves itself through everything that is terrestrially crude, savage, cruel, false, selfish, and lying, and everywhere strives to disseminate some mitigation thereof: while it is not to be expected that a universal peace will thereby be introduced, one may hope that the inevitable strife will gradually lessen, that war will become less cruel, victory less prideful.

Now that which in the poetry of all nations points to and works for this result is what the others have to appropriate to themselves. One must get to know the peculiarities of each one, in order to leave them untouched, indeed to use them as a means of association; for the traits of a nation are like its speech and its coinage: they facilitate intercourse, and it is they alone which make it possible . . .

A truly universal toleration will be most certainly attained if the particular qualities of individual men and peoples are left inviolate, while however the conviction is held fast that what distinguishes everything of

true merit is the fact that it belongs to all of mankind. To such a mediation and mutual appreciation the Germans have been contributing for a long time.²⁷

Goethe's confidence that from the womb of the age which was in the ascendant while his own life was declining an epoch would be born in which the peoples would find the way to each other, so that a culture founded on *Humanität* and peacefulness could develop—this confidence was certainly not confirmed by the history of the subsequent century. Things have not gone as Goethe had thought and hoped. Nor did they turn out as the lighthearted optimists thought, who were certain of a steady advance toward ever happier conditions. The forces which Goethe wished to repel, against which he set up his ideal of a humanitarian world literature—it was just these destructive forces which got control of the passions and aspirations of the great nations. Goethe was not able to restrain the fatal march to the abyss, but neither were any of the other house gods of Europe, nor any of the living poets. Who indeed, and were he the greatest of all, could avert such a catastrophe?

At the same time, among the Germans as among the other nations, the consciousness has not died out that Goethe was the last of the universal minds which emerged one by one in the leading nations of Europe after the Renaissance; and that he outdoes in importance the other great poets of modern times by the very fact that he is

²⁷ Offenbar ist das Bestreben der besten Dichter und ästhetischen Schriftsteller aller Nationen schon seit geraumer Zeit auf das allgemein Menschliche gerichtet. In jedem Besondern, es sei nun historisch, mythologisch, fabelhaft, mehr oder weniger willkürlich ersonnen, wird man durch Nationalität und Persönlichkeit hindurch jenes Allgemeine immer mehr durchleuchten und durchschimmern sehen.

Da nun auch im praktischen Lebensgange ein Gleiches obwaltet und durch alles irdisch Rohe, Wilde, Grausame, Falsche, Eigennützige, Lügenhafte sich durchschlingt, und überall einige Milde zu verbreiten trachtet, so ist zwar nicht zu hoffen, dass ein allgemeiner Friede dadurch sich einleite, aber doch dass der unvermeidliche Streit nach und nach lasslicher werde, der Krieg weniger grausam, der Sieg weniger übermutig.

Was nun in den Dichtungen aller Nationen hierauf hindeutet und hinwirkt, dies ist es, was die übrigen sich anzueignen haben. Die Besonderheiten einer jeden muss man kennen lernen, um sie ihr zu lassen, um gerade dadurch mit ihr zu verkehren, denn die Eigenheiten einer Nation sind wie ihre Sprache und ihre Münzsorten, sie erleichtern den Verkehr, ja sie machen ihn erst vollkommen möglich . .

Eine wahrhaft allgemeine Duldung wird am sichersten erreicht, wenn man das Besondere der einzelnen Menschen und Völkerschaften auf sich beruhen lässt, bei der Überzeugung jedoch festhält, dass das wahrhaft Verdienstliche sich dadurch auszeichnet, dass es der ganzen Menschheit angehört. Zu einer solchen Vermittlung und wechselseitigen Anerkennung tragen die Deutschen seit langer Zeit schon bei.

closer in time to the present than the rest, Dante or Shakespeare or Racine. And another feeling was stirring: that for a long time to come Goethe would remain the last star of the first magnitude to rise in the sky of Europe. But could the nineteenth century really contend that Goethe's spirit went on living in it (as Carlyle said) in true vitality? To us at any rate it seems as if in the century since Goethe's death there cannot have been more than quiet minorities, single persons of knowledge and aspiration, of whom one could say that they understood Goethe aright and had tried to follow him.

A plethora of books and monographs have been written about him, a host of specialists have analyzed and interpreted his works, Goethe societies have been organized and Goethe celebrations instituted. But all these efforts, the honest as well as the spurious, the foolish and the intelligent, have not been able to make the beauty and the wisdom of Goethe's work so effective that it might have helped to avert the great calamity. But it is also true that one cannot estimate the number of those individuals to whom Goethe's work gave anchorage and hope in the days when the twilight fell upon Europe, and still more so when the catastrophe burst forth.

There is little sense in asking why the effect which Goethe has had among the Germans and the other nations of the Occident is so out of proportion to his greatness. The historian knows that even poets of the highest rank have at certain times been almost forgotten, indeed very nearly turned into dead objects in the museum of history. Homer, Shakespeare, and Dante are cases in point. But in Goethe's case the matter stands this way, that the course of things, *all* things, has led the modern world away from the picture of man presented in his poetry, from the ideal of life expressed in his work. It is as if, before the descent began, all there was in Europe of creative forces, favorable to life and culture, was for the last time to be united and most magnificently embodied in one man. The conditions for so extraordinary an event were at that time, at the peak of middle-class civilization, nowhere so favorable as in Germany. That one among the great nations of the west which was the last one in the course of history to rise and flower was also the one to produce the last poet of supreme rank.

The Greeks thought only that poetry to be great which conveys a lofty ethos and sets up a great, exemplary human figure. True poetry

has normative force; it affects the moral element in man, and in general the will in him, since he strives for perfection in all things. In Homer the Greeks saw the ideal of a poet who had created works of this kind. Hence they called him the educator of their nation. In his figures he had created pictures of the Greek way of life, and of Greek humanity, which were at the same time model pictures—close and realistic enough to be understandable as true embodiments of the national type, and great enough to have the effect of a norm.

Goethe is such a poet too. His spirit is full of invention and full of wisdom. His genius is great enough to make him one of the great educators, one of the highest authorities—for all nations. But whether our age, which lies writhing on the ground, will turn to his poetry, whether it will be able to gain therefrom courage and hope for its burdened, gloomy existence, whether it will come to his wisdom and from it learn to think its way back to the right—who can say? And who could say what must happen to make a work of such incomparable kind attain to the world-wide effect for which it is destined? So much, however, is taught by history, that stars of so high an order in the firmament of time do not set. Of all the creations of man, only the works of his spirit have permanence in the change of the ages. Again and again they emerge into life, so long as the current of the era to which they belong goes on flowing. Goethe never ceased to admire the ability of life to renew itself incessantly. Again and again Death is swallowed up by Life. This force will validate itself again in the work of Goethe. His destinies may fluctuate in the course of history. But what a mind of such original power has created cannot disappear from the intellectual life of mankind.

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