

GOETHE AND PHILOSOPHY

In all of world literature, Goethe is one of the most suggestive of authors. The particular aspect from which we will consider him here is only one among many, the investigation of which can promote the knowledge of the author and his enduring significance. The task we have set ourselves here as Goethe and Philosophy does not mean that all his views on life and the world are to be the subject of our consideration. In Goethe's case this task would, in the final analysis, have to be carried out chiefly by the interpreter of his literary works. We, on the other hand, intend to enquire about his relationship to philosophy. Actually, this undertaking seems eminently justified when we consider that the age of Goethe was at the same time the age of the great German philosophical movement, and that the great thinkers of German Idealism, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, were all contemporaries of the great poet; indeed, the younger ones among them, because of their activity in Jena, were familiar neighbors. And yet, something about this undertaking is question-

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able, yes even dangerous. Goethe, this versatile and accomplished spirit, who assimilated and transformed the existential substance of his own time as no other did, maintained during his entire lifetime a peculiar reservation toward philosophy and metaphysics. Indeed, not only did he himself practice this reservation toward philosophy, but through him it almost became a watchword enjoining, on those who sought to form themselves in his image, a rejection of all philosophical speculation as well as an uninhibited surrender to the fullness of experience. It was particularly the middle class during the nineteenth century, those who drew their sustenance from the enormous prestige of the natural sciences, who understood Goethe in this way: "All theory, O noble friend, is gray."

However, it is part of the characteristic and almost terrifying boundlessness of Goethe's spirit that this negation of philosophy can be regarded at the most as only half true. In every period of his life he felt a continual challenge to appropriate and offer a considered response to philosophy, just as he did to every other subject matter of intellectual importance. Of course, you will not find philosophical treatises in the more narrow scholastic sense among his works, but rather always only occasional essays and position papers, only "biographical" documents. But is not that the peculiar thing about Goethe's works in general, that they are, like those of no other classical writer of any other nation, occasional works, an expression and presentation, no matter how extensive their range, of this one, unique person Goethe, of his course of life, his experiences and influences, his evaluations and desires? This is particularly clear with respect to a large part of his lyrical work. And did not he himself call all of his poetic creations fragments of a great confession? Even his experiments in the area of natural science, with which he sought to unite himself with those anonymous workers dedicated to building the edifice of science, retain something inimitably personal. The presentation of even such subjects as these have often something incidental about them which, with naive self-assurance, express in the presentation itself a chance happening on his particular path of experience and insight. And it is only proper that his autobiographical sketch *From My Life—Truth and Poetry* is not an addition or a supplement to his works, but has its own genuine equality of rank in their midst. It may be linked to Goethe's position within the history of the whole Western development, to the considerable tardiness of Germany's

political and cultural entrance into the family of modern nations, that this first classical writer of his people stands at the end of an age and for that reason has concentrated in the unity of his own person that substance of spiritual and intellectual life which constituted the unity of the Western world and which precisely at this time was on the point of disappearing.

In any case, philosophy plays a particular role within the broad horizon of this life, and by no means simply an incidental or negative one. Determining one's own position in regard to Goethe has always been, from the very beginning, the genuine concern of the philosophical sensibility. For actually it begins with the unceasing effort of Schiller, a thoroughly philosophical and speculative mind, to understand Goethe's nature, to affirm and justify the poet of reflection vis-à-vis the naive poet. Indeed, Schiller's interpretation still today governs our nation's view of Goethe, so deep and original is the importance of philosophical thought (which speaks in Schiller) for the effective history of Goethe's influence. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Schiller's relationship to Goethe is not simply the effective history of Goethe; on the contrary, it definitely belongs to the history of Goethe's own life, as one of its decisive phases. However, because what concerns us here is more than the historical confirmation of trustworthy facts in a philological study of Goethe, because the influence of Goethe and of the interpretation that Schiller gave him has never ceased to be history and to make history, a philosophical reflection on Goethe's relationship to philosophy remains a task to be taken up again and again.

It is now quite clear, given the nature of the situation, that any attempt to redefine this relationship must follow the course of Goethe's own development. On the other hand, it is equally clear that not much can be gained by simply tracking down and making a list of readings and critical responses in the area of philosophy that can be found during the course of Goethe's development. For not only are the statements made from time to time by Goethe on such matters occasional and vacillating, so that almost everything that can be proven can also be refuted, but also his preoccupation with the works of the great philosophers, with Spinoza or Kant, with Fichte or Hegel, is fragmentary and inconsistent in method. What would in others, however, be a sign of impoverishment is in Goethe's case an expression of his own fertile nature. He says on one occasion that he

had always done his learning as if it were a game. But he does not mean that everything came easy to him or that he treated it all with nonchalance. Rather, he means that learning for him took place as a spontaneous activity of personal development. Playing is of course the most extreme form of such activity, oblivious of self and engaged with a matter offering no resistance. That is precisely why it involves such an upsurge of emotional vitality. For Goethe, learning was play because it always brought into play all the forces of his being. In the course of his reading of Kant's anthropology, Goethe writes to Schiller on 19 December 1798, "I just want to mention also that I hate everything that merely instructs me, without increasing or immediately vitalizing my activity." The incidental way in which Goethe pursued his studies in philosophy does not argue against his taking the matter seriously. In his encounters with things philosophical he is looking for the same thing he is basically seeking in all his experiences of the world: the expansion of his activity, a vital increase in the unfolding of his own creative and formative powers.

One could doubt whether such an augmentation of being could come to him from philosophy at all. After all, it is a fact that his first brush with philosophical doctrines provoked the response that a separate discipline of philosophy was not at all necessary because it is already part and parcel of religion and poetry. When his teacher tries to prove that these latter have first to be grounded in the former, he obviously rejects this kind of reflection altogether. For him, poetic and religious immediacy is without question the foundation for any mediation of the concept. And the effect of his first philosophical experiences (with the "triste, atheistic twilight" of the philosophy of the French Enlightenment) was a sour vexation against all philosophy, but particularly against metaphysics. So, we will have to ask how, in spite of this antipathy, an inclination to philosophy finds its way into Goethe's sympathies.

In doing so, we shall disregard how Goethe was led to a reflection on his art. Philosophical reflection on the technical conditions in the poetic and plastic arts can also be found in those artists who have no concern for the central problems of philosophy, especially metaphysics. Obviously his thinking is inspired by something quite opposite to the metaphysics of the Enlightenment. What offends him is the doctrine of final causes, that treatment of nature that thinks only in terms of purpose and relates everything to human

utility. Against this he sets his own great view of the power of nature, creating and destroying without any concern for human ends. "Nature. We are surrounded and embraced by her—incapable of escaping from her, and incapable of delving deeper into her." That then is the decisive aspect of his view: man does not face her autocratically as the final purpose of nature whom he then relates to himself—he is embraced by her; he is himself nature. Even his own innate poetic talent is wholly conceived by Goethe as nature, and she is so named by him in the prose fragment entitled "The Only Artist" (probably not from his own hand, but certainly issuing from his spirit). In the year 1828, not too long before his death, when Goethe first saw this fragment and took it to be his own, he characterized it in the following way: "We see the inclination to a kind of pantheism in which a foundation was laid for the phenomena of the world by a being who is inscrutable, unconditioned, humorous and self-contradictory." In contrast to the rationalistic optimism of academic philosophy, it is indeed the inscrutableness of nature for the circumscribed and limited human being that gives Goethe the appearance of being a pantheist. For him, nature and God are inscrutable beings, and he always insisted on the homogeneousness of nature and God, particularly so against the Christian philosophy of faith advocated by his friend Jacobi. He simply cannot associate a God "who comes from the outside" with his own view of the internal life of nature. And yet, with his characteristic liberality he refuses to establish any dogmatic definitions, including one for pantheism.

It is chiefly in Spinoza, whom he learns to see with Herder's eyes, that he finds corroboration for his conception of nature and especially for his aversion to final causes. But basically, the conviction about certain aspects of nature—eternity, necessity, and regularity—which were developed under the influence of Spinoza, is the necessary counterresistance for which his excessive vitality and titanic desire to create yearned. He seems, right from the beginning, to possess this urge to renunciation rooted in the recognition of necessity, precisely because the creative intensity of the poet, whose powers come into vital play in every aspect of his life and respond with an intense creative counterthrust to every and any stimulus, seems to have no bounds. Through Spinoza, he feels raised above the play of his passions by which the human being, with respect to his destiny, is at times painfully restricted. This is how the old Goethe, he who had

grown wise and become a memory even to himself, interpreted the profound need that had earlier guided him in his philosophical studies. We can now confirm the correctness of this interpretation and indeed enlarge on it, even if only on the basis of an essay from the 1780s. We are thinking here of the essay Wilhelm Dilthey first interpreted in his treatise "From the Period of Goethe's Spinoza Studies." We find this confirmation in the way by which the concepts of existence and perfection, through which we conceive the infinite, codetermine the Being of limited existences, so that they, that is, the things in God, actually have their own being in themselves and cannot, as living beings, be measured by anything external to themselves. They thus display their own inseparable union of parts and whole; in short, they participate in the infinity of the colossal and the universal. This is how Goethe, even though he does so with the ideas of Spinoza, conceives his own particular view of the nature of a living being and its creative power, a view that reminds us of Aristotle's entelechy and of Leibniz's notion of the monad. The whole idea of a morphological investigation of nature is here marked out. The conditionedness of a living being is by no means prejudicial to the primal power of nature. On the contrary! How worthy it is of nature, Goethe exclaims, that she always has to make use of the same means to produce and nourish her creatures.

Now Goethe enlarges on this aspect by including in his consideration the being endowed with the ability to know. Through the act of knowing the soul unfolds its powers by setting limits. "We must limit all existence and perfection in our souls in such a way that they conform to our nature and our way of thinking and feeling. Only then can we say that we comprehend or enjoy something.

Just as all living things presuppose an environment conditioned by specific circumstances, so that the fish lives only in water, the bird only in the air, so also for human being and its nature Goethe recognizes a necessity by which it is limited and thereby preserved. We read in *Sprüche in Prosa* [Sayings in Prose], the whole trick amounts to surrendering our existence in order to exist. Our physical as well as our social life, our mores, our habits, our worldly wisdom, our philosophy, our religion, all these things admonish us to exercise renunciation.

These statements of a Goethe grown old and wise are simply the development of what the young titan discovered in the philosophical idea of nature.

We can now well understand the many-sidedness of Goethe's ventures into the world around him, his desire to investigate it, observe it, and creatively form it. Not only a mystical union with the infinite, but also a movement out in all directions in the finite world, this is the teaching, hardly characteristic for Spinoza, that Goethe drew from his Spinoza studies. To use his own words—he feels blessed with physics. For him, physics is the infinite-finite field of genuine intuitions in which, as effect and countereffect, the soul of the knower develops. The comparative scientist and the creative poet, then, are the manifestations of the same impulse to give form, an impulse that constitutes, as he tells us in the self-characterization of 1797 mentioned earlier, the center and foundation of his existence.

Accordingly, his further development as a philosopher was already marked out by two elements; and these had necessarily to become problematic for him in his position between poet and scientist. First of all, the general question about the relationship between the self and the world, particularly how a subjective, creative activity can participate in the experience of the world. And second, the more specific question about the relationship between nature and art. He was to encounter both problems in the philosophy of Kant that at this time was in the ascendancy, a philosophy that otherwise played hardly any role in his life except to inspire him to continue passionately to pursue his own individual goals. As he later describes for us, what he had appropriated of Kantian philosophy by way of reading and conversation met with little sympathy among the Kantians. "More than once it happened that one or the other of them admitted with a smile of astonishment that there was about it something analogous to a Kantian way of thinking, but the connection was certainly odd."

There was, first of all, the analogy between Goethe's "natural method" of observing objects from every point of view and Kant's demonstration of how much we ourselves and how much the external world contribute to our intellectual life. Although he himself had never separated the two, Goethe was prepared to assume the Kantian position as the one that gives most honor to the human being. As far as his own procedures were concerned, be they creative-synthetic or observational-analytic, he otherwise felt quite in harmony with Kant's epistemology.

In a particular way, however, he felt beneficially influenced by the *Critique of Judgment* because it taught a correspondence and profound inner connection between nature and art. We see an inner appropriateness in nature; we also experience an inner appropriateness in our taste for the beautiful and the production of genius. In a letter to Zeller of January 29, 1830, Goethe writes in a similar vein, "It is the boundless merit of our old Kant with respect to the world, and I would certainly add with respect to *me*, that in his *Critique of Judgment* he places nature and art side by side and concedes that both have the right, on the basis of principle, to act without purpose. Nature and art are much too great to be concerned with purposes; and what is more, they need not be concerned. For we find relationships everywhere, and relationships make life what it is." What he saw enunciated in the *Critique of Judgment* was, consequently, the inner life of both art and nature, their mutual effect from inside out. Goethe was prepared for this correspondence because he had been in Italy and had studied both art and the laws governing nature as well as life in human society that is woven out of both. And yet, it is quite obvious how little Goethe seems disturbed by Kant's actual critical thought, by the limitation of the teleological idea to a mere procedure of judgment; in other words, by the surrender of the objective validity of the notion of purpose. His whole study of Kant's philosophy remains confined to its "in-house use."

But suddenly along with Schiller, Kantian philosophy with its genuine moral passion for freedom enters Goethe's life and exercises a power that, both in its effect and in his reaction to it, carries him far into the realm of philosophy. At the beginning, Goethe had hated in Schiller the savage and revolutionary aspect of his genius as displayed in his tragedy *Die Räuber* and for that reason had kept a considerable distance from Schiller after the latter had moved to Jena. But then came a moment of mutual understanding, that remarkable conversation about the primeval plant reported by Goethe himself. As Goethe accepts the friendship and constant presence of Schiller, he surrenders to the interpretation Schiller offers him; this is a period, by the way, that turned out to be one of the most fruitful decades of his life. And so, we find ourselves here, with respect to our inquiry, at a decisive moment on the path of Goethe's philosophical development: he learns to see himself entirely with the eyes of Schiller and of philosophy. Now philosophy must appear to him as the final and long-over-due explanation for his own naive faith in

the world. And in that case, German philosophical Idealism opens up a legitimate access to the puzzle that Goethe's life was to himself and to us.

But before we make any judgments on these far-reaching questions, we first have to acquaint ourselves with the encounter between Goethe and Schiller and with Schiller's interpretation of Goethe. In the period of their relationship as neighbors, Schiller had immersed himself in Kantian philosophy and had realized for himself in the highest degree the feeling of freedom and self-determination that constitutes the life of Kant's practical philosophy. That was in extreme contrast to Goethe's striving to reflect on nature in the formation of her laws and to affirm in himself what was conditioned by nature. So Goethe accused him of "ingratitude toward the great mother who certainly had not treated him like a stepchild." Moreover, he saw in his pathos of freedom an artificial and ineffectual compulsion for moral self-control that he always found offensive.

In 1794 in Jena, after a meeting of the Society for the Investigation of Nature, it happened that they walked home together. Schiller criticized the type of lecture they had just heard and called it a piecemeal way of treating nature. And then Goethe, himself inspired by a different, unified view of nature's totality, revealed to him that he felt exactly the same way. They spoke endlessly in front of Schiller's house. Finally, in the middle of the night, Goethe followed him inside and expounded for him his metamorphosis of plants according to which the plant kingdom was unified into a great totality that could be understood in its formative process. Schiller—according to Goethe's report—

listened and considered all this with great interest, certainly with definite comprehension. But when I had finished, he shook his head and said: "that's not an experience: that's an idea!" I stopped short, actually a bit annoyed; for the point that separated us was thereby brought into clear relief. I was about to give in to my usual animosity, but controlled myself and replied, I don't mind at all the fact that I have ideas without knowing it and can even see them with my eyes.

For anyone knowledgeable about Kant's philosophy—and this Goethe was not—this disagreement is easily shown to be a misunderstanding. The Kantian antithesis of idea and experience (or appearance) is

obtained by a narrowly conceived sense of experience individuated by space-time and represented by mathematics, particularly in the form of classical mechanics. On the other hand, the idea is not simply a subjective inspiration, but rather the regulating unity of experience itself, which for that very reason can never be completely congruent with experience, because it provides the rule for all experience. This is probably the way Schiller, the educated Kantian, expressed himself. Goethe, according to his own report, held fast to his "stubborn realism." Nevertheless, this disagreement had led to the formation of a common bond; and in this way a union of the two great men was established, as Goethe himself depicted it, on the basis of a competition between object and subject, a disagreement that could never perhaps be entirely settled. In their correspondence we have before us the part of this competition they shared together.

This correspondence opens with a splendid attempt by Schiller to define his own, as well as philosophy's, relation to the spirit of Goethe.¹

In your own correct intuition there lies everything that is laboriously sought by analysis, and in a far more complete form. And only because it is in you as a totality, your own inner riches are hidden from you. For unfortunately we only know what we do not have. For this reason, spirits of your type seldom know how far they have progressed and how little cause they have to borrow from philosophy that can only learn from them. The latter can only analyze what is given to it. But the giving itself is not the affair of the analyst, but rather of the genius who establishes relationships according to objective laws under the obscure but certain influence of pure reason.

The meaning and intention of this interpretation is clear. It is simply that Goethe does not know what he is doing. Kantian philosophy is nothing more than a clarification for the genius who, following his nature, creates unconsciously. Indeed, Schiller, quite consequentially, decides to advise Goethe against the study of Kantian philosophy, "For the logical direction that the spirit, in exercising reflection, finds it necessary to take, is not easily compatible with the aesthetic direction by which alone it gives form." Of course Goethe cannot—that is

the sense of his argument—claim for his own aesthetic production the naiveté of the ancients. Their reception of necessary form in their very first intuition of things and the developing on this basis of their high style were supported by their excellent nature and an 'idealizing art' that surrounded them. Goethe on the other hand, thrust into the savage world of the North, is in need of guiding concepts in order, from the inside out, to bring forth a Greece by exercising reason. Transforming these concepts back into intuition, thoughts into emotions, is one labor more encumbent on him as well as on any modern poet. With this image of the progress of the Goethean spirit, Schiller clarifies for himself their mutual relationship and the possibility for an encounter between Goethe's intuitive spirit and the speculative one expressed through himself. But he sees the decisive result in the "marvelous agreement of their philosophical instinct with the purest results of speculative reason." For it is his opinion that the many-sidedness of Goethe's investigation of nature is so highly gifted that his spirit, like that of the classical artist, always brings forth individuals, yet ever endowed with the character of the type. And in this he is in agreement with the speculative spirit of the genius who, in turn, creates only types, yet endowed with the possibility of life. Schiller obviously affirms the validity of the Goethean spirit. But from his own point of view and this by no means implies a limitation of the truth of philosophical speculation, that is, of Kantian philosophy. His interpretation of Goethe by the practical correspondence of the speculative and intuitive spirit is rather a complete justification of what is known by way of speculation. The genius who creates unconsciously precisely confirms the philosophical truth of self-consciousness. So Kant is speaking the truth—even about Goethe.

The decisive question, however, is whether Schiller is right on this point. Is Goethe's philosophical stance one of instinct? Is his philosophy really nothing more than unconscious Idealism? Goethe himself seems to give an affirmative answer. Even if at the beginning—in his answer to Schiller's first important letter—he discovers in himself "a kind of darkness and hesitation" that resists a self-clarification offered to him in the garb of philosophy, yet there is no doubt that gradually he is ready to see himself through the eyes of Schiller as expressed in Kantian terms. This is confirmed by Goethe shortly before his death when, in a letter to Councillor Schultz of 18 September 1831, he writes, "I am grateful to the critical and idealist

philosophy for drawing my attention to myself. That is a tremendous gain." The new epoch into which Schiller leads him is characterized by his passage into a refined, more independent, self-conscious condition. The viewpoint represented by Schiller is a "higher" viewpoint, apparently because it is the standpoint of a higher consciousness. Indeed, we see Goethe grow more and more accustomed to using the language of Kant and Schiller and ridding himself of that "rigid realism." Gradually he finds it natural to speak of the idea as something higher, even to designate his "primeval phenomenon" as an idea. So now he has gone over completely to the side of Schiller, against whose assertion "that is an idea" he had previously so objected. And two decades later, in the year 1817, the only period of his later life in which there is again evidence of a prolonged preoccupation with Kantian philosophy, he himself speaks of the hiatus, the abyss, between idea and experience, to transcend which all our strength struggles in vain, and expressly agrees with the philosopher who maintains that no idea is ever fully congruent with experience. And he is content if the latter will admit that idea and experience can be, yes, must be, analogous.

On the other hand of course, his disinclination toward the tendency of philosophy to pull things asunder remains the dominant motif in all his statements on the matter. For that reason, it has been possible to represent Goethe's metaphysics as a world-view, dynamic, unitary, oriented along the lines of morphology, quite in contrast to Kantian philosophy that proceeds from the atomistic assumptions of classical mechanics.² In addition to this, after death severed Schiller's ten-year alliance with Goethe, we notice a subsiding of his effort in philosophy, indeed, even an ever-stronger tendency to return to his previous reservation. Even the statements of a previous period cited earlier are not nearly so unreserved as they sound when taken out of their context. Thus, the continuation of the letter, which had spoken of the achievement of Kantian philosophy as a tremendous gain, continues as follows: "We, as well as common sense, have to admit that it never arrives at its object, so that we could fully enjoy life in our unchangeable relation to it." That certainly no longer sounds Kantian, but once again very Goethean. The question is now: if we consider these and similar statements from Goethe's later period (and it is precisely from the later period that we hear many a cross word on the subject of philosophy), what does this desertion mean?

Actually a turning away from philosophy? An ever more-conscious realization of his own peculiar way of viewing things, seeing everywhere totalities and forms? And so, the return of Goethe the artist to himself? Or does it really mean a change in philosophy itself? For is not this turning away from critical philosophy the very same as that accomplished by German Idealistic thought during the age of Goethe?

This actually seems to be the case. First of all, there is the essay on "intuitive judgment." It resumes the discussion with a passage from Kant's *Critique of Judgment* where Kant is exploring the idea of an intuitive understanding that moves from the intuition of a totality as such down to the individual. By means of this counterimage of a divine, archetypal understanding, Kant wishes to demonstrate the discursive quality of human understanding, its need for images. Goethe, of course, sees in this his own basically archetypal method. Again, that is certainly characteristic for Goethe's Kant studies pursued for "home use." But Goethe has no intention here of interceding in favor of the intellectual intuition of later Idealism. At any rate, what Goethe accepted from Kant shows a natural affinity with the teaching of Schelling. Goethe, too, belonged to those who believe more in nature than in freedom. The derivation of Fichte's entire doctrine of science from the consciousness of freedom of absolute action was of no use to Goethe. He could have no sympathy with a thinker for whom nature was only "grist for the exercise of duty." For it was precisely Goethe who as far as possible sought to treat freedom and even our very selves as nature. Characteristic for this opposition is Goethe's marginal note on Fichte's statement "nature is independent of us (the non-I)," which reads: "but still bound to us, for we are its living parts." What separates Goethe so much from Fichte is precisely what relates him to the later idealist thinkers; for this is exactly the point at which Schelling and Hegel began to develop their philosophies, as well as the moment of their most extreme difference with Fichte: to comprehend the essence of nature as united with that of the spirit and of self-consciousness.

This tendency finds expression already in the very name of the philosophy of identity. *Identity* does not mean tautological sameness, but rather the inseparable belonging together of the real and the ideal, as it is conceived in the principle of intellectual intuition. Its supreme mode of objectification lies in the work of art that is just as real as it is ideal, just as objective as subjective. Accordingly,

to philosophize for Schelling is necessarily to pass over into the originality of artistic genius. Already this is close to Goethe, who of course never intended to separate the subjective and the objective from one another and who always meant by nature that unity of life which combines the subjective with the objective. Indeed, we might compare the ambitious life-plan for Goethe's investigation of nature described for us by Schiller. "From the simple organization you rise step by step up to one of greater complication in order finally to develop genetically the most complicated of all, man, out of the materials of the whole structure of nature." Even this guiding principle of Goethe's work has a corresponding moment in the philosophy of Schelling and Hegel, who saw their great task in having the ideality of spirit and freedom proceed out of the reality of nature.

Schelling called this his *physical proof for Idealism*, the way in which formative nature intensifies from power to ever-higher power until finally at its most intense the lightening flash of freedom strikes, at which point the highest potency of nature appears. In the light of this freedom, self-consciousness has as its object everything that has being. In this way, the standpoint of freedom is reconciled with the standpoint of nature, the objective with the subjective, Goethe with critical philosophy.

While the restless Schelling wanders on beyond this point and loses himself in the theosophical hinterlands of the problem of freedom (where Goethe no longer follows him), Goethe is able to find in Hegel's philosophy the true, and for him more congenial, elaboration of the identity of the real and ideal. "Wherever object and subject make contact, there is life. When Hegel places his philosophy of identity right into the center between object and subject and holds this position, then he earns our praise." Hegel himself understood his task to be an execution of this mediation, of raising substance to the level of subject and thus making the subject substantial. In particular, it was his task to take up the whole substantial breadth of historical life into the subject. It is significant that, on the way to this goal of raising the consciousness of the world to the level of the consciousness of the self, Goethe's way of investigating nature appeared as the highest type of this world-consciousness. With respect to its internal concretion, it transcends physics as the science of mathematical law, because it "lays hold of form in the very process of its living development." Beyond the realm of the unchangeable, the laws of mechanical nature, we discover the genuine infinity of life.

By rising to the level of the self-conscious, "the spirit enters into its native kingdom of truth."

So Hegel actually resolved Goethe philosophically into himself; and the fact that Goethe on the whole does not, for his part, respond to Hegel's philosophy is no argument against this. "I have no intention of learning anything further about Hegel's philosophy..." At times he undoubtedly misunderstands because of his impatience, like for example his indignation at Hegel's formulation in the *Phenomenology of Mind* that the blossom "refutes" the bud as the fruit "refutes" the blossom. The radical energy of proof in Hegel's dialectic could seem only suspect to him, but this could also be due to the reservation of his philosophical instinct in the sense in which Schiller interpreted Goethe for himself. Indeed, this is quite how Hegel saw it; but that means that he repeated Schiller's interpretation of Goethe when he wrote to the poet on April 24, 1825, "For when I survey the progress of my spiritual development, I see you everywhere entangled in it, and would like to call myself one of your sons. My interior life has received from you nourishment for the strength I need to resist abstraction and has corrected its course by using your works as beacons." Goethe's dynamic, unitary way of thinking is as far beyond analytic rationalism as Hegel's speculative thought and concrete concept. Thus in the plastic figures of Goethe, Hegel can catch sight of a genuine concretion of the spirit, and he saw as the mission of his life the interpreting of this in philosophical terms, that is, in concepts. Thereby he too asserts his own truth of speculative reason and, above the immediacy of living intuition, he places the infinite mediation of the concept, and above poetry and religion, as the highest act of the spirit, self-comprehending philosophy.

This then appears to be the result of our biographical wandering along the path of Goethe's spiritual development. Goethe's reservations about philosophy, so often emphasized and practiced, has proven to be not even half the truth. On the contrary, his philosophical history appears as the literary model of what was thought by the thinkers of his age, first Schiller, later Schelling and Hegel. Have we then—we must ask—in the philosophy of German Idealism (particularly in the rise from subjective to objective and absolute Idealism) the true philosophy of Goethe?

With this decisive question, our investigation has again taken a quite new direction. Not only are we going to separate ourselves

from the endeavor, so dear to our fathers, of bringing Goethe and Kant into agreement. We also do not consider it sufficient to recognize Goethe's philosophy in its actual affinity with the objective Idealism of Schelling and Hegel. Rather, we must now ask ourselves whether it is an accidental and superficial fact that Goethe, who was always glad to see any possible agreement, did not enthusiastically go along with the philosophical speculation of his contemporaries. Is that really nothing more than the expression of his own literary way of thinking that out of love for sensual intuition, shied away from the path of conceptualization. Or rather, is there present in his own way of thinking a philosophical truth that rises beyond the circle of Idealistic thought, not only beyond Kant, but even beyond Hegel? Is Goethe perhaps not only the contemporary and literary forerunner of Idealism, but perhaps its first critic?

To answer this question we have been prepared by a whole century of the criticism of Idealism, particularly since Nietzsche's attack on Platonism, that is, on the entire tradition of the Greek-Christian philosophy of ideas and metaphysics, has penetrated the general philosophical consciousness. Because of this, we now occupy a position where we can see Goethe's retreat from metaphysics, indeed his whole reservation toward speculative philosophy, with quite different eyes. We no longer see in this the artist concerned about the innocence of his creative powers, avoiding reflection as much as possible. Rather, we see in this reservation precisely the whole other half of the truth. We recognize in him—long before Nietzsche—a critic of the notion of the concept in philosophical, that is, metaphysical, truth.

The first bit of insight that leads us in this direction is the fact that Goethe himself saw, in his basically creative relation with the world, not the particularity of his poetic individuality, but rather the generality of all human existence. The artist is simply the human being raised to a higher power. The human being is what he is because of his constant effect on the world and of his experience of its countereffect on himself. Man conquers himself not in any detached freedom of standing over against the world, but rather in his daily intercourse with the world, in allowing himself to participate in its conditionedness. Only by doing so does he attain the proper attitude for the act of knowing. It is the pupil of Herder who sees our knowledge of the world not as a possession and a source of information, but rather as an experiencing and an enjoying; but that means

also as a productive answer of the human being to the world, an answer flowing from the totality of human nature.

A second element is also involved here. If Goethe tries to protect himself from the pitfalls of philosophical speculation, then he is not only following an instinct for what is most suitable for his own type; he sees in this reservation what is the proper and warranted attitude for the human being as such. But that means that against the whole of the philosophical tradition and its idea of truth he is opposing his own claim to truth. With the strangely relaxed attitude of the precursor, Goethe again points in the same direction in which Nietzsche pursued his intense criticism of Platonism, and so moves close to the beginnings of philosophy in the tragic age of the Greeks, just as Nietzsche did later. He too saw what Nietzsche saw: that the plastic nature of the ancient thinkers, the complete coincidence of life and theory, is foreign to modern times; and on that realization he bases his own conscious attitude to philosophy. In a conversation reported by Falk, he says, "Philosophers, for their part, can offer us only the forms of life. Whether these are suitable for us or not; whether we, given our disposition and abilities, are in a position to furnish them with the requisite content or not, is our affair. We have to examine ourselves and check most carefully what we take into ourselves from outside, just as we do with food. Otherwise, we will either perish from philosophy or philosophy from us."

This statement is very informative. It shows how clearly conscious Goethe was of the one-sided emphasis on reason in the education of the preceding centuries. It was precisely the Protestant centuries in their concern for the proper faith and correct dogma that gave to modern philosophical speculation its exaggerated penchant for abstraction. From his earliest years, Goethe was always on guard against such aberration. Goethe always rebelled against any dogmatic rigidity. He did not really care whether he was called *pantheist*, *Christian*, or *atheist*, "because no one really knows what all these things actually mean." With such an attitude, and without even knowing it, he is moving close to the origin of philosophy among the Greeks. In any case, it is no mere accident, but a real affinity that, in the previous quotation, reminds us of the Platonic Socrates.

Goethe's attitude toward modern philosophy was essentially the same as Plato's opposition to the notion of *paideia* cultivated by the Sophists. Plato saw the essential educational mission of Socrates in leading his interlocutors away from the noncommittal versatility

of Sophistic education to a real concern for the soul. In the marvelous dialogue between Socrates (in the Platonic *Protagoras*) and the youth who, in his thirst for knowledge, would like to be introduced into the circle at Protagoras's house, Socrates awakens the young man to the dangers lying in an unexamined reception of Sophistic teachings into his soul. For this purpose, he used here the very same image that Goethe uses in the previous quotation: food for the body is not selected without a proper inspection; how much more does the food of the soul need the same caution and scrutinizing. The task of philosophy, which has the burden of carrying out this examination, is similar to that of the physician who, when faced with the seductions of the culinary art, must determine what is proper nourishment for the body. In this sense, Socrates is the true physician of the soul and the only genuine teacher of philosophy, because he alone understands how, through the art of dialogue, dialectically to undermine the prejudices of early training. Plato actually based the dialectical method in philosophy on this view of Socrates, the dialectician. It was his opinion that philosophy could attain a proper consciousness of itself only by opposing the educational drivel of the Sophists.

Now in the same way, Goethe also opposes the abstract speculation of his age, and precisely this unencumbered self-assuredness in his opposition to the dogmatism of the modern period confers on him an aura of antiquity. In the classical sense, he too is a philosopher and is closer to the origins than his great contemporaries in philosophy. For he does not share the faith of his age in the autonomy of reason—he sees its human conditionedness.

It is, however, decisive that he does not see this conditionedness as a barrier to the attainment of truth; rather, he understands it as the human path to wisdom. We can then see that in his opposition to philosophy there lies concealed a genuine philosophical discovery of his own, one that is most clearly revealed in his conception of truth. At this moment he is fundamentally opposed to the traditional conception of *objective* truth, and this becomes part of a movement that leads from Herder through Nietzsche right up to the present time and the classical model of which is the concrete dialectic of Socrates. On the other hand, what Goethe is talking about here is not that revolt of skepticism that from time immemorial has been nourished by animosity against the dogmaticism of academic phi-

losophy. It is, rather, the will to preserve his own firm ground of truth. The constant drive to be productive, which Goethe was aware of as the rich endowment of his genial nature, is also characteristic of all men's common experience of the world. The world is actually there only for the one who acts on the world and, in turn, suffers the world's reaction. Truth rests on a living relationship. Hence, it is necessarily linked with error, in which this vital relationship is realized. The invigoration of one's activity, the release and intensification of one's vital powers, being productive both in animating and annihilating, these are the standards by which truth is measured. "Only that which is fruitful is also true." This well-known word of Goethe does not, however, dissolve truth into utility as is the case in modern pragmatism: for fruitfulness is simply the enhancement of life itself in which man's experience of the world takes shape. It is simply the reverse side of an objectivity that was recognized by Goethe as one of his own essential characteristics. For

Is not the essence of nature
In the human heart?