

GOETHE CENTENARY LECTURES

I

GOETHE AND PHILOSOPHY

A GREAT poem is by rights its own message and interpretation, both: were it possible to translate it adequately into prose, the perfect paraphrase would prove the poem imperfect. And yet all great poetry is a message which we are bound to interpret. Whether we regard poetry as a criticism of life or as its expression, surely all true poetic utterance is a response to a significant view of life. In reading a great poem we share in a great vision in which nature may be disclosing her inmost soul, as it discloses its shell and outer vesture in an epoch-making scientific experiment. When Dante sings, in the last line of the *Divine Comedy*, of "The Love which moves the sun and the other stars", he may in truth be quite as revealing as Newton or Einstein. In the one case as in the other we should heed the Evangelist's warning, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" So Dante again, with no mean estimate of his art, challenges our understanding:

O ye who have sound intellects, observe
The doctrine that is here, hiding itself
Beneath the veil of the unwonted verses!

I shall not with naïve conceit propose in this single hour's discourse to tell Goethe's secret, lest you with unkind accuracy conclude that I have loyally kept the secret. My task is a more modest survey, and still too taxing I fear. I have sought to suggest it in the title I have chosen: not "The Philosophy of Goethe", nor even "The Philosophy in

Goethe", nor yet merely "Goethe and the Philosophers", but rather something of all these three together: so I have called it "Goethe and Philosophy", a topic half-biographical, half-analytic and interpretative, and not too gossipy withal. In brief, this is our question today: What is Goethe's view of nature and of human nature as we find it developed and expressed in his works? And furthermore, what are Goethe's philosophical kinships, and how does he take his rank and stand with the great thinkers of the past?

Goethe himself disclaimed any attachment to technical philosophy. He has thought, he tells us, but he has not spent his time thinking about thought: he has kept free from philosophical entanglements. We should not be misled by such words, nor yet by the scorn which Goethe's Mephistopheles pours on logic and metaphysics:

Truly the fabric of mental fleece
 Resembles a weaver's masterpiece,
 Where a thousand threads one treadle throws,
 Where fly the shuttles hither and thither,
 Unseen the threads are knit together,
 And an infinite combination grows.
 Then, the philosopher steps in
 And shows, no otherwise it could have been:
 The first was so, the second so,
 Therefore the third and fourth are so;
 Were not the first and second, then
 The third and fourth had never been.
 The scholars are everywhere believers,
 But never succeed in being weavers.

Goethe disdained pedantry of whatever sort, and the philosophical pedant impressed him as hopelessly arid. "What should the English and French think of the language of our philosophers, when we Germans ourselves cannot understand it?" And again he says: "Before I write a syllable on metaphysics, I must first better settle my physics." But he did not on that account disdain or dismiss real philosophy. Without scholastic or pedantic commitments, we find him

articulating a philosophy of life for which he claims the prime merit of naturalness, of sanity.

Goethe's view of life is original, not in that it is novel but in that it is thoroughly his own. It is not a part of his learning but of his experience. Thus he responds to other thinkers, assimilating or rejecting, but always remains himself, and the direction is his own. The dominant idea, aim, and touchstone of Goethe's thinking is his deep conviction of a living principle in nature, in the world without and in humanity. Goethe awoke very early to this sense of the vital unity of nature, and he never lost it. Even while still a child, believing in the God of his fathers, he yet sought to reach Him more directly through nature—sometimes in curious ways. Once he made an altar of a red-lacquered music-stand with a four-sided top like a pyramid; loaded it sacrificially with products of nature and set some incense aflame with a burning-glass at sunrise. This was his offering to the great nameless Spirit of Nature. The second time he tried it, however, his flame spread to the lacquered stand, and the boy did not venture further in his career as nature-priest. But his apotheosis of nature persisted as he grew up and, while his imagination was ravished by the Greek naturalistic pantheon and his conscience felt the need of moral response to a supreme personal deity, his intellect sought unity in all nature, and that unity living and divine. So later in life he wrote to Jacobi: "As a poet and artist I am polytheistic, as a naturalist I am pantheistic, and I am the one as decidedly as the other. Did I need a God for my personality, as a moral being, I should already be provided therewith." These are not incompatible views in his mind; they suggest rather the vast range of nature: her infinite variety, her all-pervading unity, and her divine responsiveness—all natural.

But it was chiefly the idea of the living, all-pervading unity of nature which possessed Goethe's mind. The vision of this unity as divine and perfect gave it a religious character. He could not tolerate the idea of a transcendent deity alien to the world:

What were a God, who from the outside stirred
So that the world around his finger whirred?
He from within the universe must move,
Nature in him, and him in nature prove.
Thus all that lives and moves within his bliss
Will ne'er his power and ne'er his spirit miss.

This cosmotheism is reflected also in Goethe's scientific thinking. His ideas of the metamorphosis of plants and animals; his notion of all plants as originally evolved out of one primal plant-form, of a living, directing activity in nature, not supernatural but itself nature's own process: these are but instances of his pantheistic naturalism. It expresses itself in rhapsodic nature-hymns, hylozoistic and almost mystical. Jakob Boehme, the German mystic of the Renaissance, had spoken of nature as "the book of God" and had said that in a meadow "one could see, smell, and taste God's power." To Goethe also nature is a living book, and he is convinced that he can read it: "Nature! We are encompassed and enfolded by her—incapable of emerging from her, and incapable of immersing ourselves more deeply in her. Unbidden and unwarned she picks us up in her whirling dance and sweeps us along until we drop, exhausted, in her arms. . . . She is ever changing and there is not a moment's pause in her. . . . Her pace is measured; her exceptions rare, her laws unalterable. . . . The unnatural itself is Nature. . . . Whatsoever is true and whatsoever is false, she has uttered it. All is her blame, all is her merit." As the life and spirit of a living being that is not superimposed upon its many members but permeates each

part, so is nature's unity. Nature is not a sum nor a heap; it is not fragmentary, but integral in each part:

Nature no kernel has, nor shell,
Her all in every part doth dwell.

To such a pantheist the fashionable French materialism of the day was unthinkable. For the emancipating work of the French Enlightenment, Goethe had words of high praise, and for Voltaire in particular; but the crass materialism in which it ended, impressed him as sterile. In his *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he writes of Holbach's *System of Nature*, the so-called Bible of eighteenth-century materialism: how it repelled him so that he could not comprehend its ruinous appeal to other minds. He rejected it, alien to his spirit—this account of the world in terms of mere matter and motion, frictions, contacts, collisions, masses and dissolution of masses, nothing more! "It seemed to us so gray, cimmerian, so deadly." In this resistance to what was spiritually dull in the French Enlightenment, Goethe took his rank with the men who were championing another, more humane ideal. The violent romantic rebellion of Storm and Stress certainly stirred the young Goethe; the longing for untrammelled freedom, the cult of the titanic, the impatience with any formal bonds, the disdain for tradition. But Goethe's ever-reliable sanity and saving-grace of humor were bound to lead him to that aspiring but serene activity which became increasingly characteristic of him as he matured.

With Herder, above all, Goethe was gaining a historical sense and the deep cultural insight that comes from alert tolerance. To Herder reality was history: culture, language, religion, institutions were the pulses and the pillars of the world. Goethe had too lively a sense for physical nature ever to go the whole way with Herder, but Herder's devout

humanism reinforced his own opposition to shallow mechanistic accounts of the world. That you can devise and test accurate mechanistic formulas of nature need not mean that you have really perceived the range and depth of its being. It may only show how much abstraction has been required to encase nature in a formula. You have squeezed the orange dry and so you have a precise disclosure of its sectors and joints and inner geometry. Goethe did not really need Herder to reveal nature to him as the matrix and the living scene of spirit; but Herder led him to perceive the reach and the roots of the spiritual realm, its order and its onward movement through history. So Goethe was enabled to go beyond Herder, to achieve a synthesis of Herder's humanism and of what passed for naturalism in the eighteenth century.

In this synthesis material nature was not merely material, nor mind a mere ripple or stirring episode in the Dead Sea of matter. But while firmly resisting the materialist, Goethe found equally unconvincing and uncongenial all philosophers who sought to find reality above nature and sat as it were in judgment on nature. So, against the uncomprehending view of nature from without and the arrogant-condescending view of it from above, Goethe saw a really true view of it from within, a view of nature entire and living. Ancient hylozoism, the conception of the whole material world as alive, engaged his imagination but was too naïve to hold his intellect. It was not until he came to Spinoza that Goethe found a kindred philosophy. It is interesting to observe that this year in which we commemorate the centenary of Goethe's death marks likewise the tercentenary of his philosophical master, for Baruch de Spinoza was born in Amsterdam just three hundred years ago, in 1632, the same year in which also John Locke, the leader of British empiricism, first saw the light of day.

Goethe's own mind was thoroughly prepared in attitude for Spinoza's monism. First introduced to it indirectly by a hostile criticism he had read and by the poor article in Bayle's *Dictionary*, Goethe was led in his twenties to Spinoza's own works and as a result found an acknowledged master. Late in life he told Eckermann "how well the views of this great thinker met the needs of his youth. He found in Spinoza his own self, and so could attach himself to the finest in Spinoza." This attachment was no passing devotion. In 1812 the sixty-three year old Goethe writes in his diary that for weeks on end Spinoza's *Ethics* had been his daily reading. It was his consolation, he said: "When I feel troubled I return to the *Ethics*."

What then did the young Goethe find in Spinoza? No one has answered this better than himself: "I found in the *Ethics* a sedative for my passions, and it seemed to unveil a clear, broad view over the material and moral world. But what especially riveted me to him was the boundless disinterestedness which shone forth in every sentence. That wonderful sentiment, 'He who truly loves God must not require God to love him in return', together with all the preliminary propositions on which it rests, and the consequences deduced from it, filled my mind. To be disinterested in everything, but most of all in love and friendship, was my highest desire, my maxim, my practice, so that saucy speech of Philine's, 'If I love thee, what is that to thee?' was spoken right out of my heart. Moreover it must not be forgotten here that the closest unions rest on contrasts. The all-equalizing calmness of Spinoza was in striking contrast with my all-disturbing activity; his mathematical method was the direct opposite of my poetic style of thought and feeling, and that very precision which was thought ill adapted to moral subjects made me his enthusiastic disciple, his most decided worshipper. Mind and heart, understand-

ing and sense, sought each other with eager affinity, binding together the most different natures."

Spinoza looked at the world as a unitary, infinite, eternal, self-determined Substance. Infinite in essence, it must have an infinitude of attributes or essential aspects, such as the two which we recognize, matter and mind. Reality is both extended and thinking; matter and mind are as it were two different versions of one world-order, therefore independent of each other but thoroughly parallel and corresponding to each other. All that exists is a state or modification of the one Reality; the ultimate ground, the tap-root of all things is one. Look at the world on the surface only and you see multiplicity, waywardness, disorder; but see deeper into the heart of things and you will perceive in them all the manifestation of the one ultimate Reality. The waves are all in and of the one ocean. This ocean of all being you may call God, or you may call it Nature: the two terms were synonymous to Spinoza. Reality then is not in the random particular, nor is it in some divine, transcendent Being, but things are real-in-God. Their true being is in Nature, and this integral being of them all is the true nature of each of them. They are what they are ultimately in God, and their nature is thus eternally determined. There is no waywardness in God and there can be none in the world in detail. This our intelligence may perceive; in recognition of the eternal world-order we are led from confused petulance to the serene clarity of reason. Infatuate upstart passion springs from confused perspective; as we understand a passion and see it in its place, as we learn to see things in relation, in their true nature, in their cosmic context, or as Spinoza puts it, under the pattern of eternity, our whole thought becomes possessed by the sense of the perfect Ultimate in which all things are. This serene yet exalted perfection

of rational insight Spinoza calls the intellectual love of God.

It was the idea of the perfect unity of this divine, determined order pervading all things which impressed Goethe. But he did not master all of Spinoza's apparatus, nor did he follow his master the whole way. To feel himself one with Mother Nature was a sublime experience, but Goethe insisted on feeling himself *one*. Spinoza's mind was filled with the divine Nature in which all things are; Goethe's mind contemplated poetically the perfection of all things that are thus one in the divine Nature. It was an important difference. As Gundolf has well expressed it, "What separated him from Spinoza was just his poetic sensibility, which worshipped the divine presence not only as the mathematical Spinoza worshipped it, in the laws of the universe, but in its forms and forces; his pantheism, unlike Spinoza's, was not mechanistic but vitalistic; God-Nature to him was not rational law, but visible, palpable, plastic figures."

This more poetic, or shall I say more dramatic, Spinozism of Goethe leads him to further divergence from his philosophical master. Goethe's pantheism is dramatic. It is not only the monism of the all-embracing world-*order*, but it is also or rather the monism of the all-pervading, self-revealing divine *activity*. It is the drama of nature in which all things are evolving and perfecting their respective rôles. So, it seems clear, Goethe was bound in his maturer thinking, while never losing his loyalty to Spinoza, to revise his master's doctrine radically, so as to gratify his keen poetic sense of the characters, the rôles, the living action of the drama of reality. Spinoza had been content to exhibit its unity, its order, its inevitable perfection. Goethe's philosophy is thus a Spinozism pulsating with life and concrete character.

It is evident, in terms of technical philosophical procedure, that here we have a movement from Spinoza, if not to, then toward Leibniz. Lessing, as Bielschowsky has pointed out, setting out from Leibniz, found his refuge and destiny in Spinoza's monism. Goethe, on the contrary, reached after a philosophical vindication of living individuality which nevertheless should not disrupt the organic unity of nature. So he turned to Leibniz' monads, or rather as he preferred to call them by an Aristotelian name, entelechies. The monads, the entelechies, are powers whose essence is activity and which are accordingly eternal. So Goethe does not depreciate finite personality but demands an immortal destiny for it. If my essence is in and of the universe, and this essence is characteristic ceaseless activity, then my extinction is ruled out; nature exacts that to which I aspire: my eternal unique rôle in the drama of reality. Speaking to Falk on his way back from Wieland's funeral, Goethe reasons: "All monads are by nature so indestructible that they cannot stop or lose their activity at the moment of their dissolution, but must continue it in the very same moment. Thus they only part from their old relations in order to enter at once into new ones. In this change all depends on the power of intention which resides in this or that monad." And again, later in his life in a conversation with Eckermann: "The conviction of our survival arises in me from the idea of activity; for if I am tirelessly active all my life, then Nature is in duty bound to assign me another form of existence, when the present one can no longer hold out for my spirit." Here the expression "in duty bound" should not mislead us. Goethe does not, like Kant, advocate a purely ethical view of immortality; his conclusion is a corollary from his natural science: the soul is essentially active and thus inextinguishable. Poetically expressed, an entelechy is

a distinctive actor in the drama of existence, and so cannot be spared: the continuance of the drama requires this individual participation. "I do not doubt our survival, for Nature cannot spare the entelechy." To have a hereafter, however, one must be active here; one must *have* a rôle. "To manifest oneself as a great entelechy in the hereafter, one must, of course, be one." Goethe would doubtless have seconded Browning, or rather Browning shared Goethe's idea: as, for instance, in *A Toccata of Galuppi's*:

The soul, doubtless, is immortal—where a soul can be discerned.

Thus Goethe's thought matured and found expression, to be sure not in isolation from the philosophical currents of his time, but yet without technical partisanship or systematic give-and-take. Jacobi's critical reaction stimulated Goethe to a more careful study of Spinoza, and on this account as well as on account of his friendship, Goethe's debt to him was very real; but Jacobi sought in vain to draw the poet into his own controversies over Lessing's Spinozism. To use Spinoza as a yeast for his own thinking was one thing; to engage in scholastic arguments over Spinoza's metaphysics, another. Goethe lived in the most intimate responsiveness to the life and spirit of his time, but he was not afflicted with what might be called intellectual journalism: that mental preoccupation with the factional polemics of the day which makes so much alleged philosophical writing little more than "occasional prose."

This freedom from intellectual partisanship was a part of Goethe's Olympian spirit. It may serve to explain his relation to his greatest contemporary. The year 1781, notable in the history of modern thought, marked the death of Lessing and the publication of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Two years later Kant published his *Prolegomena to*

Any Future Metaphysics. The revision of the *Critique* in its second edition, in 1787, already indicated the wide response and critical reaction it had aroused in Germany. Goethe does not seem to have sensed the epoch-making significance of that decade. While Germany was learning and discussing Kant, Goethe was re-reading his Spinoza and was steeping himself in the spirit of classical antiquity on his Italian trip. Kant's ethics, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, appeared in 1788, the year of Goethe's return from Italy to Weimar, and two years later Kant's aesthetics, the *Critique of Judgment*. All Germany was reading, thinking, teaching, disputing Kant, but, in spite of Jacobi's urging, Goethe had read but little of the Critical philosophy. It was really Schiller who first stimulated his serious interest in Kant. To do full justice to Schiller's intimate relation to Goethe, so important in the spiritual career of both men, demands more manifold attention than could be given to it in an essay dealing mainly with Goethe's relation to philosophy. It should not be understood that Schiller encouraged Goethe to read Kant: on the contrary, Schiller did not think that Kant could give him, Goethe, anything, and told him so. But Schiller himself was absorbed in Kantian studies, and Goethe's intimacy with Schiller made his participation in Schiller's own Kantian interests natural. The attitude of the two men towards Kant was very different. Schiller, as Lewes puts it, had really "hampered his genius by fixing on his Pegasus the leaden wings of Kant's philosophy." Goethe, as we have seen already, had the sources of his philosophy in himself. He did not go to Kant to find himself, but rather, Ludwig says, "in order to go out of himself, which he could do the more readily, as his nature, like scattered droplets of quicksilver, directly and easily united again." He read Kant's *Critiques* with no thought of taking

sides, but only anxious to see what Kant might have congenial to him. Goethe's studies, as his passions, were means to an ever fuller and more mature poetic utterance.

That real knowledge was neither in passive reception of sense-impressions from without, nor yet in purely rational notions, excogitated and as it were dictated to nature, was as clear to Goethe as to Kant, and in this critical reaction to both the empiricism and the rationalism of the Enlightenment, the two were one. I do not mean to say that Goethe had articulated this truth in his intellect, much less given it adequate statement—that was Kant's work; but it was just such an idea as was bound to arouse a kindred response from Goethe. "Thoughts without content are empty; perceptions without conceptions are blind." Sensation supplies the initial stuff of what we come to know, but knowledge is not the mere result of our sense-experience of nature: it is the understanding which makes nature possible. This Kantian insistence on the mind's integrity with nature in the subject-object world of experience was in line with Goethe's fundamental turn of thought.

But there was also a certain basic dualism in Kant's system which was bound to meet with a vigorous resistance from Goethe. Kant proceeded, in his account of the nature and genesis of experience, to advocate a doctrine of critical limitation. Knowledge was in and of experience: while there were no assignable limits to the world of experience—spatial, temporal, or causal—yet we know and can know only phenomena, things experienced; the things in themselves are beyond our reach. The world of our knowledge is the causally connected world in space and time. As knowing minds we are involved in this causal space-time nexus and cannot transcend the world of experience in detail so as to contemplate it in its totality. The transcendental ideas of

the Soul, the World-totality, God: these our reason may entertain as notions, but cannot validate.

While God, Freedom, and Immortality do not admit of theoretical proof, Kant nevertheless declares them in his ethics to be sovereign postulates of Practical Reason. Morality involves dutiful respect for categorical imperatives; it thus discloses man's character as passing beyond the merely physical. In his devotion to virtue man is engaged in an enterprise where both the achievement of his goal and its just recognition in the Realm of Ends demand immortal scope for his ideal activity and also God as universal Judge of Worth and Exemplar of Perfection.

There were thus in Kant a sceptical strain and also a new supernaturalism, or rather a new cleavage between the world of nature and the supreme ideals. Goethe opposed them both. God, World, Soul were no mere notions to him as they were in Kant's "Transcendental Dialectic." The World, Nature in its integral entirety, was more real to him than any detailed item of existence. He might be astray regarding the particular, but the Whole was indubitable to him, Nature supremely real and divine, the cosmos of active souls. Kant's great antithesis—of necessity and freedom, empirical and intelligible character, physical nature and Realm of Ends—could not be the final word of the Critical philosophy. Goethe saw that it served rather as a challenge to Kant's successors. Spirit and nature could not thus only be counterpoised: unless they were integrated in a higher synthesis, one or the other must prevail, in a one-sided philosophy.

And this synthesis, if attained, must be attained rationally and not merely by dogmatic or mystical fiat. Goethe writes in 1801 to Jacobi, who had been impressed precisely by the sceptical or rather phenomenological note in Kant's

philosophy: "How I stand toward philosophy, you can easily conceive. When it is preëminently bent on separating, I cannot get on with it, and can indeed say that it has often hurt me, in that it has disturbed me in my natural course. But when it unites, or rather, when it heightens and ensures our native sense of oneness with Nature, and transforms it into a deep, serene view, in whose everlasting union and separation we feel a divine life, . . . then I welcome it." Goethe was a poet, but he did not on that account exalt mystical feeling in philosophy. He would not follow the lure of Jacobi, who tried to cherish in his heart the pious treasures which he thought that his understanding rejected. Unlike Schiller's interpretation of Kant, Goethe could not accept the world of nature as mere appearance, from which he would have to rise to the world of values in order to reach reality in its true essence.

Fichte's exaltation of spirit at the expense of matter repelled Goethe as unnatural. Goethe's early interest in Fichte, whom he called to a professorship at Jena, was real, and they shared some very important ideas. Fichte's championship of unremitting endeavor as essential to the moral ideal was bound to appeal to Goethe; indeed it has been pointed out that this central idea in *Faust* was attained under Fichtean influence. But Goethe found Fichte's austerity distasteful, and even more Fichte's depreciation of art and his imperious virtues, and most of all his haughty dismissal of nature as a mere sounding-board for the Fichtean ego. Here were two different philosophical temperaments in spite of real similarities in ideas. Still Goethe would do him justice: after the satire on the young Fichteans in the scene of Mephistopheles and the Bachelor of Arts in the Second Part of *Faust*, the devil concludes on a tolerant note:

The must may foam absurdly in the barrel,
But still it turns at last to wine.

Schelling seemed to Goethe to be nearer the right path, or at any rate, Schelling was seeking the right path—to nature creative, living and entire, in which spirit was to be at home. But while Goethe was attracted by Schelling's portrayal of living, developing nature, he came to distrust the unrestraint of Schelling's philosophic imagination. Goethe was a philosophical poet; Schelling a poetical philosopher: an important difference.

Hegel's dialectic was not likely to attract a mind like Goethe's, but, as he came to know Hegel better, Goethe found him not alien but bending toward a similar goal, the active synthesis of spirit and nature. Goethe and Hegel shared the resistance to the romantic cult of pure, irresponsible feeling; in both is the Spinozistic exaltation of the unity of rational activity integrating intellection and sentiment; both reveal the profound influence of Herder and Lessing in the possession of a genuine historical sense, the sense of a world-process of significant on-going and fertile activity; of life not merely as movement but as a real journey, a quest, though an ever-expanding one; and a historical sense likewise of civilization, not as a dull random course of nameless masses nor as a romantic career of single heroes, but as genuine civilization: essentially social and multitudinous, yet engaging individuals in genuine personal activity: ever more real persons in an ever more real society. Hegel has been called by Berthelot the Goethe of philosophy. He sought to formulate in reasoned terms the conviction which Goethe's poetry uttered in the language of direct and intimate experience: the conviction of spirit as at home in nature, sap and fruition of the living tree of nature.

To Goethe this demand for living unity is no mere systematic exaction but a deep expression of his whole being, which he finds vindicated everywhere. The two-lobed leaf of the oriental gingo tree transplanted in his Weimar garden was to him a symbol of his own inmost life:

Do you not feel it in my poems,
Twofold and yet one am I!

"Twofold and yet one!" is just the point: the world discloses not bare identity of parts nor yet random and irreducible differences, but rather the living organic unity of diverse parts and elements. This entire philosophical problem, and also its solution, Goethe has stated in two packed lines:

To reach unto the infinite,
Distinguish first, but then unite!

Kant had done the former, the distinguishing, straightforwardly, and while he had not achieved the synthesis, he had emphasized the demand for it and ruled out some pretended solutions. Kant had beaten off interloping spirituality in nature under the guise of teleology and final causes, and on the other hand he had exposed the spurious systems of morality, hedonistic and sentimental. Kant had thus imposed the demand for a real synthesis. Goethe felt that he through his own nature pursued a similar course to Kant's. Especially did Goethe value Kant's aesthetics, not because of its detailed technical perfection or even adequacy, but because of the profound insight of its central idea. Just as Kant recognizes no final causes in nature, so likewise he admits no ulterior purpose in art. In the work of art the word has become flesh; the idea has gained sensible form and substance, and in the perfection of this embodiment has found its full self-realization. But this naturalness of art suggests to Goethe, if not an aesthetic view of all nature, at any rate

a sense of kinship between the two realms of spirit and nature. "A work of art should be treated as a work of nature, and a work of nature as a work of art; the worth of each self-evolved and immanent in itself." The great artist literally "holds the mirror to nature": in both nature and art the whole is living in each part; the idea is sensibly apparent; nature utters spirit.

Was this a deeper truth in Kant which Goethe already possessed, and did Schiller's words, that Kant had nothing to give to Goethe, mean, as Kühnemann understands them: Goethe did not need Kant's philosophy for he already had it and lived it? Was this the further function of art, to reveal to us nature herself as the cosmic artist, uttering her meaning in living forms from the lowest types of being clear up to man? And did not Kant find man's direct knowledge of the absolutely real in his recognition of the moral law, the categorical imperative? Virtue, the life of duty, is not merely a means to something ulterior, but is its own justification; man's own self-perfecting is the highest Ought; the achievement of personality, itself the supreme fruition of nature, is our supreme duty.

As moral agents we are free. We are not masters of what takes place or of what befalls us, but masters we can be and are of what each event in our life means to us. There is thus necessity in the event; Spinoza's determination is here incontestable; but the worth of the event is determined by our will's championship or rejection of it, in dutiful devotion to the moral ideal. So Siebeck points out the tragic instance of this in *Faust*: Gretchen's attitude while in prison. "The chain of circumstances has involved her in love, in sin; but the resolution to entrust her final fate to God's justice, whereby she is redeemed not only in appearance but really, springs out of the most personal depths of

her noble nature." To Goethe, unlike Kant, this view of freedom does not imply a supersensible realm, but rather reveals the incapacity of mere mechanism to do justice to the living reality of nature in all its vast range. Here again the difference between Goethe and Schiller is evident: Schiller, and Kant also, depreciate the sensible to exalt the spiritual and noumenal; Goethe resists this Christian tendency and, in a more pagan spirit of naturalism, views the sensuous, the moral, and the aesthetic as all integral in the normal fruition of man, the full harmony of his being.

So here is a philosophy that reads into Kant as it had read into or out of Spinoza, what itself demands and recognizes in man's spirit and in nature. Reality reveals the same fundamental character in living nature and in all true works of art and in the life of moral endeavor. These are but various versions of the one drama of nature. One should not in wholesale vagueness neglect the unique rôles of the characters in this drama, nor again should one seek the meaning of the drama beyond itself, that is, beyond nature. It is its own justification; its divinity is immanent; its beauty inherent; its virtue, in the dutiful activity itself.

Let us not, however, mistake this philosophy for a placid cult of nature. As in her own creation, so in art, so in moral effort, nature is inexhaustible. The perfect achievement of personality is an eternal task. In this sense, following Goethe's dramatic monism, we may now say, "The play is the thing," but as we say it, we recognize the tragic dignity that our life thus reveals. For Nature is inexhaustible, and art is long, and the moral enterprise never completely achieved. Already in 1774 the twenty-five year old Goethe, exalted by the sense of the nobility of tragic endeavor, had flung his challenge to the notion of infinite divine placidity, in his great poem *Prometheus*:

So didst thou think,
 I should weary of life,
 And fly to the desert,
 Because not all
 Blossoming dreams ripen?
 Here sit I and fashion
 Men in my image,
 A race to be like me,
 To suffer, to weep,
 To enjoy and rejoice,
 All disdainful of these.
 As I!

We may follow the lead of *Faust*: "In the beginning was the *Act*." In the beginning and all the way through: is not this the central thought of Goethe's masterwork? It is not the having achieved, it is the achieving that matters. Lessing's noble words come to mind: "Did the Almighty, holding in his right hand Truth, and in his left Search after Truth, deign to tender me the one I might prefer—in all humility, but without hesitation, I should request—Search after Truth." This finality of truth Goethe realized, that real truth was beyond finality and inexhaustible, that only in eternal perfectibility is real perfection of truth or of any other value. This is the conviction of the dying Faust:

Yes! to this thought I hold with firm persistence,
 The last result of wisdom stamps it true:
 He only earns his freedom and existence
 Who daily conquers them anew.

There is a great passage in *Wilhelm Meister*, which has been suggested by Siebeck as a motto for *Faust*: "Man is blessed only as by his own boundless striving he sets his own limits."

So Goethe teaches us, as I have tried to interpret him elsewhere¹: "The worth of human life, as Faust comes to know it, is not in fervid enjoyment nor yet in thrilled or placid contemplation of past attainment, but in noble en-

¹In the chapter "The Devil in Modern Poetry," in *The Nature of Evil* (New York, Macmillan, 1931).

deavor and high hazard. . . . Only this perception of the eternal worth of high endeavor can exalt the fleeting moment and seal it with eternal worth . . . an ideal forever real because never completely attained, and a grace forever blessing because never quite deserved." Here is the mystery and the marvel of the spiritual life: man reveals his limits but also his self-transcendence in aspiration. Man does not stake his fate on the external event, nor yet disdain it in its worship of some Supernature: but the event itself is pregnant with its own vaster meaning, ennobled and exalted by its own Beyond. So the Mystical Choir sings at the close of *Faust*:

The unattainable
Here grows to event. . . .

This sense, humble yet exalting, of the inexhaustible perfection with which we are yet one in principle: is not this the essence of piety and likewise the dynamic of all creative achievement? So Goethe declared: "Only religious men can be creative." And so again in his poem on *The Divine*:

Hail to the unknown
Higher presences
Whom we divine:
May man be like them,
And his acts teach us
To meet them in faith. . . .
But man can accomplish,—
Man alone,—the impossible;
He discriminates,
Chooses and judges;
To the fleeting moment
He gives duration.

So again at the end of *Iphigenia in Tauris*: Thoas hesitates before the noble decision. Iphigenia urges him:

For doing good, one needs no thinking over.
Thoas: Indeed so often good but leads to evil.
Iphigenia: Distrust alone the good to evil turns.

This then is the true Realm of Ends: in it nothing is final and conclusive, and again nothing is a mere means to some ulterior, final end, but each stage is justified in its own activity as fertile and creative present. Goethe heard in all nature what one far greater than Goethe had uttered in the language of religion: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Renan interpreted Goethe's conception of God as inexhaustible, creative perfectibility: "a Divinity ever being achieved by man's intelligent endeavor toward perfection, by the very trend or *nisus* of the universe." To Goethe this truth of man's inexhaustible career was not a mere doctrine to teach: he thought it, he sang it, he lived it out. For it has rightly been said that, great as was Goethe's work, his greatest masterpiece was his life. It was a life of rich and varied culture, the fullest expression of all the manifold energies, perceptions, emotions, and ideals of the modern spirit. But it was far from a perfect life, nor a contented life, nor scarcely happy. "I can affirm," he said in 1824, "that during the whole of my seventy-five years I have not had four weeks of genuine happiness. It is but the perpetual rolling of a rock that must be raised up again forever." This is Goethe in a depressed moment. I cite him here deliberately to gain balance in the portrayal of the man. Yet this is not the characteristic note, as Goethe's works witness. It was not pain that distressed Goethe, nor failure, nor frustration, but rather instability of effort, or the hazard of stagnation.

The gloom of young Arthur Schopenhauer was so intense as to cast a gray veil over the gay brilliance of Weimar's social life and to impress even benign sages like Wieland. But though Goethe was personally attached to Schopenhauer, the young pessimist's gloom and wails did not impress or upset Goethe's active serenity. Wiser in his judg-

ment was Spinoza, he thought, in his resolution not to abuse and ridicule the emotions and actions of men, but to understand them. So Goethe told Schopenhauer:

To what end should man strive on earth?
To know the world, not scorn its worth.

In response to Schopenhauer's request for a "sentiment" in his autograph album, Goethe, in memory of many friendly conversations, wrote the following concise judgment on the young man's pessimistic view of life:

The joy of thine own worth to know,
Worth to the world thou must bestow.

This couplet, needless to say, did not convert the philosopher of gloom; yet Schopenhauer valued it so highly that he tore out all the other leaves in his album and left only Goethe's page in its single dignity. These two couplets are of outstanding interest, summing up as they do Goethe's philosophy: its theoretical, naturalistic serenity and its practical, heroic fruitfulness. To these two may I, in closing, add a third, likewise a sage counsel to a young pessimist, to Adam von Doss, one of Schopenhauer's disciples: "The good Lord has indeed created the nut, but he has not also cracked it."

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