

# GOETHE'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

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Eleusis servat, quod ostendat revisentibus.

"Ich denke auch, die Behandlung ist gut; es ist Methode darin."

(To ECKERMANN, February 1, 1827.)

NOTHING makes the occupation with the great minds of the past more attractive than the fact that with the change in the whole situation of the present time, with the maturing of one's own personality, they appear in a new light and present themselves in rejuvenated shape. I had a curious experience of this kind, when it occurred to me during the investigation of some phenomenological problems, that Goethe, though ignorant of the name, had employed a definitely phenomenological method. In occupying myself now with the revealing of this fact, it will be my leading principle to understand Goethe through himself, and I shall try not to adapt his meanings to my own theories. This is a principle which many of the critics have transgressed, notably the author of the most thorough analysis yet undertaken of Goethe's *Urphänomen*.<sup>1</sup> I cannot start from this very able writer's premise that Goethe's *Urphänomen* is identical with the Platonic Idea, nor can I assume with her that his method was not empirical but idealistic, since it produced its object as an Idea. We must forget both Plato and the contrast of empiricism and idealism; for what Goethe meant by the *Urphänomen* can only be cleared up from the whole of his teaching concerning phenomena. What, then, was Goethe's phenomenological method?

We shall understand it best if we contrast it with other modes of procedure to which it is opposed. So far is Goethe from finding his starting-point in pure thought, and educing its object from it, that he scoffs at men who begin with a theory and only afterwards go on to examine experience. "Theories," he says, "are usually the rash utterances of an impatient intelligence, that would gladly be done with phenomena, and so puts in their place images, concepts, even words. One suspects, one even sees, that this is a mere makeshift; but are not passion and partisanship always lovers of makeshifts? And rightly so, since they need them so thoroughly."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elisabeth Rotten, *Goethes Urphänomen und die platonische Idee*. Giessen, 1913.

<sup>2</sup> *Goethes naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, ed. by Steiner, Vol. IV, Part 2, p. 376; referred to subsequently as St.

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“Theory as such is of no value, except in so far as it enables us to believe in the interconnection of the phenomena.”<sup>1</sup> The mind does not apprehend the essence of things, but it substitutes symbols, images, concepts, for reality, which in themselves are senseless if they do not refer to what is real. Only for him who is in possession of the phenomena is theory of value as revealing their connections.

Hypothesis, as the foundation of theoretical physics, as it was first developed by the atomists, falls under the same condemnation. “Hypotheses are lullabies with which the teacher soothes his pupils to sleep. The thoughtful and faithful observer grows increasingly conscious of his limitations, for he perceives that the more knowledge extends the more numerous are the problems that emerge.”<sup>2</sup> “To rid the human mind of an hypothesis that has unduly restricted it, forcing it to observe erroneously and to combine falsely, to muse instead of seeing, to sophisticate instead of judging, is already to render it an inestimable service. Henceforth it sees the phenomena with greater openness of mind, in other relations and interconnections, orders them after its own manner, and once more gets the chance to err after its own manner, a chance that is invaluable if it soon succeeds in perceiving its error.”<sup>3</sup> He recognizes, of course, that science cannot proceed without hypotheses, but he regards them as a scaffolding which should be taken down when the building is completed, and which must not be mistaken for the building itself. Newton’s “hypotheses non fingo” is repeated to ensure the mind’s freedom of aspects: “All hypotheses hinder the ἀναθεωρισμός, the reconsideration of the phenomena in question, their examination from all sides.”<sup>4</sup>

This examination from all sides is essential, because phenomena are inexhaustible, infinite; hence every mode of representation (*Vorstellungsart*)—and this includes theory, hypotheses, system—represents a limitation that is undesirable. It would, however, be a complete misunderstanding of Goethe to interpret him as wishing to dispense with all such modes of representation. On the contrary, he endorses Schiller’s remark<sup>5</sup> that “the natural sciences have hitherto erred in two directions: in confining nature within the limits of their theories, and in allowing objects to restrict the powers of thought.” This is not the indecision of weakness, of inability to realize himself and to reach the essence of things, but of strength, of the deep insight, that no one perspective, nor one man, but only the total perspectives of all mankind can suffice for the apprehension of truth. His remarks to Reinhold: “In the course of time every possible opinion presents itself to us, partly as productive, partly as historical,” and to

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 357.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 358.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup> *Works*, Weimar edition, Section II, Vol. 13, p. 441, referred to subsequently as W.A. II.

<sup>5</sup> In a letter dated January 12, 1798.

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Jacobi: "I for my part, considering the many different tendencies of my being, cannot be satisfied with one single mode of thought," define the universality of Goethe lying midway between the architectonical-creative universality of the great "uomo universale" of the Renaissance and Hegel's constructive-historical universalism, which apprehends every shape of nature and history as a moment in the one metaphysical process. It is, in other words, a universality of observation, and examination of things from all sides. It is in this freshness of outlook, this diversity of aspects, and inexhaustible wealth of observations that Goethe's greatness lies. No metaphysic, no system arises in this way. Goethe would emphatically repudiate both—but just as little does it end in a mere chaos of aphorisms; rather are all his utterances, as phases of one concentric world, supported by a single constructive law.<sup>1</sup>

Goethe's scepticism is directed against theory, against hypothesis and other modes of representation, against the proneness of weak minds to generalize rashly from a single observation. But its deeper significance first becomes apparent from his rejection of the quantitative method, for thereby it repudiates the standpoint of exact science in Europe since Pythagoras. In sharp opposition to the belief which, through the influence of Descartes, has become the ruling principle of modern thought, namely, that it is the task of science to substitute quantitative descriptions for qualitative ones, he puts the antithesis: "It is a false notion that a phrase or a mathematical formula can ever take the place of, or set aside, a phenomenon."<sup>2</sup> "A phenomenon that cannot be measured still remains a phenomenon."<sup>3</sup> This does not mean that the mathematical method is dispensed with. On the contrary, it is treated with the greatest respect; it is even extolled as the model of scientific method.<sup>4</sup> What is denied is simply its claim to be the *sole* instrument of scientific knowledge. The real motive of Goethe's opposition to it is his desire to preserve the phenomenal datum in its living, unanalysed concreteness, in its quality. The fundamental difference between Goethe's science and mathematical science is that it is qualitative, not quantitative science, that it leaves the qualities in themselves intact, that it does not reduce them to quantities. And should his science prove false in most of its assertions, it would still have its methodological significance in this regard. It is the presupposition of the mathematical view of the world that all possibilities of order must be merely of a formal nature. As against this Goethe's view rests on the implicit assumption that there are, besides the mathematical

<sup>1</sup> How near Goethe actually comes to Hegel's historical conception may be gathered from an interesting remark to Schiller, in a letter of January 24, 1798 (*Recl.*, Vol. II, p. 242).

<sup>2</sup> W.A. II, Vol. II, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Schiller, referred to above.

<sup>4</sup> W.A. II, Vol. II, p. 78.

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and logical orders, others grounded in the nature of the contents. At any rate, the place of Goethe's science on the "globus intellectualis" is only to be fixed after having recognized the need of a basic science of content.

It follows as a necessary consequence of this rejection of quantitative physics that Goethe's investigation cannot be a causal one, but must refuse to regard the causal principle as the ruling principle of order among phenomena. Not that he ignored the concept, as Emil du Bois-Reymond accused him of doing; indeed, he regarded it as "the most innate, most essential of notions." But he saw, as Schiller expressed it, that "with regard to relation it is the everlasting aim of Rationalism to ask for the causality of phenomena and to connect everything as cause and effect, a most commendable and necessary undertaking for science, but one that also may become pernicious through one-sidedness. I am referring here to your essay criticizing above all this abuse of the search for the causal determination of phenomena. Rationalism seems to fail here chiefly through the scantiness of its survey, which embraces only the length, not the breadth of nature."<sup>1</sup> It was Goethe's desire to survey nature in its breadth as well as in its length, and not to destroy the indivisible phenomenon by a false abstraction of the understanding, which treats as separate factors a cause and effect that actually constitute a single process. "Man in thinking errs particularly when inquiring after cause and effect; the two together constitute the indissoluble phenomenon. He who recognizes this is on the right path to effective action." "It is rightly said that the phenomenon is a consequence without a ground, an effect without a cause. It is hard for men to find causes and effects because they are so simple that they elude their view."<sup>2</sup> He associates himself here with the Greeks, who never spoke of causes or effects in their descriptions or reports, but simply presented the phenomenon itself.<sup>3</sup> If the predominance of the concepts of cause and function in modern European thought has resulted in the loss not merely of the *notion* of substance but of the substantiality of man himself, this is clearly an attempt to restore to man his heritage of substantial being. Hence the question here asked is not what are the causes, but *what are the conditions under which the phenomena appear*. Their sequences and antecedents, their recurrence in innumerable different circumstances, their sameness and their diversity, are observed and admitted, their determinations are recognized and determined again by the human mind.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter, dated January 19, 1798.

<sup>2</sup> St., Vol. IV, Part 2, p. 372.

<sup>3</sup> W.A. II, Vol. II, p. 370.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Erfahrung und Wissenschaft*. See Heynacher: *Goethe's Philosophie aus seinen Werken*, p. 159.

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This negative attitude, the refusal to begin with theory or hypothesis, term, concept, or mode of representation (*Vorstellungsart*), with number, mechanical motion, or causality, determines at the same time the positive direction of Goethe's inquiry.

(1) *His method is phenomenological, firstly, in starting with the phenomenon itself, i.e. with the empirical phenomenon as it is given in sense-perception, when, for example, we observe under certain determinate conditions the colours that appear on a white screen when the light is refracted through a prism. These empirical phenomena are in the first instance naïvely accepted, or are at least not subjected to critical reflection. The standpoint is thus definitely empirical, though it is better not to prejudge it by labelling it Empiricism, as Schiller did. It is not hellenic, nor mediaeval, but specifically modern. Goethe agrees with the Positivists in his demand that men shall confine themselves to the knowable and begin with as exact a description of the phenomena as possible, as he does also in his concept of truth, but he parts company with them in his desire to maintain the phenomena as they are, and not to resolve them into quantities or analyse them into their simplest elements ("simple ideas"), and notably in his refusal to give the central place to the concept of relation. In starting with the phenomenally given, he is associating himself with Kant, though also differing from him. Both insist that knowledge begins with experience, yet does not arise out of experience.<sup>1</sup> And it is evident that Goethe has in mind Kant's doctrine of the independent activity of mind over and above the given matter of sense, when he emphasizes the creative independent force of mental powers by which experience is ordered and formed. Yet the two differ essentially in detail. Kant begins with the chaos of sensations, out of which the mind constructs a world by its immanent principles of order. For Goethe, on the other hand, experience is no brute fact, but has already from the first an immanent order. The subject is not opposed to its object, for it is not yet distinguished from it. Goethe lives in the perceptually given, at a level at which the two are not yet separated. The process of knowing consists for him in a progressive clarification of this material, in which "every seeing (*Ansehen*) becomes an observing (*Betrachten*), every observing becomes a meditating (*Sinnen*), every meditating becomes a connecting (*Verknüpfen*), so that we may actually be said to theorize whenever we look at the world attentively."<sup>2</sup>*

The complex and difficult question "Goethe and Kant" cannot be solved in an incidental manner. But it is important to recognize that, despite their similar points of departure, the two move on entirely

<sup>1</sup> W.A. II, Vol. II, p. 49.

<sup>2</sup> *Vorwort zur Farbenlehre*, W.A. II, Vol. I, p. xii.

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different planes, have different aims, directions, and interests. The fact that after a notable alternation of approaches and recoils, Goethe finally rejects Kantianism, because it is not able to reach the object, indicates the real difference in their points of view. Goethe lives in devotion to objects; he seizes them, they possess him. What he says of Rahel, that she did not judge of objects, but seized hold of them, is more profoundly true of himself. To begin with the phenomenon means, for him, to begin at a level at which subject and object are one.

Goethe holds that men have so far neglected the nearest thing. This nearest factor he supposes to be the appearance of which we are ourselves aware at any moment, and of which we might demand that it should explain itself if we penetrated deeply into it. Colour, for example, has been overlooked as an elementary natural phenomenon. "Do not look for something behind the phenomena; they themselves are the doctrine." "The highest point of view would be to recognize that all fact is already theory. The blue of the heavens makes known to us the law of chromatics."<sup>1</sup> An attitude of deepest modesty is expressed in the words: "To be equal to objects in their whole breadth means learning; to penetrate their depth means discovering."<sup>2</sup> Never have phenomena been considered more seriously nor been perceived in greater abundance.

(2) *Goethe's method is phenomenological, secondly, in proceeding through phenomena.* This procedure follows a definite rule. Even its starting-point is not indifferent, for not every phenomenon affords a suitable beginning. "Phenomena are of no value unless they yield us a deeper or fuller insight into nature, or unless we can apply them to some use."<sup>3</sup> Their value lies in their fruitfulness, either for knowledge or for action. Here, however, the question arises: What makes the phenomenon reliable? To this Goethe replies: "*One phenomenon, one experiment, proves nothing; it is but a link in a longer chain, that has significance only in a whole. . . . No phenomenon is self-explanatory; only a larger number, viewed as a whole, methodically ordered, yield at least something that could rank as a theory.*"<sup>4</sup> By the production of an ordered sequence of phenomena what is subjective is eliminated, and what is objective is reached. *Goethe's phenomenological method is unique in this sense, that it is at the same time an experimental method, experiment being the link between subject and object, between concept and nature, between concept and Idea, and that it goes beyond the empirical phenomenon to the scientific.* Experiment is here understood as the deliberate repetition of experiences that we ourselves, or others before us, have had, "the restoring of phenomena that have occurred, either by chance or by design."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St., Vol. IV, Part 2, p. 376.

<sup>2</sup> W.A. II, Vol. 13, p. 444.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 368.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 375.

<sup>5</sup> Heynacher, p. 135.

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Experiment has thus to assume the function of guaranteeing the phenomena. The isolated information furnished by a single phenomenon is rendered certain by repetition.<sup>1</sup> Its function is not the verification of an hypothesis, but simply clarification, the bringing of data into evidence. It is the increasing (*Steigerung*) of observation, and, by overcoming the isolation of the single observation, it accomplishes the transition to a higher level of experience. Since all things in nature stand in a constant relation of reciprocal causation, every phenomenon being connected with innumerable others, the phenomena most closely related to it must be produced, in order to exhibit *one experience* in all its possible aspects. The same experiment must therefore be performed under as many varying conditions as possible. In accordance with Leibniz's famous principle of continuity, each phenomenon is linked to its nearest, and experiences of the first and second levels are thus ordered in series. The experiences of higher levels which result consist of several others. "They represent the formulae for innumerable single calculations."<sup>2</sup> Thus the opposite dangers of exaggerating the significance of a chance combination of elements, and of overlooking an essential connection are avoided. "That order is the best in which the single phenomena become, as it were, one large phenomenon, whose parts stand in reciprocal relation."<sup>3</sup> Spinoza's substantial monism (*Monosubstantialität*), itself a phase in the decline of monotheism, is transformed into a mono-phenomenalism, which demands that the multiplicity of phenomena be regarded so far as possible as *one* phenomenon.

This unification, being a concrete one, involves the difficult condition of exhaustiveness. "I became convinced from investigations in physics that it is the observer's first duty to discover every condition under which a phenomenon may occur, and to aim at the completeness of the phenomena, since they actually form a series, or rather are forced to interpenetrate, so that they will present themselves to his observation as an organization manifesting an inner life of its own."<sup>4</sup> The conditions under which the phenomena appear are thus varied, in order that the entire range of their appearances may be discovered. Since nature is one, the phenomena through which it presents itself to us must have an inner connection. An internal organization must become apparent among them, which therefore we do not introduce (it is not the understanding that gives laws to nature, as Kant asserts), but which we discover in it. "To exhibit the total range of the appearances is the only way of getting beyond partial explanations, of banishing them."<sup>5</sup> The elimination of partial explanations is not, however, the aim; it is merely a means

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> W.A. II, Vol. 11, pp. 43 and 28.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 48, 49.

<sup>5</sup> W.A. II, Vol. 5, Part 2, p. 9.

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to obtain the knowledge of what is constant. “The constancy of the phenomena is the one important thing; what we think about them is quite irrelevant.”<sup>1</sup>

This transition to the higher phenomenon through a complete survey of the appearances, revealing their constancy, is at the same time the advance to law. The tentative character of this advance will be apparent from the following fragment:

“Phenomenon	}	. . . .	test empirical
experience	}	. . . .	test theoretical
law	}	. . . .	test transcendental
cause	}	. . . .	

The way they succeed each other is the right one.”<sup>2</sup> Thus the empirical test is the medium of transition from phenomenon to law, or from observation to conception.

Goethe’s experiment derives its peculiar character, not from its method alone, but also from its connection with the human body. He believes that man, when he has the normal use of his senses, is the finest and most exact of physical instruments, and that the modern physicist has done a real injury to science in divorcing experiment from man, and attempting to explore nature only by artificial means. Here, however, a difficulty arises which we meet again at the last stage of the inquiry, viz., that the way lies through phenomena to a phenomenon of a higher order, but that this latter must be expressed in brief, easily comprehensible statements, comparable to those of mathematics.

(3) *Goethe’s method is phenomenological, thirdly, in ending with the phenomenon.* Here, too, it stands in the closest relation to modern thought. Its goal is pure experience. “Who can claim to have an inclination for pure experience? All men believe themselves to be doing what Bacon so strenuously urged, but who of them has succeeded?”<sup>3</sup> To reach the pure phenomenon is not easy, for it is not given, but is concealed by the various accidents of mental temper, organic conditions, atmosphere, light, temperature, etc.

To recapitulate, then, we have distinguished the following levels in the phenomenal: (1) The empirical phenomenon, which we all perceive in nature, and which is converted into (2) the scientific phenomenon, by means of experiments in which it is presented under circumstances and conditions different from those under which it

<sup>1</sup> W.A. II, Vol. 13, p. 444.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 454.

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was first observed, and in a more or less happy sequence. (3) The pure phenomenon is the final result of all experiences and experiments. This can never be isolated, but is revealed in a constant sequence of appearances. To present it the human mind gives definiteness to the empirically fluctuating, excludes the accidental, rejects the impure, unravels the confused, even discovers the unknown.<sup>1</sup> This is merely a clearer analysis of what we have already shown. The pure phenomenon is the purified, clarified, constant phenomenon that is apprehended by pure intuition.<sup>2</sup> Like the Hegelian Absolute, it lies at the end of the inquiry, not at the beginning. It is the final result of experience and of experiment. It lies beyond the external, empirical data, for it is that which appears in them, that which is revealed in a continuous series of appearances. It is the form that persists through the alternation of the species, constantly recurring, yet presenting a thousand variations. The relationship to Hegel is closer here than is apparent at first sight; for Goethe's pure phenomenon is also Idea. For him concept is a summary, but Idea is the product of experience. For both a mental process is comprehended in the Idea, for the one a perceptual, observational one, for the other a process that is at once historical and reflective. But the fundamental difference remains that for Hegel the movement (*Gang*) of reflection is the movement of the thing-in-itself. "Quantitatively," Schiller points out, "the pure phenomenon must include the totality of the instances, for it is what is constant in all of them." Qualitatively, we might add, it is the Idea.

Only at this stage is it possible to understand what is meant by the "*Urphänomen*." It is the pure phenomenon; yet not every pure phenomenon may assume this title, but only the purest. It is also referred to as the "basic phenomenon" (*Grundphänomen*), the "basic experience" (*Grunderfahrung*), or the "original experiment" (*Urversuch*). Its primary function is unification. An innumerable multitude of phenomena is embraced within its unity, and becomes apprehensible through this synthesis. "*Urphänomene*" are basic phenomena, "in which the manifold can be contemplated."<sup>3</sup>

Thus in being one and undivided they are simple. "We must learn to see that what we have seen and recognized in the most simple must also be supposed and believed in the complex. For the simple conceals itself in the manifold."<sup>4</sup> But the simple is not, as with Descartes, the result of analysis; it is what is apprehended in the simple glance of a purified perception. If experiment and the synthesis of a series of experiments in one fundamental experience are

<sup>1</sup> W.A. II, Vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> In this respect Goethe's theory is a theory of pure intuition, not of pure reason (like Kant's), or of pure knowledge (like Hermann Cohen's).

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Chr. v. Buddel.      <sup>4</sup> Letter to S. Boisserée, February 25, 1832.

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the means of guaranteeing experience itself, its warrant is not the *cogito* of Cartesian or Kantian rationalism, it is intuition (*Anschauung*)—additional evidence of the far-reaching divergence between Goethe and Kant. Their bases are entirely different. Kant could never have said: “It is blasphemy to talk of an optical illusion.”<sup>1</sup> “The senses do not deceive; it is judgment that deceives.”<sup>2</sup> “Man is adequately equipped for all his genuine earthly needs if he will trust his senses, and develop them in such a way that they continue to prove worthy of his confidence.” The basis of knowledge is thus trust in the senses, not, however, in experience as such, but only in the experience that survives the process of purification. The most certain is “that which recurs in the appearances again and again in uniform connection, thus indicating a constant rule.”<sup>3</sup>

Albeit the *Urphänomene* are said to fulfil these functions of unification, simplification, and validation *by virtue of being phenomena*, it will be clear that they thereby transcend the sphere of the merely phenomenal. The transition from the phenomenon to the *Urphänomen* has thus the following implications: (1) That “experience is only half of experience,” *i.e.* that he who desires to attain to knowledge cannot rest in one phenomenon.

(2) That such a transition must take place first of all *within the phenomenon itself*; it must reveal the connecting principles that are concealed within it, and require to be exhibited.

(3) That the free activity of mind is required to effect this transition, for nature does not reveal itself to an unintelligent stare, but only to a mind that is able to break through its surface appearance and penetrate to its depths.

(4) This transition can be effected because every phenomenon is more than a phenomenon.

*An appearance is always an appearance of something.* It is particularly necessary to be reminded of this to-day, when Positivism has divorced the appearance from its ground and has substantialized it. “Something appears” means that *something* comes upon the scene. This *something* is contained in what appears, but it is not exhausted by it. A man appears. The human entity that appears in this man, *qua* infinite, cannot be completely presented in any single appearance. Moreover, even such an appearance implies more than this one man, for it also represents a species of men, *e.g.* the miser. “Every existing thing is an analogue of all that exists.”

But what is it that appears in the appearances? In the first place, not things-in-themselves appear in them, for Goethe recognizes no independently subsisting things-in-themselves. Riemer has preserved an interesting communication,<sup>4</sup> pointing out that man can

<sup>1</sup> W.A. II, Vol. 5, Part 2, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> St., Vol. IV, Part 2, p. 349.

<sup>3</sup> W.A. II, Vol. 12, p. 106.

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never express the whole nature of anything. "To know nature he ought to be nature itself. What he is able to express of nature is always something specific, *i.e.* it is something real, something actual, namely, something in relation to himself. But what he expresses is not all that it is; it is not its whole nature. This may serve as an explanation, and concession for those who still speak of things-in-themselves. Although they can say nothing of things-in-themselves just because they *are* things-in-themselves, *i.e.* are out of relation to us and we to them, and because we recognize everything that we say to be our own mode of representation . . . it is evident that they at least agree with us that what man can predicate of things does not exhaust their nature, that they are not simply and solely what they are thus said to be, but much more, and much else. . . . In other words, things are infinite in their natures. Man in expressing the object is below and above it, man and God, reconciled in one nature. We should not speak of things-in-themselves, but rather of the One-in-Itself. For 'things' exist only from the human point of view, which posits a diversity and a multiplicity. All is actually only one, but who is able to speak of this One as It is in Itself?" Appearances are not appearances of things-in-themselves, because there are no such things: things are merely the fragments into which our human weakness breaks up reality, wrongly representing the infinite in this finite form.

The One-in-Itself is the centre of this world view. *Urphänomene* differ from ordinary phenomena in manifesting the One in a specific manner. In them the creative and synthesizing forces of the universe become apparent in an unusual way. This Theory of Ur-phenomena is so difficult, because the term covers many—at least seven—different meanings:

(1) The Ur-phenomenon is an appearance, for it appears, as an image, if not to the outer at least to the "inner eye."

(2) The Ur-phenomenon is the thing that appears (*das Erscheinende*), in so far as it does appear. If we take it, not in isolation, but in relation to the class of phenomena with which it is associated, it *appears in* these.

(3) The Ur-phenomenon is the thing that appears, in so far as it *cannot* appear, because it is infinite, and thus exceeds what can be included in a single appearance.

(4) The Ur-phenomenon is that which *becomes apparent*, *i.e.* it is that which is in transition to actual appearance, and thus connects the appearance with that which appears. The two factors just distinguished here coalesce. The term phenomenon thus receives a new meaning: it is that which appears (*das Erscheinende*), that which comes to appearance (*das in die Erscheinung Tretende*), which exhibits its nature, which reveals itself by itself (*das sich von sich*

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*selbst her Zeigende*). We might call this the Christological aspect of the phenomenon, for the Word made flesh has here become the Word made phenomenon. This becoming is both fact and symbol. "A symbol is the fact without being the fact, and yet the fact, an image, focussed in the mirror of the mind, yet identical with the object. How superior this is to allegory, which may, indeed, be ingenious, even witty, but is almost always rhetorical and conventional, and is always better the nearer it comes to being what we call a symbol."<sup>1</sup> "Everything can be understood only symbolically; there is always something more behind it."<sup>2</sup> "All our knowledge is symbolic. One thing is a symbol of another. The magnetic phenomenon is the symbol of the electrical; it is both, itself and a symbol of the other, just as colours are symbols, through their polarity, of the poles of electricity and of the magnet. So science has an artificial life, and is an extraordinary mixture of fact, symbol, and analogy."<sup>3</sup> Thus, paradoxically, fact and symbol coincide, yet do not coincide. It is in this sense that the Ur-phenomenon is an appearance in which the One-in-Itself appears, symbolically and actually.

(5) But there is also a subjective moment in the Ur-phenomenon, a specific attitude to reality. "What we call inventing or discovering in a higher sense is an important expression of an original feeling for truth, that has been developing for a long time in the depths, and issues as quick as lightning and unexpectedly in a fruitful discovery. It is a revelation, developing from within, that gives man a presentiment of his kinship with the Divine." This is precisely a definition of the Ur-phenomenon in its subjective aspect.

(6) Whilst the Ur-phenomenon embraces both the appearance and the thing that appears, it also includes the law of the appearance of that which was before invisible. Compare, *e.g.*, the statement: "What comes to appearance must divide in order to appear."

(7) Finally, the Ur-phenomena are also the laws of the appearances themselves. "What we become acquainted with in experience are for the most part instances which, upon a little examination, can be brought under general empirical canons. These may, in their turn, be subsumed under scientific headings, which have again a higher reference, by which we get a further insight into certain indispensable conditions of a thing's appearing. After that everything adapts itself by and by to higher rules and laws, which, however, are not revealed to the understanding by words and hypotheses, but likewise to intuition by phenomena. We call these Ur-phenomena, because nothing in the realm of appearance lies above them, yet they are of such a nature that we can descend from them, step by

<sup>1</sup> *Philostrats Gemälde*, 1818. W.A. I, Vol. 49, p. 142.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Chancellor von Müller, November 21, 1821.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Riemer, November 21, 1805.

step, as we had previously ascended, until we reach the commonest data of every-day experience."

This plurality of meanings of the Ur-phenomenon makes its relation to the Idea very difficult to determine. That the two are not identical is evident from the fact that there are a number of Ur-phenomena but only one Idea. Why only one Idea? Because there are no things-in-themselves, but only the One-in-Itself. It is possible for Goethe to conceive the Idea as one, because he has the inestimable privilege to find the true, the beautiful, the good, and the Holy coincident, their domains being all subject to the same formal principle, their spheres concentric. The one Idea means nothing else than the unity of this formal principle. To ask what more it is is meaningless. There is no answer to this. If, however, everything, which we perceive, is a manifestation of the Idea, all perishable things are reduced to symbols. In this sphere of perishable beings the Ur-phenomena represent the eternal, revealing the inner relations of nature, of man, and of God. "The understanding cannot reach to this height; a man must be able to rise to the highest plane of reason in order to touch the Divine, which reveals Itself in Ur-phenomena, physical and moral, behind which it dwells, and which proceed from It."<sup>1</sup>

But it is also true that, in another sense, the Ur-phenomenon is the Idea. It is the Idea immanent and active in the appearance, the creative central point, in which man, nature, and God are united. In it as a perceived order we become aware of the internal relationship of phenomena to each other, to the creative mind of man, and to God. With this Ur-phenomenon, as the ultimate object of knowledge, Goethe's inquiry after truth is satisfied.

*We have seen that his method is genuinely phenomenological. It begins with phenomena, proceeds through them, and ends with them, returning at the last from the Ur-phenomena to the particulars whose claims have not at any point been abrogated.* This method is a personal achievement in the double sense that it issues from Goethe's own personality,<sup>2</sup> and that it reacts upon it in a manner that it would need a separate inquiry to demonstrate.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> To Eckermann, February 13, 1829.

<sup>2</sup> "Appearances are not independent of the observer; they are all interwoven and entangled in his individuality" (*Maximen und Reflexionen*, 1224, published by Hecker).

<sup>3</sup> "To grasp the phenomena, to fix them to experiments, to arrange the experiences and know the possible modes of representation of them—the first as attentively, the second as accurately, the third as exhaustively as possible, and the last with sufficient many-sidedness—demands a moulding of a man's poor Ego, a transformation so great that I never should have believed it possible" (*Correspondence between Goethe and F. H. Jacobi*, 1846, p. 198).

## PHILOSOPHY

Although the present school of phenomenologists may have opened our eyes for the first time to Goethe's phenomenology, we must not overlook the fact that it differs fundamentally from Husserl's doctrine upon the following points:

(1) It is not, like Husserl's, a purely philosophical method, aiming at the discovery of ultimate truth, but operates at the level of science, or, more accurately, on a level between that of science and philosophy.

(2) It does not begin, therefore, with a "transcendental reduction," *i.e.* it does not annihilate the world, nor bracket it and its assumptions, nor does it desert the sphere of concrete consciousness in order to construct its system upon this plane. It is neither critical nor sceptical, but accepts phenomena naïvely, at their face value.

(3) Nor does it perform any "eidetic reduction," proceeding from that which is directly perceived to its essence. It does not ask what is the essence of colour, the essence of red, etc. It even denies that such questions have any meaning. (Goethe considers it nonsense to talk of the "essence of light.") Nevertheless it is true, as we have seen, that it reaches essences by its own route, but this route lies, or *should* from its natural tendency lie, in the realm of the phenomenal itself.

(4) Contrasted with Husserl's, this route is the route of the scientific investigator, who uncompromisingly rejects Husserl's transition from the particular to the universal, insisting upon experiment as the medium through which the subjective must attain objectivity.

(5) The law that is reached by this method is regarded, at least in its earlier stages, as hypothetical; it is not, as with Husserl, an absolute norm to which all subsequent experience must conform.

(6) As against this, the principles finally attained are regarded as having metaphysical validity, since in them the Godhead is revealed, whereas Husserl claims no ontological significance for his principles.

(7) Husserl's principles are formal; Goethe's have reference to content, and can never be completely resolved into relations of pure form.

Apart from these important differences, and from the fact that Husserl's phenomenology is a search for absolute truths and for a *mathesis universalis* encompassing the entire realm of the possible, whereas Goethe's is an investigation of the phenomenally given world, in its multiplicity and its unity, the two methods exhibit a certain community of character. For it is the endeavour of both to preserve the qualitative aspect of things from dissolution into the quantitative, and to discover its specific character.

To make clear the relation of Goethe's phenomenology to the Hegelian, and its divergence also from this, would demand an

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analysis of his phenomenology of nature which must be reserved for a later inquiry.

Goethe's method has clearly certain material defects that we have no wish to conceal. It does not reach the level of precise concepts. Yet all knowledge is a knowledge of concepts. If it is his view that the system of laws underlying appearances can be immediately perceived, this is interesting as implying the denial of an abstract order of thought and hinting at a structural (*gestalthaft*) order. If, however, this leads him to regard ontological connexions as objects of direct intuition or of "intuitive judgment" (*anschauliche Urteils-kraft*), whereas they are actually objects of understanding, which follows only the path of perception, he is unwarrantably restricting their range. It is never possible to decide from intuition whether an ontological connexion exists or not; and what he designates an *Ur-phenomenon* on the ground of direct perception is often extremely arbitrary. Thus the fascinating concept of the *Ur-phenomenon*, with the diverse meanings that we have enumerated, actually does more to conceal the real problems at issue than to solve them. It involves the problem of a structural order immanent in the phenomena, which cannot be apprehended by the processes of the old logic, but which plays an important rôle in the domain of living things—a problem that has lately become crucial through the influence of Wertheimer's *Gestalttheorie*. It also raises the problem of an order of content, *i.e.* the question as to the existence of uniform connexions that are not of a formal nature, or orders of co-existence, concomitance, the conjunction of qualitative elements, constituting peculiar structure of their own. Lastly, there lurks behind it the question of the laws which everything that is to appear must obey. If all these questions are carefully distinguished, the apparently purely perceptual character of the *Ur-phenomenon* vanishes.

Nevertheless, I believe that Goethe's phenomenology—as an example of a pre-philosophical phenomenological analysis—may have some real value for the present situation, for an age whose watchword is "the return to the concrete," for the transition from Husserl's abstract phenomenology to the concrete phenomenology which will be needed to prepare the ground for the reformation of the philosophical problems. Heidegger tried to effect this transition, but has unjustifiably and arbitrarily restricted its domain, leading into a *cul de sac*, so that the endeavour ought to be made once more on a wider and firmer ground. In any case, our age would do well to adopt the attitude which leads to this method: "We have daily cause to clarify our experience and to purge our minds."

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