

# Gespräche mit Goethe

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I first encountered the book in an English translation when I was a student at Harvard. It must have been about forty years ago. It made an impression on me, and I recall a few things. One was that Goethe early on in their acquaintance asked Eckermann to go through issues of a journal to which Goethe had contributed anonymously in his youth and to identify those pieces. This surprised me. First, how could Goethe have so forgotten what he had written, if so he must have written a lot. Secondly, how could Eckermann identify his pieces, were his writings so distinctive? As to the latter I have only recently understood that this can be done<sup>1</sup>. I also recall that Goethe complained that sometimes the colors of the actors clothing did not always take into account the colors of the background stage, which sometimes has comical effects, such as an actor simply disappearing, or just his legs, so a torso was seen moving around. I found this a bit frivolous and trivial. Also I recall that Goethe complained about the German youth of the day. Young without youth was his verdict. This struck a note, perhaps because I felt that I was young without youth. 'Junge ohne Jugend' I translated back in my mind to German. It did not sound as good as in English. But finally, what really made an impression on me, was when Eckermann viewed the body of Goethe lying next to blocks of ice. Goethe was an old man, about to turn eighty-three within the next six months, but according to Eckermann, his body was of a young man, and not only young, but godlike. The chest wide, the muscles supple, no sign of fat nor any flabbiness. How could this be biologically possible? And if Goethe was in such supreme physical shape, how come he died. Should he not be still alive, more god than man?

Many years later I encounter the book in German. It is much thicker than the one I read in English, which must have been severely abridged, or more in the nature of a mere selection<sup>2</sup>. The German unabridged version seemed forbiddingly thick, would I ever get around to plough through it? Yet, you pick up books, not because you are about to read them right away, but perhaps in the future. And anyway they are nice to have.

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<sup>1</sup> I once wrote in English under a pseudonym for the Swedish Math Society. To my surprise many people saw right through the disguise. One of them claimed that he had a lot of practice recognising the styles of others. The idea of stylistic fingerprints has been used for a long time in computer identifications, although it remains a controversial issue

<sup>2</sup> The real conversations come in two parts. The first was written concomitantly, and as a historical document is more reliable. Many years after it was published, Eckermann came up with a complementary one, written long after the conversations, and hence less reliable as a document, but in many ways more interesting from a literary point of view, containing some long discourses by Eckermann on the art of bows and arrows and the habits of birds, and containing a very vivid recollection of a dream in which Goethe and his son appear, after Goethe's death. Selections usually juxtaposes those two books. My comments, for considerations of time and volume, will almost exclusively be confined to the first book.

Reading through Gray's book on Goethe, I became curious. Picked up my old English translation, read about Eckermann in the short preface, got intrigued, and sure enough I located my German book, which I thought I had, under Eckermann, not under Goethe. I started reading it, it was intriguing, and I decided that would I just read a quantum of 30 pages each evening, I would finish it in a month. This seemed not to be an unreasonable proposition, and I prevailed, often reading much more than the stated minimum, with the result that it was finished ahead of schedule. Let us now turn to it.

First who was Eckermann? He was born in 1792 and grew up in very modest circumstances in a small village on the Lüneburger Heide, thus getting very limited schooling. His unusual ability indicating that he was special and deserved attention, was first discovered through his uncanny and unsuspected skill at drawing. He was offered to be educated as an artist, but very little came out of those promises, probably due to a lack of funds. In his early youth he enlisted in the army driving back the Napoleonic forces, but the great experience was not war itself but the encounter with the culture and in particular the art treasures of the Netherlands. He was once again committed to an artistic career, but somewhere along the line he decided that his true metier was writing. For that he was hampered by a deficient education and tried to catch up, partly by hiring tutors, partly by attending as an overage pupil a local Gymnasium, while supporting himself as a clerk. It was, however, too much for him to sustain two full-time occupations. Nevertheless he eventually got a stipend to study at the university of Göttingen. Being funded, a stipulation was made that he should study something practical, and for that purpose he decided to enroll in the faculty of law, although such a career did not at all appeal to him, being fired up with literature, happier to write poems and critical essays. His first real infatuation was with Schiller, only gradually becoming aware of Goethe, who would eventually eclipse the competition. He sent a critical essay he had written to Goethe, hoping that the latter would put in a good word, so it could be printed and published. He furthermore decided to make a pilgrimage to Goethe in Weimar, and on June 10 1823, he was first shown into the presence of Goethe, with whom he would stay on for almost a decade, before the latter died on March 22 1832. Eckermann soon became Goethe's secretary, later on one of the executors of his Nachlass. He regularly went and dined with Goethe and his family, consisting of his son August, his daughter-in-law Ottoline, and the three grandchildren. Eckermann was instrumental in making Goethe conclude the second part of Faust, as well as his novel 'Wilhelm Meister', in which he was invited to effect an extensive editing. Goethe must have seen in Eckermann a kindred soul.

In those days there were no tape-recorders, so the entire exchanges must have been reconstructed out of memory. As was usual in those days, people kept diaries, so did Goethe, but the latter is not very extensive, and mostly serve as a corroboration of facts to the one of Eckermann, which would be artistically worked into, what is known as the Conversations. The account consists of three parts. The first appeared during Goethe's life time and covers up to 1827, the second part the final years between 1828 and 1832, having as their climax, the above mentioned inspection of Goethe's dead body. Then in 1848 a third volume appeared, starting from the beginning again, now actually from 1822, before the time of Eckermann, up to a few days before Goethe's death, in which he makes a few revelations about his Christian Faith. Here we obviously have a case of a reconstruction

long after the fact, relying not only on the notes of Eckermann himself but also of Soret, who met Goethe earlier. The passages tend to be fewer but much longer. In the first two parts, one suspects that things were written up and polished rather promptly, while in the third part, things are written down about twenty years later. For that reason historians would ascribe more significance to the first and second than the third, but to reject the latter would also be to reject much interesting material<sup>3</sup>.

The conversations are not recorded day by day, and it is of course doubtful that Eckermann would have met Goethe everyday, in fact they are rather unevenly spread out. Sometimes there are hiatuses for up to six months, at other times, several entries may be made within a week. The fact that we are dealing with a selection is of course clear from the appearance of the third part, drawing on a wealth of additional material, with no overlap with the first. It is reasonable to assume that this also contains but a selection of what was available, and that Eckermann decided to leave out a lot for which he nevertheless had adequate documentation, although one should perhaps not see this as the proverbial tip of an iceberg. The fact that this is a selection is also apparent from the fact that Goethe always appears very calm and with an optimistic outlook suitable for an Olympian presence. Eckermann wanted him presented in this idealized way, perhaps thinking of this as being the essential Goethe, anything else would just be distractions. In fact from other sources one concludes that Goethe was indeed moody. Time of optimism being punctured by bouts of despondency, his calm disrupted by temper tantrums. To live with Goethe, must not have been easy, and especially Goethe and his son did not always get along, the latter succumbing to excesses of drink and abuse, often being unfaithful to his suffering wife.

One also wonders how much of the editing was actually imposed by circumstances, and that Eckermann only wrote down some sketches after each encounter, later to be fleshed out, a procedure not unusual to people writing say a travel report, where there simply is not enough time and seclusion from worries and logistics to present a fully polished account at the end of each day. One remark (October 8, 1828) seems to bear this out. Eckermann writes *Die Unterhaltung was lebhaft und ungeniert, von dem jedoch, was gesprochen worden, weiß ich mich wenig zu erinnern*. It also, of course, confirms the general observation that what is dealt with during a conversation, is often much less important than the social impact of there being a conversation at all. In other words, small talk is important, but never its contents. Obviously much of the conversations he had with Goethe must have been at the level of chit-chat, and although for artistic effect, some of it must be included to set a tone, most of it must have been unceremoniously cast away. One may also question the value of those conversations, after all we have the diaries of Goethe himself. Are not those as informative, if not even more, of the thinking of the great man himself, even more unguarded and intimate. The problem is that, as we have already indicated, a diary is a diary, and even if written for posterity by those of a sufficiently grand ego, it tends to be a tedious occupation, as noted above, and why record at the moment, what is completely clear to you. Thus comparing the accounts of a day, given by Eckermann and Goethe respectively, the latter tend to be very terse, while the former supplies a lot of detail. Obviously a day spent with Goethe meant much more to

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<sup>3</sup> cf previous footnote

Eckermann than the reverse did for Goethe.

It starts out very impressively. Eckermann has been walking from Göttingen to Weimar to meet the great man, as we have already noted, and in the introductory entry, he dwells with dramatic effect on every detail that meets his eye, as those must have been indelibly engraved in his memory. Before he meets Goethe, he is ushered into the stately villa by the manservant, and we are introduced into a milieu which recalls Biedermeier interiors of solid sophisticated bourgeois taste, so characteristic of the early 19th century, suspended between the elegance of the previous century and the modern industrial age which would be established during it. Eckermann is not immediately thrown into the presence of Goethe, before that he encounters his daughter-in-law and some of his grandchildren as mementoes of the real thing. The nature of their relationship is more or less established on that first encounter. Goethe is the Old man with all the authority, and Eckermann, more than forty years his younger, is definitely going to play the role of the junior partner from then on. Over and over again in the conversations we become privy to the veneration he holds for Goethe. He always listens to him attentively, he is struck by his wisdom, what he says he saves in his heart. He feels tenderness and love in addition to admiration. But Eckermann is no mere 'flunkey', he has his own dignity, and at times he even dares to oppose the great one, although his attitude of veneration already referred to is always present. This must have suited Goethe, and being the reason that he gradually extended more and more of his confidence invested in him.

As noted it is an impressive house, but Goethe claims that it is too big for him, he is satisfied with much less. In fact most of the rooms he does not use, so what is the use of the freedom to freely wander from one room to another, he wonders. It is really enough to have a bedroom and study where to keep your books and prints, that is all you need. He has spent almost an entire winter there. He likes a small apartment, where everything is untidely tidy and a bit gipsylike. He admits to an aversion against comfort, it is a distraction. For one thing there is no couch in his room, an easy chair is enough. People who surround themselves with comfortable furniture must be the same people who do not think at all.

And now what is really going on in those encounter and exchanges? A complete report would of course necessitate a report almost as long as the conversations themselves, so let us restrict to a few natural themes. The Art of 'Dichtung', a word which in German (and Swedish) not only means the writing of poetry, although the word itself literally refers to that very activity, but more generally the writing of fiction, of which poetry traditionally is considered the most elated of its aspects, is of course an obvious and common theme throughout, and one which may interest literary people the most .

First and foremost for a real poet the knowledge of the world is inborn, he claims, there is no need for a lot of experience, and he exemplifies from his own experience writing Egmont in his youth, and later finding that all he had written in his youthful inexperience turned out to be true. Eckermann is taken a bit aback and assumes that he by this means the inner world? Goethe confirms. Of course he has been thinking of love and hatred, hope and despair, everything that has to do with the passions of the soul. Obviously he does not mean to imply that he is born with the knowledge of how things are done in the Parliament or how you proceed in a coronation of an emperor. You recognize the true

talent by his finding his enjoyment in the work, in the execution, the lesser talent on the other hand is more concerned with the gain he is about to receive, and out of such lowly goals, Goethe proclaims, nothing great could possibly ever ensue. Goethe, we find out has no high regard for philosophy. Philosophizing kills the writing, he claims, it is far better to be of a practical bent, it improves the style. The English are a case in point, they are practical people, and in general they write very well. Or take the case of Schiller. His style is the most effective when he does not philosophize but concerns himself with practical matters as in his letters. In fact the most precious mementoes I have of him are his letters, he adds. The case of Schiller is of utmost interest, considering how close they were for many years, and how they could almost not be told apart, so associated as they were to each other. And indeed, with friends such as me and Schiller, long united, with similar interests, with daily intercourse and exchanges, Goethe explains, there no longer make sense to speak about individual thoughts as it was pointless to speak about his or mine. In our co-operations, he continues, sometimes I provided the thought and Schiller wrote the verse, or the other way around. You really have to be deeply stuck in Philistinism to believe that there is any importance to making such distinctions, he concludes.

What about Schiller? When he first met him, Goethe reveals, he did not think he would live another four week, maybe not even a fortnight. His face was that of one crucified. At the time he had not even finished *Don Carlos*. But he rallied, he was not brittle, and would live on for many more years, and would no doubt have lived even longer had he taken better care of himself. His most important works were yet to be written. In fact he once turned down a generous financial offer from our Grand duke. He reasoned that as he was a talent, he should be able to stand on his own feet. But with the demands of a growing family, he had to work far too hard. His talent had to be available to him and do his bidding twenty-four hours of the day. Schiller was not much of a drinker. In fact he was naturally abstemious, but when the pressure became too hard he became intermittently excessive. This was definitely not good for his health, nor for his work. As noted he wrote well as long as he stayed away from philosophy. His real talent was for the theatre. He made constant progress. He was an idealist. A pity that he died before Byron entered the scene. He would have appreciated him.

As to the motive, the subject matter, it is indeed very important for the poem, Goethe reminds Eckermann. Especially women usually have no inkling of that. A woman may say that a poem is beautiful, having only her own sensibility in mind, thinking merely of pretty words and verses. Because of this so many poems are written with no subject matter in mind, only consisting of words. Dilettantes, especially women, have little understanding of what poetry is really about, to them it is mostly about technicalities. such as rhymes and versifying. The matter is quite simple, Goethe points out. In order to write prose you have to have something to say, so consequently those who have nothing to say can nevertheless produce rhymes and verses, where one word leads to another, and something ensues, that looks like it is something, but in fact is nothing at all. He thus praises the French, because their poetry is firmly attached to the ground, and can be transferred to prose without the loss of anything essential.

The poet should try to master a lot, because the whole world is potentially his subject. There is no such thing as an unpoetic subject, everything can be turned into poetry, it is

up to the poet. E.g. a religious motive is not a bad excuse for poetry, as long it has a general human interest. The same thing goes for history. In particular English history is very well adapted for poetry, as it repeats itself. French history on the other hand does not, and hence it gets out of date, as does the poetry based on it. The main thing is that the subject matter should be external. As long as someone only expresses his own subjective feelings, he is not a poet, he has to turn to the world and express it, before becoming one. The poets nowadays tend all to write as if they were sick, and that the world is nothing but a giant hospital. It is all about misery and the longing for a better world, But this is an abuse of poetry, the point of which is to make us happy with our lot here and now.

The problem is that the poetic culture in Germany has by now expanded so much, Goethe points out, that on the other hand no one any longer writes bad verse. Hence the young poets who send me their works are not worse than their predecessors, and hence they cannot understand why those were praised and not them. What is needed in a situation such as this, is that there is somebody who is head and shoulders over the others, because the world can only relate to individuals.

Goethe has just come to understand that by the classic we are talking about the healthy, while the romantic the sickly. From that point of view everything falls into place, he remarks with satisfaction. Yet in poetry there is always something of the demonic, he admits, especially when it comes to matters of the unconscious, where reason does not dare to tread.

Goethe appreciates more and more that poetry belongs to the whole of mankind, and manifests itself throughout the centuries through hundreds and hundreds of people. Some manage it a little bit better than others, or swim a bit longer, that is all. To have a poetic gift is after all not such a rare thing, and just because you have turned out a good poem or two it is no cause for conceit.

When it comes to poetry the devastating critic is not so bad after all, because the poem possesses the magic power of the heroes of Valhalla, who were hacked to pieces in the morning yet were able sit down happily in one piece for lunch later in the day.

But what did Goethe think of other writers and poets? Of Schiller we have already some inkling, but who were his favorites? Some are expected, others are more surprising. That he held Shakespeare in high regard should hardly be a surprise. He first compares him to Sophocles, noting that the characters in the work of Sophocles all contain some of his greatness, and that the same can be said about those of Shakespeare. In fact Shakespeare made the Romans into Englishmen, otherwise he would not have been understood by his compatriots. Furthermore he thought he was almost too rich and powerful. In order not to be paralyzed one should only read a little bit of him each year, Goethe claims, and continuing that there is hardly anything human he has not touched upon. And always with such lightness and freedom, he adds. He did not write primarily for the stage, Goethe interjects, it was too narrow for him. He gives us apples of silver which turn out to be of gold when peeled.

The praise for Lord Byron is more qualified. Admittedly he finds him the greatest contemporary poetic talent. But, he adds, Byron is only great when he writes poetry, when he thinks, he is at the level of a child. His high status as a peer was at his disadvantage,

as every talent is embarrassed by his surroundings, even more so if he is of high social standing. There are things in the world the poet rather hides than reveals, but that would have been against the character of Byron.

The fact that Goethe admired Scott a lot may come as a surprise, but it should remind us of the status that Scott enjoyed at the time. A status that obviously did not leave Goethe unmoved. While his praise of Shakespeare is rather conventional and more in the nature of giving the bard his due, when it comes to Scott, he is much more enthusiastic, almost gushing in his praise. Everywhere the confidence and thoroughness of his depiction are apparent, he points out. This being due to his extensive knowledge of the real world, he explains, something well in line with Goethe's extroverted temperament. He lauds his talent, his depths and heights, and in particular brings out 'The Fair Maid of Perth' as an example where he never nods. Eckermann himself is moved to read Scott and reports on October 8, 1828 to have read his first Scott novel, and the pleasure it gave him. Then Goethe prompts him to report on the 'Fair Maid'. Goethe concurs with him in his judgement. The 'Kunstverstand' of Scott is very great, this is why he can paint such convincing scenes. Goethe recommends his interlocutor to read Waverley. This was written before Scott had reached his large audience, and really it ranks with the best he has ever written <sup>4</sup>. Goethe also reads Ivanhoe, and goes on. Scott is a great talent who has no equals. Reading it one understands how he can move his readers so much. Later on while reading Rob Roy, he praises it all 'Stoff, Gehalt, Charaktere, Behandlung' and that diligence in preparatory studies, and the precision in the details. Why waste time on reading trivialities when you can read Scott. Yet in spite of his attention to details he makes many mistakes, such as in Ivanhoe describing a guest arriving in the dark, giving as much attention to his shoes, as the rest <sup>5</sup>, when those were clearly invisible.

When it comes to language itself and its possibilities, there is precious little to be gained from Goethe's conversations. The fullest account is given in connection to a visit by a young Englishman in the beginning of 1825. The English visitor to Weimar is encouraged by Goethe to learn German. You have done wisely to come here, he tells him. Not only will you learn German quickly and with little effort, you will also get to know on what it is based. The landscape, the climate, the ways of life, habits and social intercourse, as well as the German constitution. The visitor assures him that there is hardly anyone of good family in England who is not learning German. Goethe on his side assures him that he has for fifty years engaged himself with English and its literature, and that he would now feel quite at home, would he travel there. He praises the efforts of the young English people, and welcomes them to Germany. Those who understand German can do without most other languages, except possibly French which is a language of social intercourse and invaluable during travel, as it is understood everywhere. As to Greek, Latin, Italian and Spanish we are able to read the best of their literature in such excellent German translations, so unless there are particular reasons for it, we may safely abstain from the efforts to learn them. Goethe claims that German is such a flexible language so it can really incorporate all other languages. He then learns that the young man goes to the theatre every evening. Goethe thinks it is remarkable that you so quickly learn to understand,

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<sup>4</sup> 8. März 1831

<sup>5</sup> 11. März 1831

but it takes much longer to be able to express yourself. The young man confirms and says that his understanding of German has now proceeded so far that he can even note when somebody expresses himself badly, but when he tries to speak himself, he gets stuck. True, when it comes to small talk with the ladies at a dance at the court, there is no problem. but when he wants to express something more subtle, something remarkable or spirited, words fail him. Do not worry, Goethe consoles him, such things are always hard to express even in your mother tongue.

What about Goethe himself? Eckermann summarizes his poetic ambition by claiming that the poetry of Goethe is for individuals not the masses. For reflective individuals who want to probe into the depths of the world and humankind, for those who enjoy passion and wants to find the wonder and pain of the human heart, for young poets who want to learn how to express themselves, for the critics who need to know according to what maxims one makes judgements, and how to write a review so as to make it interesting and a pleasure to read. His poems are also for the artists to enlighten them and teach them what gives a painting significance, and also for the natural scientist, not only to teach him laws but more importantly a method through which he is enabled to reveal nature's secrets. Goethe concurs, this is why he cannot achieve popularity. In fact the pre-eminence he now enjoys, at least in German literature, was not at all the case at the time. Schiller was for a long time considered the superior. Goethe does to some extent admit that, saying that the public still quarrels about who is the greatest me or Schiller. They should be happy that there are men of which they can quarrel. As to the theatre he claims that he only had an interest as long as he could have a practical influence. By the nineties my real interest for the theatre was gone, he continues, but then Schiller came along and revived it, and then I would have been able to write dozens of pieces for the theatre. There was no dearth of subjects, and the writing was so easy for me, I could always in eight days write a piece. And I still regret that I did not. With the exception of Faust of course, the dramatic pieces flowing from his pen belong to his youth, and he still looks back fondly upon the time when he wrote *Götz von Berlichingen* and *Egmont*. He did not have much experience at the time, he admits, but that does not really matter for the true talent, as we have noted. The poet knows in his heart what he needs to know, and for the rest reality imitates fiction, as he was to learn later. But of course, Goethe is not an introvert, and what he says has to be taken with a grain of salt. I have studied and learned by heart every detail of nature, he claims, so when I as a poet needed anything, it was available to me, and I did not easily err against truth. With Schiller it was different, he points out, he did not study nature, yet his spirit was so admirable that he nevertheless could be realistic. He admits that he was lucky, when he came to German literature in his youth. It was still a *tabula rasa*, now it is sullied.

When it comes to the actual handicraft of writing poetry he assumes that the rhythm of a poem comes to the poet naturally without him being conscious of it. Would he keep it in mind he would be driven mad and accomplish nothing of value. I guess he speaks for himself, although what is true for yourself is usually a good guide to what is true for others. As to the rules of poetry he believes that would he be young again he would sin against all rules. I would indulge in alliterations, assonances and fake rhymes, as long as people would be charmed and willing to read and learn by heart, he says. He acknowledges



that at least in poetry good things cannot be forced, you have to wait for the proper mood. The trick is, he continues, to stop when you still have much you want to write down. This means that when you renew your pursuit the next time, you get a flying start.

But he is not finished yet with his works. Faust is still to be completed, and also Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, which is a thinly veiled autobiography. In fact, as is often noted, everything Goethe wrote was autobiographical, being a great egocentric. Eckermann is very instrumental in pushing Goethe to complete them, and Goethe resorts to strange stratagems, as having a printed version of Wilhelm Meister filled out with pads of blue paper, where there are still gaps. In this way, he can to his great satisfaction monitor his progress<sup>6</sup>. But the most important thing is of course the completion of Faust, which has been with Goethe since his youth.

Faust is such a peculiar individual, Goethe holds, that only a few people may be able to imagine what makes him tick. Mephistopheles, with all his irony, is also not an easy character to draw. On January 15 1831 Eckermann urges Goethe to finish the episode of the Walpurgsnacht in Faust II, and not to be content with provisionally printing it as a sketch, as Goethe would prefer to do. Because to do so, Eckermann warns him, would run the risk that it will never be finished. Goethe is obviously being lazy, and his conversation partner assumes the role of his bad conscience. It seems to work, and Goethe applies himself. He notes that the old Walpurgsnacht is monarchic, while the classical one is republican. In the first Mephistopheles is in charge, in the second they are all equal and do not care about the others. Thus no element of subordination. One may think of Faust more as an opera than as a regular drama. This means that music has to be written. Who would really be capable of that? Mozart may have been, Goethe muses. It has to be something like Don Juan. Barring Mozart, who is of course dead, Meyerbeer, may be a substitute.

On February 17 1831 Goethe delights Eckermann by showing him a thick manuscript. It turns out to be of Faust II. Just see how much you can do by steady application, a little each day, Goethe remarks. This you realize when you get older, when you are young you believe everything has to be done in a day, he muses. Then he hopes that in the next spring months he will make substantial progress on Act Four. This he sketched a long time ago, but then other acts have risen to such a high level, that he had had to make a renewed effort to make Act Four measure up. The first part of Faust is wholly subjective, he explains, but the second is much more objective and engages with a far richer world, and will not make sense to anyone who does not have the necessary width of experience. A few months later in May 2 1831, he makes Eckermann really happy by claiming that he has more or less finished the beginning of the Fifth Act. It goes back to intentions he had formed over thirty years ago, he adds, and which he had had in mind ever since as they were so important that he never lost interest in them, but they were also too difficult to execute and he despaired of completing the task. But now I have managed to get back on track again and with luck it will make me finish Act Four soon, he adds filled with hope. A month later he shows Eckermann the still missing parts of Act Five. Eckermann

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<sup>6</sup> Gray in his Goethe introduction, reviewed in this volume, is aghast at the hodgepodge nature of the work. Goethe seems just to have piled together everything that struck his fancy without any effort of editing. This seems to bear it out.

reads on until the burning of the hut of Philemon and Bacis, when he has to pause. The names were given to them to make the reader associate them with that old couple of the past, Goethe explains. Then they talk about the character of Faust, who even in old age, cannot transcend his dissatisfaction. What he does not have, he wants to destroy, just as the king Ahab in the Bible, Eckermann comments. Faust in Act Five should be a 100 years old Goethe says as a response and wonders whether he should not write that out explicitly. Goethe then brings up the verse in which the key to Faust is to be seen <sup>7</sup>. It is in harmony with the Protestant creed that our salvation is beyond our powers, Goethe notes with satisfaction, it is a grace that can only be administered from above.

Finally in August it is all finished after the Fourth Act has been completed. Goethe is very happy and relieved. He has accomplished the goal of his life, and what is left of it is a pure gift, with no further obligations attached. As we know a few months later he will be dead.

When it comes to talent in general, the most reasonable is to stick to what one is born with or has been educated for, and not interfere with others performing their duties. So let the shoemaker stay by his last, the peasant behind the plough, and the prince left to govern. Anyone having a skill should not go beyond it, on the other hand not be too modest either. A prince should learn as many things as possible, because many-sidedness is part of his skill, just as a poet should try to learn as many varied things he manages, because the entire world is part of his subject. But a poet should not try to be a painter, he should be content to paint with words. The arts are difficult to master and each demands a life of application. Education and occupation should be separated. A painter needs to distinguish between what he has to paint and what not to paint. When everything is said and done, it is the greatest art to limit yourself and to isolate. Goethe gives the advice to Eckermann to stay in one line of work and not to allow himself to digress. Man is not born to solve the problems of the world, but to find out what they are all about, and restrict himself accordingly. All what we do have consequences, but the wise and correct do not always bring the good, and the other way around, in fact most often not.

Goethe is careful to make a distinction between the talent and the mere dilettante. It is in the nature of dilettantes that they do not appreciate the difficulties, and thus start to embark on something for which they do not have the required power. There is a distinction between the accessible and the inaccessible, those who do not know may spend their whole life engaging with the inaccessible, without getting any closer to the truth. On the other hand talents are not self-sufficient. In fact, talents do not come about to rely solely on themselves but to interact with other and out of which something may come about. And he brings in Rafael. Talent like him do not grow on trees, they need to feed on the past. For great talents living during an important epoch and in an important environment it is not easy to tell from whom they learned. They just look around and absorb. In the case of Claude Lorrain, the school of Carracci must have been crucial. Still one may be productive without talent if one lives in a culturally active time. But as soon as such talentless people have given what they have received they are dried up. Yet it often

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<sup>7</sup> *Gerettet is das edle Glied/Der Geisterwelt vom Bösen:/Wer immer strebend sich bemüht,/Den können wir erlösen,/Und hat an ihm die Liebe gar/Von oben teilgenommen,/Begegnet ihm die selige Schar/Mit herzlichem Willkommen.*

happens in the literature that modest talent triumphs over true ones, because of belonging to the right party. Musical talent can manifest itself at an early age, because music is something internal and congenital and who needs no external nourishment of experience of life. The master recognizes the talent best.

As to talents he claims that Tieck is a talent, but when they compare him with me they are mistaken, he points out. It is like comparing me with Shakespeare, who is at a different level altogether, and it is I who has to look up to him. Herder too is a talent, his best work was the history of mankind. Moliere is so great that one is always once again surprised when you reread him. As to Voltaire. Among the most delightful of his works are the minor poems addressed to various people. More surprisingly he brings up the mathematician Lagrange. A good guy. When a good guy is talented (begabt) he will always be good to the world, be it as an artist, a Naturforscher, poet or whatever. As to Hegel. His judgments as a critic are always good.

When it comes to the knowledge of human nature Goethe has a thing or two to say. Most importantly he does not understand why one should try and know oneself. No one has ever managed to do so, he points out. In fact it is in our nature to turn our attention to external things, not to ourselves, something which may reflect his essentially extroverted personality. About ourselves we know nothing beyond what makes us happy and what makes us suffer, so we can look for the former and avoid the latter. Man is an obscure entity, he does not know where he comes from, nor where he is heading, he knows little of the world, and even less of himself. I do not know myself, Goethe claims, and God should protect me from any such knowledge. When Eckermann confesses that he wants to avoid people with whom he feels no affinity, Goethe takes him to task. It is a folly to expect people to harmonize with ourselves, Goethe lectures him. He himself has always taken people for what they are, so that he can study them in all their peculiarities, even when he was out of sympathy. It is through this struggle with natures that go against our grain that we develop all our different aspects of our own personality. He then concludes with a strong admonishment to Eckermann to step out into the real world.

Other remarks are lighter in character, such as his claim that when we in our youth have no possessions or do not have the wit to appreciate those we have, we are democratic. But when we during a long life have acquired property, we do not only want to enjoy that ourselves, but also that it serves the enjoyment of our children and grandchildren, and then we tend to become Aristocrats. Similarly in the same vein he proposes that in childhood we are sensualists, when we are in love idealists, and when love has run its course, we become skeptics. What remains in life may be as it is, and hence like Hindu philosophers we become quietists.

Bitterly he reflects that few people can appreciate what is of real value, most people only praise what they are able to take measure of. Elaborating at a later time that man is just born for small things. He only understands and takes pleasure in what is familiar to him. This is why many critics and poets ignore the great and bestow on the mediocre a remarkable worth.

But he makes Eckermann laugh about his comparison of people wholly engrossed in their own concerns, taking no notice of each other, to billiard balls blindly moving on a green covered table, any accidental contact only making them move away from each other.

This apropos his readings of the letters of Jacobi and his friends.

The invariance of human nature is brought out by a Chinese novel he is reading. Eckermann is at first taken aback. It must be very strange. Not at all, Goethe retorts. Human nature tends to be the same, and you soon feel quite at home. In fact the novel reminds him of his own 'Germann und Dorothea' as well as the British novels by Richardson. Yet he highlights in what ways it differs from a western one, namely in the way that external nature is always present in addition to the human characters. The goldfish in the ponds are always heard splashing about as well as the birds singing on the branches, and much is made of the Moon, making the night as light as the day.

Everyone believes in his youth that the world only began with him and that it is just for his sake. In particular man can never wholly liberate himself from the impressions and influences of his youth with regrettable consequences. Peter the Great who fell in love with Amsterdam in his youth, tried to create it again at the banks of the Neva.

With characteristic self-irony he remarks that it is often said that one has to become wiser with age, when one really has to make an effort to keep ones wisdom as one ages.

Goethe is interested in art. He often brings up a 'Kupferstich' closely scrutinizing it. He tried his hand at drawing and painting, but has to concede that he had no talent. He had no sense of the plastic, his bodies lacked solidity. He always feared not to do the right thing, no confidence. He made no progress unless he practiced regularly, and if he made a longer break, he had to start all over again. Yet, he was not altogether void of talent, at least not when it came to landscapes. In fact he was once encouraged by an artist claiming that if he only stayed with him for a year and a half he might be able to accomplish something capable of bestowing some joy on him. As he waxes philosophically: we may take advantages of dead-ends. The one who without any talent engages himself in music, may never become a master, but he will be able to appreciate what a master can do. In the same way his own vain efforts to become a painter has taught him to distinguish the good from the bad. The attempts of the crusades to liberate the holy graves, was obviously a mistake, but it weakened the Turks and prevented them from achieving mastery over Europe. In short any action has unintended consequences.

Eckermann asked him how one could tell whether somebody had real talent for painting. A question that must have been of some interest to him, as he first started out with such an ambition. The real talent has an innate sense for the body, its relationships and color, so he manages to get it all right without any conscious effort. In particular he can give solidity to the body and by the right shading make it very tangible. Also when he is not practicing he is still making inner progress.

When it comes to the experience of art, he gets rather close to what Collingwood would claim a century later. The artist puts us in the same mood as he was when he painted, corresponding to Collingwoods theory of eavesdropping.

As usual Goethe bemoans the lack of vitality in the contemporary art scene. The artists have learned a lot and studied their lessons, and there is little to criticize except the lack of spirit. The basic thing in art is the expression of personality, and he speaks admiringly of Tizian, Veronese and Rubens, especially of his landscapes.

The splendor of the flowers in the garden a spring day in March 1831 makes the two speak about the mastery depiction of the Dutch flower artists. Goethe remarks that great

flower painters are no longer imaginable, as one now expects too much scientific correctness, and the botanists will find faults everywhere while being indifferent to the purely artistic aspects as grouping and lightning.

As has been noted Goethe does not care much for philosophy. Spinoza, however, he had a weakness for, as he read him in his youth, Kant he thought to be the best of the lot, and the one whose philosophy has had the greatest impact on German culture. He has to admit that he never read him, although Schiller always urged him to do so. He never met Kant either. As far as he can tell Kant never took any notice of him. Goethe's work on the metamorphism of plants was written before he knew about the philosopher, but nevertheless it is very much in the spirit of Kant, especially as it comes to the distinction between subject and object, and that everything exists for itself, not for other purposes, as if the cork tree grew just in order to enable us to cork our bottles. In conclusion: the closer you are to a philosophical school the worse you write.

Politics. This does not seem to particularly interest Goethe either. The closest we can come is his admission that he has had the privilege of living through the most exciting times in world history ever. He mentions the seven years war of Fredrik the Great, the independence of the American colonies from Britain, the French revolution and of course the rise and decline of Napoleon. And the phenomenon of Napoleon interests him. In fact Goethe once encountered Napoleon in the flesh. He did not look remarkable in any way. But that was not the point. The remarkable fact was simply that it was him. That was enough. Yes, he had my book Werther in his library, Goethe recalls. He had read it, but more as a judge reads an act. We had spoken about it. But what was the secret of his success? According to Goethe Napoleons skill consisted in his deep knowledge of human character. In particular of their weaknesses of which he knew how to turn to his own advantage. He treated the world as a performer treats his instrument. He was always the same, both feet firmly set on the ground. He always knew what to do, he was never at a loss. He had true talent in what he did. What is noteworthy in this is the aesthetic element. It is not the power per se, which is interesting to Napoleon. It is not seen as a goal, only as an instrument. The exercise of the power constitutes the pleasure, just as a musician extols in his power to perform on his instrument, the dictator extols in his down-to-earth machinations.

Closely related to politics is the issue of national character. Here Goethe concentrates on the Germans, the English and the French. The Germans are too philosophical and hence write too badly. They introduced the notion of individual freedom, which has its disadvantages. While the Germans engage in the solution of philosophical problems, the English laugh in our face and conquer the world. The English are practical people and write well. They are, however, pedantic. The French do not belie themselves, not in their style. They are social, and thus never forgets the public to which they address themselves, thus they make an effort to be clear in order to persuade but not at the expense of antagonizing their readers. The French have reason and spirit, but no foundation nor any piety. Thus they put too much emphasis on what serves a particular party. They are clever. French poetry can be translated into prose without anything essential being lost. This shows that they have their feet on the ground. Reason is an obstacle for the French, they do not understand that the imagination obeys its own laws with which reason should not

interfere. Yet in politics, everything works through bribes. Even the revolution worked that way.

As to any contemporary political issue, the only thing you can find is a brief allusion to the Irish question. It is far too complicated, according to Goethe. The country suffers and there is no easy fix. In particular emancipation would not work. It is a pity that England has been drawn into the conflict. The two million Protestants are at the mercy of the five million Catholics, who are at loggerheads among themselves, but when it comes to confrontation with the Protestants, they close rank.

But in a sense Goethe's real passion was for science, or so he claimed. It was in many ways an unreciprocated one, although his discovery of a particular bone in the human anatomy is regularly referred to. He is excited that he has lived through a time in history when so many great discoveries were made, starting with those of Franklin and electricity when he was just a child. And from then on the one great discovery after the other was made. But his failure to achieve corresponding acknowledgment frustrated him. When it came to natural science he had in a sense tried everything, or at least those parts of science that directly impinged on his senses. His was not an abstract talent, he always looked for the sensual. Thus in particular he did not pursue astronomy, while one is so totally dependent on instruments and calculations, which was not his cup of tea.

Mineralogy is a science for the rational sense of practical life, as it concerns itself with what is dead and no longer emerges. Meteorology is on the other hand something alive and whose processes we daily observe. It cries out for a synthesis, but Goethe does not think that Man will be able to effect such a one. It is far too complicated, and the efforts to do so, are wasted. This state of affairs does not surprise him though, considering how hard it is to synthesize such simple things as plants and colors.

Goethe scoffs at the idea that the moon influences the weather. This is pure superstition he seems to think. His own explanation may not strike the modern reader as less fantastic. He thinks of the earth as would it be one giant organism, which is trapped in an eternal in- and exhalation, causing the changes of humidity. He presents a few rules of thumb. High pressure means dry weather, and an easterly wind. Low pressure translates into humidity and westerly winds. That forms the laws to which he adheres, and when they are contradicted occasionally, it does not bother him.

With nature you have to proceed slowly, not to say languidly, if you want it to reveal its secrets. He himself never expected to have his hypotheses immediately confirmed. And if it did not, it led him to another route, he might never have thought of otherwise. The difficulty with nature is to see laws which are hidden and contradict the testimony of our senses. Such as that the sun does not set and rise, but it is the earth itself which rotates and waltzes around at an unimaginable speed.

He sees with pleasure the many people going into science. Some start out well but get grounded on too subjective an approach. Others keep on collecting facts out of which nothing will come as you need to have a theoretical approach to penetrate to the 'Ur'-phenomena, out of which everything else can be derived. Goethe has a propensity to look for the unified picture, making daring comparisons across wide spectra of living creatures, often enclosing plants and animals in common schemes. And he is not shy of extending ideas, such as thinking of a hive of bees as a single organism with the queen serving the

purpose of the head. He is particularly proud of his work on the metamorphism of plants, which caused him more work and pain than he had anticipated, and to which he makes repeated references.

Goethe denies that nature produces in an economic fashion. On the contrary it is profligate, and as to Adam and Eve, he is more inclined that nature produced hundreds of couples, not just one, which to him settles the silly question whether we all stem from them, something also contradicted by all the different races and colors. As to the Bible he takes a skeptical stand as it behooves a child of the enlightenment. That it at times report on things that may have happened he does not have a problem with, but to try to see how it happened he thinks to be a useless occupation suitable only for those who have nothing better to do than to engage themselves in insoluble problems. Eckermann is amazed by the digressions and contradictions to be found among the evangelists, and Goethe drily remarks that it is like swallowing a whole sea if you want to engage yourself in a critical historical investigation. Eckermann takes exception to the accusations of Goethe not being a believer. It is simply the case that he does not believe in what most believers believe in, it is too petty for him. Would he explicate his beliefs, would they be amazed would they be able to understand what he is talking about. When it comes to the highest being, Goethe simply thinks of it as a great mystery of which we have at most only traces and inklings.

Goethe would never have devoted so much time and effort to develop his 'Farbenlehre' had he not felt that the Newtonian theory was not only a big mistake, but also very detrimental to the spirit of man.

One day just before Christmas 1826 after the conclusion of the meal Eckermann excitedly tells Goethe that he had discovered that the transparent part of the flame reproduces the same phenomenon as creates the blue of the sky. He asks whether Goethe has made the same observation and if so included it in his *Farbenlehre*. Goethe is happy to confirm and brings out the volume in which he has included it, reading with undeniable pleasure the paragraph in which it is treated. Now, he concludes, Eckermann has gained entry into his theory and the problems with which it is concerned, and has from now on a point of departure from which to study further phenomena.

Later on in the day towards four o'clock with an overcast sky and at the beginning of twilight Goethe lights a candle and brings it close to the window and puts it down on a white piece of paper. Then he brings up a small rod which he places between the candle and the window. The candle light makes the rod cast a shadow illuminated by the fading day light. Goethe asks Eckermann about the color of the shade. It is blue, the latter says. What about the other shadow that points towards the candle, Goethe persists. It is a reddish yellow, Eckermann retorts. Goethe then asks his companion to come up with an explanation, and not to consult his 'Farbenlehre' until he has given up hope to find one by himself. Then he proceeds to put some alcohol into a spoon and lights it. A big flame ensues, transparent at its base, which takes on a blue hue, when seen against darkness, just as Eckermann earlier in the day has reported. When turned against the light, the blue hue fades and disappears. Eckermann is delighted. Goethe concurs, explaining that the greatness of nature lies in its simplicity, that phenomena that manifest themselves in the big also repeats themselves in the small. The same law that governs the blue of the sky, also

makes the blue in the candle flame or in the smoke that ascends from a village seen against a dark mountain. But how does Newton explain this simple phenomenon, Eckermann asks. With that you should not concern yourself, Goethe retorts irritatedly, adding that it is far too stupid and that it is unbelievable what damage is done to a good mind when it concerns itself with something stupid. Stick to the true theory, Goethe admonishes him. He then he professes to honor mathematics, this excellent and useful science, but warns that it should not be applied outside its proper domains, when this noble science turns into nonsense. He then explains that just as there exists acid that acidifies there is something that colors. This alone makes no explanation but it is a step towards liberating the theory of the limits imposed by mathematics. And then the conversation turns into other topics.

One week later Eckermann has figured it all out and is impatient to explain it to Goethe, but prefers to write it down, rather than give an oral presentation of which he despairs finding the right words. Goethe dismisses this by saying that the writing he can do later, now he would like him to demonstrate it practically, so he can tell whether he is really on to something. It being still too light after the meal they have just finished they have to wait impatiently for twilight which finally descends. Goethe lights a wax candle and gives him a leaf of white paper and a small rod. Eckermann receives them and sets things up exactly by the window as Goethe had done a week before, and the spectacle of the yellow and blue shadows appears again. Goethe asks Eckermann to give his explanation and the latter explains that light and darkness are no colors, but the extremes enclosed within colors appear. The yellow towards light, and the blue towards darkness. That light turns to yellow when seen through darkened, and darkness to blue when observed through lightened. 'So look at the shadow, it would turn completely dark, would I close the shutters and shut out the daylight. But now the light enters freely through the window and makes up a lighted medium through which I contemplate the darkness which hence turns blue' Eckermann explains. Goethe nods and smiles and asks what about the yellow. Eckermann refers to the principle of light seen through a darkened medium and explicates: 'The burning candle throws a faint light with a touch of yellow on the paper. But the day light has so much strength as to cast a shadow which darkens the light and hence make it yellow. If I weaken the darkening by moving the shadow close to the light it turns a bright yellow, but if I strengthen the darkening by removing the light from it, it turns the yellow towards the red'. Goethe smiles disingeniously, laughing gently. Eckermann asks whether his explanation is correct, Goethe commends him for a good presentation and observations, but does not admit that he has given an explanation. He had argued cleverly, even spiritedly, but not correctly. Eckermann begs him to give him the correct explanation, but Goethe refuses. He will be given it in due time, not today and not in this way, first he wants to show him another phenomenon through which the basic principle will emerge very clearly. You are close, he admits, but further progress cannot be made in the direction he has chosen. So come one sunny day earlier for dinner then I will show you something and everything will be clear to you. Eckermann was delighted by the prospects, and Goethe too was happy that his companion had taken such an interest, whose pursuit was sure to provide him with a source of joy. The problem though obsessed Eckermann to the degree of following him into his dreams.

But it would take some time before Goethe would take him up on it again, at least



according to the documented sources. Five weeks later on February 1 1827 he encounters his host with a volume of his 'Farbenlehre' in front of him. Goethe feels a bit guilty not having given him the promised explanation and decides to make amends. He suggests that the two of them will study his treatise systematically, this will give them something to talk about, and also will give Eckermann an opportunity to absorb it as his own. And Goethe opens up the first page and starts to expound. The main point is to make a distinction between objective colors and subjective ones which the eye itself generates. It is not clear whether Goethe thinks that all colors are subjective and thus whether there really is a distinction to be made. A clear point is that the eye craves variety, which is the case with all sense organs. We like music which exhibits a mixture of major and minor, music which does not soon gets tedious. The same thing with the theatre. A tragedy which is consistently sad wearies us, Eckermann points out with the accustomed eagerness he makes interjections to the pronouncement of the great bard. Goethe agrees with him and points to the case of Shakespeare. But then he thinks of classical Greek tragedies to which the principle does not seem applicable. Eckermann retorts that those tragedies are so short so maybe there is not enough time for tedium to set in, and besides there is a succession of choral and dialogue pieces which may provide the needed variety. Goethe is amused by the way the conversation has digressed. You may very well be right, he admits, and it may be worth the effort to see whether the same law also applies to Greek tragedies. But the main point is, he pontificates, that everything hangs together, that a law on colors leads to an investigation of Greek tragedy, but warns that one should be leery of extending laws beyond their proper domains and instead speak of analogies.

Eckermann is filled with admiration for Goethe's 'Farbenlehre' how the author presents a few basic principles out of which everything else follows. Goethe complains that he has had many disciples but they have tended to stray from the right path. How come all those professors still adhere to Newton? Eckermann wonders. Goethe explains it by the laziness of human nature. They owe their living to the old theory and it takes quite an effort to reeducate themselves. But how can they persist with their theory in view of all the experiments they make, Eckermann asks. They have no interest in finding the truth, only to push their opinions, thus they ignore all experiments that show that they are wrong. Goethe explains. Eckermann sees it as an exemplary presentation of science to serve as an inspiration in other domains and wonders whether Goethe is not embittered having written it and not received the acknowledgment it deserves. 'I do not regret it' Goethe assures him 'even if it has cost me the efforts of half my life. Obviously I could have written half a dozen tragedies instead, but that is all'. He confirms that it is the method of his 'Farbenlehre' which is the most valuable, and that he has tried to write similarly on musical tones, and obviously his Metamorphism of plants is written in the same vein. When it comes to the latter, he refers to Herschel, who was so poor that he could not afford a telescope, but had to make one himself which was his good luck, because it was much better than anything else which was available, enabling him to make his great discoveries. In the same way he entered the field of botany, approaching it empirically and in his own way, determined to find what unified all plants. It is clear that he is very proud of his scientific exploits. When it comes to his 'Farbenlehre' he still has to explain the rainbow. It is very difficult but he still hopes to solve it. He confesses that he can only engage in

a science if it directly impinges on his senses, thus he has no mustered any interest for Astronomy because here you are wholly dependent on instruments, calculations and the laws of mechanics (as we have already noted).

It takes until December 16, 1828 before the subject is breached again. Goethe proudly points out that his 'Farbenlehre' had precedents such as Plato and da Vinci. Eckermann points out that he is daily convinced by the theory whenever seeing the light of a candle or the smoke from a kitchen. On the other hand he has no understanding of the Newtonian theory, according to which the sky absorbs all colors, except blue. And he cannot understand the use of a theory that makes your thoughts stall and prevents any sound consideration. A few months later on February 19 1829 there unexpectedly comes a crisis. Goethe had earlier suggested that Eckermann writes a compendium on his theory, and when asking him how things were going, it turns out that Eckermann have started to have some misgivings. According to Goethe, the blue tint of a shadow in the snow, is due to a subjective reaction. The snow we look at actually has a yellowish tinge, and hence generate the blue as a contrast. But Eckermann had noticed that the large shadow cast by a building outside his window is blue, although there is hardly any lighted snow visible around it. This greatly puzzled him. To make sure he took a paper and rolled it into a tight cylinder looking at the shadow through it, and still it was blue. He was convinced that the color was objective and not something he made up. Furthermore he notices that on an overcast day, the shadows were gray, although the snow itself had a yellowish tint. The same phenomenon appeared when the sky was still covered, but the sun shone through some clouds. This convinced him that the blue sky was the cause of the color, and this also explained the different colors of the shadows cast by the small rod in connection with the initial experiment with the wax candle by the window. Goethe's theory had to be modified. To tell him that without wounding him would not be easy, but did he really have a choice?

So he gives him the reasons for his misgivings, reveals his observations and the conclusions he has been forced to draw. He had hardly started to talk before the previously happy face of Goethe darkened, and Eckermann became immediately aware that he did not approve at all. It must have been hard for Eckermann to challenge his idol, and sure enough he makes excuses. Perhaps he overstates his case orally, when writing it down, he may discover his mistakes. Goethe is not to be mollified and makes some sarcastic comments, dismissing his theory of colored light to the 14th century. With my theory it is as with Christianity. You think that you have some loyal disciples, but they turn out to go their own way, forming a sect and behaving like heretics. He walks to the window and Eckermann goes up and presses his hand, still feeling that he was in the right, and it was Goethe who suffered. Soon the latter started to talk and joke again, but solely about indifferent matters. Eckermann concluded that when it came to his favorite topic he could not stand opposition, while when it came to literature he gladly accepted it. It is like a mother whose favorite is the child whom everyone else shuns. In fact, as Goethe sees it, whatever he has done as a poet is nothing compared to what he achieved with his 'Farbenlehre' where he was the only one who saw the truth. Posterity judges him differently.

Not less than a year later on 20 February 1831, does Goethe finally admit, if grudg-

ingly, that Eckermanns suggestion that the blue of the shadows could arise from the blue of the sky, although this does not necessarily exclude the possibility that both occur, and his idea of generation can simply amplify the phenomenon. Eckermann obviously agrees and is very happy that Goethe has come around. But Eckermann, to be honest, has come around to, more so than Goethe, bending backwards indeed to accommodate him, denying that there is such a thing as colored light, diluting all his former convictions to the point of mere blandness.

Goethe had dissenters and opponents. Among the dissenters he counts primarily those who stem out of stupidity. They do not understand me, and they berate me without knowing me, he tells Eckermann. They have bored me a lot, but I should forgive them, they never knew what they were doing. As to scientists, as already remarked above, he explains their propagation of mistaken beliefs, as due to the survival instinct. They preach what they owe their existence to, and hence they extol it. Of course as to enemies, only Newton is explicitly named. No doubt Goethe found him too mathematical, too mechanical, in short too materialistic, the epitome of what he missed in science, the sense of spirit and mystery.

Eckermann does not only suffer the censure of Goethe when he expresses misgivings about 'die Farbenlehre', but also early on in their acquaintance when Eckermann is tempted to accept an offer to become a regular contributor on contemporary German literature to an English Journal. Goethe scoffs at the idea. What does he know of contemporary German literature? It would take him far too much effort and provide too serious a distraction from his real work, which is, although he does not say it explicitly, being a private secretary to Goethe. Thus, one surmises that poor Eckermann is denied a source of regular income. At the end, Goethe does not approve of Eckermann publishing their conversations, and thus depriving him of following a literary career which those conversations certainly would have launched him on.

Finally Goethe is an old man. What does he think of death? The thought of Paradise does not appeal to Goethe. All those pious people whom he would meet and who would tell him, was this not what they had thought and expected all along. Were they not right after all? A boredom without any end. Thoughts on immortality is only for people (especially women) with nothing better to do. A busy man who has something to strive for and accomplish in this world does not concern himself with the next. Yet the issue of immortality cannot be dismissed so easily. As he notes: 'When you are in your 75th year (2/5 1824) you cannot help thinking of death. The thought does not disturb me' he assures Eckermann, 'I am convinced that our spirit is indestructible. It is like the sun which shines all the time, even if we see it as setting and rising'. (On 4/2 1829) He continues to claim that man should believe in immortality, to that he has a right, it is in his nature. This conviction is based on the concept of activity. 'When I up to the end feel restless it is the duty of nature to let me continue, be it in some other form' he believes. (On 1/9 1829). 'How much has not been philosophized on immortality, and to what avail' he exclaims, and continues. 'I do not doubt our continuation 'denn die Natur kann die Enteleiche nicht entbehren' (On 15/5 1831) 'When one is in ones eighties you have hardly a right to exist, you must be prepared to be called away at any moment', he professes. This means that you have to have your house in order, and by that time Goethe has assigned Eckermann.

to be his executor as to his Nachlass and gives him a contract to sign.

Goethe was active to the very end. He noted: 'It is unbelievable how much the spirit steadies the body. I often suffer from pains in the nether regions, only my spirit and mental perseverance keeps me going. At high barometer I work better than at low, so at the latter I must compensate by more mental effort and it works'. So although he may seem a picture of health he had to struggle in his old days. On November 30 1830 he suffered a violent bleeding and was not far from death. Half a year later, as noted above, he makes Eckermann his executor. What finally does him in is pneumonia the following spring.

October 5, (18, 26), 28, November 6, December 1-2, 2014 **Ulf Persson:** *Prof.em, Chalmers U.of Tech., Göteborg Sweden ulfp@chalmers.se*