

Begriff (Concept)

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The lexeme *Begriff* marks Goethe's ongoing reconstruction of the traditional philosophical concept across a variety of disciplinary practices. In its most developed articulations, it also works transcendently to establish the conditions of possibility for thought and intelligibility on a dynamic plane of verbal experimentation and reinvention that cuts immanently through the world. Unlike the clear and distinct concepts of rationalist metaphysics, which function as fixed universals beyond the reach of the senses, Goethe's extensive usages and ongoing conceptualizations of *Begriff* draw on an expressive power within language to generate sequences of cognitive moves and moments of transitional understanding that stand in close relation to each other and can be gathered in graded series to be saved for further observation, description, reflection, and reconfiguration. Through its successive linguistic manifestations, moreover, and in line with Goethe's heterodox approach to systematic philosophy, *Begriff* lays out force fields of verbal and philosophical activity and discovery with fluid and permeable borders. In ways comparable to the power of reflective judgment in Kant's third critique, which dispenses with the categories of the understanding and their determining judgments to work intuitively within the world of living forms (*Gestalten*), Goethe's *lebendiger Begriff* (living concept) proves to be a more encompassing structure of thought and its processes than the conceptual machinery of orthodox metaphysical systems with their regulatory regimes of limit-setting terms. Redeployed as an experimental object of experience, *Begriff* is, therefore, also *anschaulich* (visual, accessible to intuition). By offering a dynamic perspective onto the fugitive things of the world—including its thought things—it continually reveals the hidden secrets of its own perpetual becomings.

Introduction

Born into an era of cultural upheaval and transformation that would carry his name, Goethe came of intellectual age on the battlefield of philosophy. The course of his emergence as an important, although often marginalized, participant in the conversation of German philosophy at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries, however, was more circumstantially driven, and so more meandering and tactical in its articulations, than it was strategic, deliberate, or direct. While Goethe engaged with philosophy from his earliest days as a student in Leipzig and Strasbourg and while he continued to mature as a philosopher throughout the classical and post-classical stages of his philosophical edification, he eventually came to understand his philosophical engagements as a series of counter-maneuvers against systematic metaphysics and

the conceptual machinery that powered it. Attempting a comprehensive examination of his widespread and variable uses of the lexeme *Begriff* throughout his long journey in metaphysics, therefore, offers special challenges. On the one hand, as a philosophical contrarian, Goethe typically responded in random asides or brief comments to the entrenched beliefs of the followers of Christian Wolff (1679-1754)—who had dominated the university curriculum during his student years—as well as the metaphysical debates that were circulating among philosophical luminaries of the day, including Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), Salomon Maimon (1753-1800), Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814), Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831), and Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling (1775-1854). On the other hand, however, his defensive jabs against the “assaults” of the philosophical establishment and its

Begriff in Adelung's Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart. *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart.* Adelung's entry for *Begriff* provides a summary of how it was commonly understood as Goethe undertook his philosophical excursions. It also suggests that his usages of the lexeme were creative reconstructions of a series of definitions that were widely circulating at the time:

Der Begriff. 1) In dem figurlichen Verstande der zweyten Bedeutung des Verbi begreifen, die völlige Bereitschaft zu dem Anfange einer freywilligen Handlung; ohne Plural. Im Begriffe seyn oder stehen. Er stehet im Begriffe abzureisen. Ich war eben im Begriffe zu ihnen zu kommen. 2) In der dritten Bedeutung des Verbi. (a) Derjenige Raum welcher etwas in sich begreift. Der Begriff des Hauses, der ganze Umfang desselben. Der ganze Begriff der Welt [...]. (b) Dasjenige, was Begriffen, oder kurz zusammen gefasset worden [...]. (c) Eine jede Vorstellung in der Seele. Ich kann mir keinen Begriff von dieser Sache machen. Einen klaren oder dunkeln Begriff von etwas haben. Nach meinem Begriffe, nach der Vorstellung, die ich mir von der Sache mache.

CONCEPT. 1) In the figurative sense of the second meaning of the verb to understand, the complete readiness to initiate an action; no plural. To be poised or stand ready. He stands ready to depart. I was just poised to go to them. 2) In the third sense of the verb. (a) That space encompassing something. The concept house, or the house in its entirety. The complete concept of the world [...]. (b) That which has been grasped or succinctly summarized [...]. (c) Any mental presentation. I cannot conceive of this matter. To have a clear or an obscure idea of a thing. According to my idea, as I imagine something.

doxai inadvertently produced sustained philosophical actions on his part as well. Through opportunistic skirmishes with the philosophical arbiters around him, rather than in an extensive campaign, Goethe would effectively resist the orthodoxies of the rationalist, Kantian, and idealist architects of both the old and the new metaphysics by undermining their most basic building block: the eternally valid and universally applicable philosophical concept.²

Interestingly, Goethe's widely documented aversion to all systematic dogmatisms, which often expressed itself reactively, also actively produced a new understanding of the basic vulnerability of philosophical *doxai* as such, including the concept. By repeatedly rethinking the lexeme *Begriff* over the course of his extensive philosophical career, he found himself on an accidental journey through philosophical conceptualization that would secure his position as a heterodox thinker who intuitively recognized the susceptibility of concepts to variability and change. Looking both forward and backward, Goethe came to the paradoxical understanding that the building blocks of the philosophical edifice are its own fugitive concepts. In the process, he also established the plastic *Begriff* as the informing *problem* of philosophical inquiry and not the universal key to any of its perennial riddles.³

The Journey of *Begriff* and its Modifications in Goethe's Philosophical Lexicon

The extensive lexicon of words that Goethe salvaged and reinvented as a heterodox thinker can be provisionally organized into clusters or groups: (1) concepts borrowed from everyday words and expressions; concepts appropriated from (2) theology, (3) science, and philosophy, including (4) epistemology, (5) ethics, (6) aesthetics, and (7) poetics; (8) concepts constructed from grammatical structures; as well as concepts invented as (9) neologisms or portmanteaus and (10) signature terms. But whether "borrowed," "appropriated," "deployed," or "invented," *Begriff* and its modifications for Goethe did not just fix in words the results of the conceptual acts of grasping (*fassen*, *greifen*, *ergreifen*) and containing (*umfassen*, *umfassen*). Through an increasingly self-aware process, it also came to grasp itself—in the spirit of the poem "Ganymed" (1774/78/89) as "umfassen" (FA 1.1:205; embraced). As a temporalized figuration of the *process* of thinking, that is, Goethe's re-conceptualized philosophical concept would ultimately comprehend itself *within* the force field of its own self-production and perfection. And much like the heretic Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677),

whose reconceptualized divine substance encompasses nature as an eternally self-renewing expressive force (*natura naturans*), Goethe imagined *Begriff* doing its work of comprehension on what Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) and Félix Guattari (1930-1992) call a “plane of immanence.”⁴ According to his own similarly heterodox approach to philosophical conceptualization, all past and future modifications of any concept, as well as all of its subsidiary concepts, can potentially materialize, or express themselves, like Spinoza’s modal expressions of the divine attributes, as “sensibilia” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 49). Like Deleuzian-Guattarian thought objects, moreover, or the “prehensions” in the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), *Begriff* and its aggregate of subsidiary concepts operate within the world and not above it. They can only maintain themselves—to borrow another Whiteheadian term—by becoming “ingredient” in the ongoing concrescence of new concepts and new perceptual objects. By recording and passing through the degraded “Meinungen” (FA 1.24:442; *doxai*, beliefs) of the philosophical tradition, as well as its own fugitive moments of conceptualization, *Begriff* thus ultimately became a foundational structure of thought for Goethe upon which he would erect his vast edifice of philosophical concepts.

The journey of the word *Begriff* in German philosophical discourse did not begin with Goethe, however, but with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), whose translation of the Latin verb *concipere* (to conceive, gather) in its past participle form *conceptus* (product of conception, fetus) linked the mental act of conceptualizing not only with physical activities like grasping, holding, gathering, collecting, and containing, but also with the biological events of conception (*zeugen*) and giving birth.⁵ By the early nineteenth century, *Begriff* had acquired widespread currency within German intellectual circles, and it would appear some 1,700 times across Goethe’s works, while its Latin derivative *Konzept* has about 600 occurrences.⁶ Among all of Goethe’s usages, 137 occur in variations of Adelung’s phrase, “im Begriff seyn oder stehen” (to be poised or stand ready). And while this substantive, along with the two infinitives that are often paired with it, suggest a stable state of being, it can also be followed by infinitive phrases other than “to be” or “to stand” to suggest potentiality and motion. Each of these subsidiary phrases, in fact, contains the possibility of all of the finite forms of its own infinitive, thereby further

implying that *Begriff* is not just finite and particular in its individual manifestations, but also infinitely variable in its self-comprehension as process. That is to say, based on a double capacity to move through and encompass all of its own possible modifications, or finite modes, as well as all the modifications of its subsidiary concepts, *Begriff* is a figure on the move. It invariably pushes established semantic borders beyond their limits in pursuit of new problems to articulate.

Along with the verbs *begreifen*, *konzipieren*, and *zeugen*, which—like Spinoza’s divine attributes of extension and thought—refer to parallel physical and mental activities, Goethe’s lexicon of philosophical concepts includes a collection of closely related words of grasping that, in turn, can be grasped as expressive modifications of *begreifen*, similarly understood as both physical and mental activities. These include, in addition to *ergreifen* (to grasp, take hold of), synonyms such as *fassen* (to grip, grasp, apprehend), *umfassen* (to encompass, comprise, comprehend), *zusammenfassen* (to summarize, subsume), and *erfassen* (to grasp), as well as *umfängen* (to surround, embrace, envelop). And when other key verbs that denote “grasping things in their essence” are added to the list, the expressive range of *begreifen* is extended. In fact, when considered together and in relation to each other, the cluster of discrete terms subsumed under the infinitive acquires the form of a graded series. *Begreifen* thus connects and resonates not just with *ergreifen*, *erfassen*, *fassen*, *umfassen*, *zusammenfassen*, and *umfängen*, but also with philosophically invested verbs of perception such as *schauen* (to behold) and *anschauen* (to look at something intuitively and with deep understanding), as well as with *vorstellen* and *darstellen* (to present and represent), and *verstehen* (to understand). And as the Latin verb *concipere* (to conceive), along with its past participle *conceptus* (embryo or fetus) suggests, all of its modifications and synonyms work together to configure *Begriff* as a morphological process that moves through the distinct phases of life, including birth, maturation, conception, fruition, death, and regeneration.

The Lyrical Subject Reconfigured as Conceptual Persona

An unlikely *mise-en-scène* of *Begriff* as a morphological figure of thought can be found in Goethe’s hymn “Ganymed” (1774/78/89),⁷ which evokes Spinoza’s modal

metaphysics as the poem's "conceptual persona"⁸ moves, strophe by strophe, through the finite modifications of nature toward the infinite source of their perfection. Ganymed's journey in affection, perception, and perfection begins in strophe one, where he joyfully announces his physical and spiritual rebirth within an erotically charged natural landscape that recalls the immanent power of divine generation, designated in the *Ethics* as *natura naturans*, or the infinite force field of its own endless modifications (*natura naturata*):

Wie im Morgenrot
 Du rings mich anglühst
 Frühling Geliebter!
 Mit tausendfacher Liebeswonne
 Sich an mein Herz drängt
 Deiner ewigen Wärme
 Heilig Gefühl
 Unendliche Schöne! (FA 1.1:205.1-8)

How in morning's red shimmer your gaze glows
 all round me, Springtime, my Lover! With
 thousand-fold and joyful passion, your warmth
 presses its holy touch eternally close to my heart,
 you infinite Beauty!

If the first strophe introduces divine immanence as an alluring figure of renewal and love that awakens Ganymed to his own capacity to be pleurably affected, however, the solitary sentence of strophe two—in accord with Proposition 53 in Book Three of the *Ethics*—transforms these spontaneous feelings of joy and wonder into a self-reflexive sensation of a higher order that signals the mind's passage "to a greater perfection."⁹ Thus seized by amazement, Ganymed cries out with the third of eleven exclamations throughout the poem, "Daß ich Dich fassen möcht / In diesen Arm!" (FA 1.1:205.9-10; That I might hold tightly onto you with grasping arm!). Apparently, the alluring sensations featured in strophe one as erotic and aesthetic affections now animate the speaker's body and mind by engaging and setting into motion a capacity to act that is as essential to his being as his capacity to feel. Clearly, Ganymedian "amazement," which the series of exclamation points in each of the poem's strophes features as a motivational device, is not just a passive affection. That is to say, the feeling that strikes Ganymed in strophe one does not just transfix and hopelessly incapacitate

him. In fact, he quickly moves through his initial seizure, or passive affection in amazement, to its active reconfiguration in wonder, which from Plato and Aristotle through Heidegger, Whitehead, and Deleuze has been linked to the mythical origins of philosophy.

In an important sense, then, Ganymed's outstretched arm signals a reflexive awareness of his comprehensive capacity to grasp the world in its essential reality. By configuring his journey in philosophy as a journey of "grasping," moreover, this physical gesture further specifies his passage through the poem as a journey in philosophical conceptualization. As predicated with the transitive verb *fassen*—which also means "to comprehend"—the passive and active affections of body and mind traced by the arc of Ganymed's trajectory will henceforth allow him to "get his arms and his mind (conceptually) around" the divine progenitor. If God's *reality*, according to Spinoza's analysis, is given to human cognition in the reality of the modal essences and their infinite modes—which move as bodies and thoughts from the infinite to the finite and back,¹⁰ then Ganymed's "all-loving Father," conceived as *natura naturans*, is given to him in his own passage between a principle of earthly transcendence that reproduces itself in infinite modifications and one of divine immanence that is infinitely productive.¹¹

No sooner does "Ganymed" articulate its figural investment in philosophical conceptualization, however, than it records a second reversal with the pneumatic "Ach" (alas) of displeasure that introduces strophe three:

Ach an deinem Busen
 Lieg ich, schmachte,
 Und deine Blumen, dein Gras
 Drängen sich an mein Herz
 Du kühlst den brennenden
 Durst meines Busens
 Lieblicher Morgenwind!
 Ruft drein die Nachtigall
 Liebend nach mir aus dem Nebeltal. (FA
 1.1:205.11-19)

Alas, lying at your bosom I languish, and these
 your flowers, your grass, press through to my
 heart. You cool the burning thirst in my bosom,
 dear sweet Morning Breeze! Call in the nightin-
 gale, drawn loving me, from fog-filled vale.

Apparently, the urge to grasp (or contain and comprehend) the generative power of *deus sive natura*, which the last three lines of the first strophe configure as sacred (*heilig*), eternal (*ewig*), and infinite (*unendlich*), cannot be sustained. Despite the overwhelming desire to extend his arms “umfangend” (FA 1.1:205.29; embracing), that is, and embrace the meadow flowers and grass that he smells, sees, and feels in his midst, Ganymed momentarily experiences an “unpleasant” diminution of power and languishes. With the distant circle of fog in the nearby valley not yet dissipated and the unheard melodies of the invisible nightingale not yet materialized, at least at this point in his journey, the speaker falters, philosophically, in his attempt to contain and stabilize, and thereby to clarify, the eternal essence of the divine reality that first awakened and lured his awe-struck attention in strophe one.

But the failure in the first two lines of strophe three to grasp and comprehend the vibrant array of indistinct shapes and transient colors—which in strophe two appear to emerge from the redness of the dawn’s light—also initiates a third reversal in the poem’s graded series of transitions: “Ich komme! ich komme! / Wohin? Ach, wohin? (FA 1.1:205.20-21; I come! I’m coming! Where to, alas, where to?). And while Ganymed’s focus remains as yet unsteady and indistinct, as his song ends, he finds himself positioned to return to the erotically charged and beautiful world of strophe one with an enhanced understanding of the “sacred, “eternal,” and “infinite” force field of self-generating, self-maintaining, and self-perfecting forms that first triggered his pleasant sensations and subsequent urge to reach out and grasp.

Hinauf hinauf strebts!
 Es schweben die Wolken
 Abwärts die Wolken,
 Neigen sich der sehnenen Liebe.
 Mir! Mir
 In euerm Schoße
 Aufwärts!
 Umfangend umfängen!
 Aufwärts
 An deinen Busen,
 Alliebender Vater! (FA 1.1205.22-32)

Ascend, Ascend, strive! The clouds are all floating downward, they’re floating, bowing, chasing lovingly after me! Me, on your lap spiral upward! Embracing embraced! Drawn upward onto your bosom, All-loving forebear!

Propelled by an undefined push from within—which the contraction “strebts” (it strives) signals—Goethe’s lyrical subject thus continues on its rhythmic journey of systolic contraction and diastolic expansion through strophe five by tracing a trajectory of motion and rest that spirals outward and upward. That is to say, as the clouds drift downward in his view and his field of vision clears, Ganymed imagines an uplifting journey of self-perfection that turns on the axis of the active-passive construction “umfangend umfängen!” (FA1.1:205.29; embracing embraced). However imperfect, it seems, his characteristic desire to embrace and actively comprehend the reality of his surroundings in their essence is part of a larger physical and mental process of conceptualization that, like Spinoza’s three stages of cognition and self-comprehension, or Leibnizian “perception and apperception,” promises to complete itself within a state of perfect self-containment and attentive self-awareness.

From this third point of grammatical, topographical, and conceptual inflection, which is strategically placed to introduce an ultimate moment of heightened awareness, the song’s trajectory quickly moves toward its endpoint, where Ganymed rests in the embrace of his all-loving progenitor. Fully contained within the generative region of divine causality (*natura naturans*), he touches the chest of the divine father and experiences the kind of infinite wholeness (or substantial reality) that, according to Spinoza, belongs to the finite modes “by the force of the cause in which they inhere, though when they are conceived abstractly they can be divided into parts and regarded as finite.”¹² At least intuitively, it appears, and in line with Spinoza’s Ethics (Ip15), Ganymed—as both “conceptual persona” and poem—ultimately comprehends what it means for the body and the mind to be, or inhere, “in God.”¹³

An important component of this comprehensive embrace is the hymn’s implied reader, who can learn to “hear” the unspoken words within its sequence of figurative turns by following the rhythmically demarcated arcs of its flight.¹⁴ With its fourth and final reversal, therefore, the poem makes full circle from its spiraling ascent in song to direct Ganymed, along with this reader, back to its starting point, or the affectively charged semantic field where the hymn’s lyrical journey through philosophical conceptualization began. Powered by the erotic allure of the same kind of unfathomable and unobservable forms (*Gestalten*) of life that trigger Werther’s “wunderbare Heiterkeit” (FA 1.89:15; amazing pleasure) in the Ganymedian letter of May

10, Goethe's "conceptual persona" is again poised to move toward a state of mind analogous to Spinoza's divine intellectual love (*amor dei intellectualis*), which according to Part Five of the *Ethics*, is the highest form of cognition.¹⁵

When seen in the context of "Ganymed's" spiraling circle—which moves from the finite modes of the Goethean "Gott-Natur" (FA 1.2:685.32)¹⁶ through the infinite modifications of the divine body and its idea to their sensible comprehension in song and back—the writer's lifelong journey in philosophical conceptualization appears to be no less Ganymedian or, for that matter, no less Spinozist, than Werther's. Like the complex art of the songbird in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*—whose territorial creation "does not merely isolate and join but opens onto cosmic forces" (185)—*Begriff*, in all of its material and mental affections, or modifications, traces an analogous "line of flight"¹⁷ through the life-cycle of finite things toward a more comprehensive, or enhanced, aesthetic understanding of their essential reality as perpetual processes of emergence.

Instead of a Definition

In a tradition extending from Plato and Aristotle through Heidegger, Whitehead, and Deleuze-Guattari, philosophy began (and perpetually restarts itself) when someone looked into the world with a sense of wonder.¹⁸ Setting out in pursuit of an enhanced understanding of what initially presents itself for observation, but remains elusive, the philosophically motivated thinker imagines and makes verbal representations of the world of things in the Faustian hope of comprehending their shared nexus (*Zusammenhang*), or what holds them together. That is to say, driven by the affect of amazement (*Erstaunen*), the searching mind invents concepts. And even if no single word or phrase will ever adequately capture (*erfassen*) and comprehensively contain the essence of things in traditional definitions, there is a special moment (*Aperçu*) of intuitive understanding (*Anschauung*) for Goethe that, according to his phenomenology of the concept, facilitates philosophical seeing by collecting and organizing all the conceptual attempts, or *Versuche* (experiments), to understand things in terms of their emergence (*Erscheinung*) through time.¹⁹

When constructed as an experimental technology, however, *Begriff* is a *paradoxical* figure of thought. Driven on its journey of self-clarification and -realization by an internal

principle that can never be fully grasped, it finds itself lured to define its own borders and, thereby, contain further possibilities of explication. Yet at the same time, these set borders, along with their delimited horizons of understanding, open onto transitional zones of reconceptualization where new problems emerge and new concepts are required to formulate them. Or to put the matter differently, if as Spinoza argued, the circle "comprehends" an infinite number of possible rectangles, in Goethe's reconstruction, the philosophical concept *virtually* contains an infinite number of finite conceptual modes. That is to say, within its spiraling circle of immanence, the mutable and elusive *Begriff* contains—paradoxically—an *infinite* number of past and future modifications, or finite concrescences, of its own cognitive power. As a morphological capacity with a growing self-awareness that is attuned to a life in change, moreover, it must itself be conceptualized through the complex trajectory of its progressive self-perfection, rather than through any single concretion on its path. In this regard *Begriff* is excessive and transgressive in at least two senses. Not only does it refuse to limit the "definition" of a thing to any of its individual modifications or material expressions, it also acknowledges that the ontological pursuit of things in their essence cannot be limited by the requirement of concepts within the separate disciplines, including traditional metaphysics, for clarity and stability. For Goethe, thinking about things in terms of their essential reality requires thinking about concepts with the capacity to undermine—or even to violate—the reliance of orthodox philosophical systems on logical and stable properties like the "particular" or the "universal," which must be attributable to and predicable of things, if they are to become legitimate objects of ontological and epistemological reflection. By contrast, *Begriff* privileges force fields of philosophical activity and discovery with fluid and permeable borders that (like the power of reflective judgment in Kant's third critique) work intuitively within the living world (rather than logically within the worlds of Euclidean geometry or Newtonian physics, as in the first critique). The Goethean concept, in fact, finally works *transcendentally* to establish the conditions of possibility for thought and intelligibility rather than set strict limits on the understanding. Specifically drawing on the expressive capacity of language to generate sequences of cognitive moves and moments of transitional understanding that can be gathered in graded series, *Begriff* exists in a state of perpetual becoming. Its fugitive "appearances," like Aristotle's "*phainomena*,"²⁰ are always saved for further

observation, description, reflection, and recomposition in an endless process of reinvention.

Goethe's Mephistophelean Encounter with Philosophy

When Goethe began his university studies in Leipzig, he was still far from articulating the kind of theoretical statements about philosophical inquiry and its conceptual apparatus that he would later produce in his aesthetic and scientific writings, as well as in autobiographical reflections. Nonetheless, he quickly acquired a marked distaste for the orthodoxies of the dogmatic followers of Wolff like Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), whom he found professing in Leipzig and was more than happy to lambast. And this is just what happens in the second study-scene in *Faust*, where Mephistopheles, decked out in the disgruntled professor's academic regalia, mentors a naive student about the virtues of the *Collegium Logicum* (FA 1.7:83.1911). Here the philosophical concept—which from Aristotle to Kant was tied to formal logic—still regulates the mind when it makes its judgments by setting and enforcing secure boundaries. As satirized by Mephistopheles, however, the governing terms of philosophical inquiry are reconfigured as a torture apparatus that imposes a punishing regime on thought and fetters the mind.²¹ As the satire continues, the disruptive comments of the diabolical “professor” further imply that the philosopher's reified words have become degraded placeholders for the conceptual regimes of traditional metaphysics and its punishing disciplines, which have been emptied of all meaning: “Denn eben wo Begriffe fehlen, / Da stellt ein Wort zur rechten Zeit sich ein” (FA 1.7:85.1995–96; For just where concepts are lacking, a word appears in the nick

of time). Mephistopheles' joke notwithstanding, however, Goethe remained engaged throughout his own life in philosophy by a long line of notable predecessors whose superannuated words and concepts he would often redeploy and reinvent, rather than simply erase. And by engaging with the tradition in this way, he was able to make new concepts in order to articulate new problems and ultimately to frame new ways of thinking about the world.

Perhaps the most memorable example of the kind of circular, or spiraling, path that Goethe's philosophical words and their concepts can trace occurs in the first study scene of *Faust*—just before Mephistopheles emerges from Faust's poodle—when a rejuvenated scholar creatively translates the divine λόγος (word) in the “Gospel According to John.” There we find Goethe's theological and philological heretic wandering through a series of increasingly bold and unlikely alternative translations for the foundational *logos* that after his first hesitant choice “Wort” (FA 1.7:61.1224; word), haltingly continues with “Sinn” (FA 1.7:61.1229; sense), “Kraft” (FA 1.7:61.1233; force, power, energy), and “Tat” (FA 1.7:61.1237; eventful activity). If understood as creative interpretive work, however, Faust's final iteration returns us to the beginning of his translation with an enhanced understanding of God's foundational “word,” which with “sense” acknowledges its refusal to be semantically fixed and with “force,” its formative power of self-completion.

Many years after Mephistopheles had exposed the flaws of dogmatic metaphysics and its lexicon to the student in Faust's study, a remark in *Hegel's Vorlesungen über die Aesthetik* (1835–38; *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*) lamented the sad state of the philosophical concept along similar lines. “In neuerer Zeit,” according to Hegel, “ist es keinem Begriffe schlechter gegangen als dem Begriffe

The Infernal Scene of Biblical Translation. The unique and strange verb *irrlichtlieren* (to will-o'-the-wisp around) is used by Mephistopheles-Faust in the second study-scene as a lexical innovation that captures the heretical imperative of Goethean thought to displace the proper way of doing philosophy (including logic, rationalist metaphysics, and transcendental idealism) by repurposing its concepts, or traditional instruments of torture.ⁱ This neologism also captures the *transgressive* moment within any translation of a sacred text in the sense that translation, like metaphor (*Gleichnis*), implies moving across a border. Speaking through translation, or figuratively through metaphor and analogy (*Analogie*), always means speaking in “other words.”

i. See the entry *Irlichtlieren* for a detailed discussion of this kind of philosophical work. In this sense, it seems entirely appropriate that Faust's translating activity in the first study-scene begins stirring the “devil in the dog” even before his more traditional incantations conjure Mephistopheles upon the completion of his philological experiment.

selber” (during recent times, no concept has fared worse than the concept itself).²² Building on this observation, Hegel diagnoses philosophy’s malady and then prescribes a remedy by linking beauty in works of art, designated as the “ideal of beauty,” to a series of interconnected terms that includes the idea of beauty, as well as its closely associated concept. “Das Kunstschöne” (Hegel, 128; the beautiful in works of art), according to Hegel’s critique of the conceptual inadequacies of rational metaphysics, is not an “Abstraktion des Verstandes” (Hegel, 128; abstraction of the understanding). Instead, as the concrete manifestation (*Erscheinung*) of an idea, it exemplifies the highly prized conceptual absolute: “de[n] in sich selbst konkrete[n] absolute[n] Begriff” (Hegel, 128; the Absolute Concept, which is inherently concrete). In the terms of Goethe’s “Metaphysik der Erscheinungen” (FA 1.1.25:100; metaphysics of appearances), that is, beauty in art generates “die absolute Idee in ihrer sich selbst gemäßen Erscheinung” (Hegel, 128; the absolute idea as an appearance that is adequate to itself). The “Kunstschöne” (Hegel, 128; beautiful in works of art) enables the ongoing, material self-realization of its own concept (in the singular), which pursues the totalizing “Idee” of the Hegelian dialectic through a progressive series of concrete appearances.

Of course, Hegel’s idealist construction of processes of formation, which is based on logical contradiction, differs from Goethe’s morphological construction, which establishes the basic polarity (*Polarität*) of the material world and the world of ideas as the transcendental ground of all *Bildung* (processes of formation). Kant’s “aesthetic idea,” therefore, might provide a better comparative term for *Begriff* than the Absolute Concept in Hegel. “Dieses Prinzip” (this principle), according to §49 of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790; Critique of the Power of Judgment),

sei nichts anders, als das Vermögen der Darstellung *ästhetischer Ideen*; unter einer ästhetischen Idee aber verstehe ich diejenige Vorstellung der Einbildungskraft, die viel zu denken veranlaßt, ohne daß ihr doch irgend ein bestimmter Gedanke, d.i. Begriff adäquat sein kann, die folglich keine Sprache völlig erreicht und verständlich machen kann.²³

is nothing other than the faculty of presenting *aesthetic ideas*. By an aesthetic idea I understand that presentation of the imagination that occasions

much thinking without, however, any definite thought, i.e., any concept, having the capacity of being adequate to it; consequently, no language ever reaches it completely and makes it comprehensible.

Kant’s explication of what, in the preceding paragraph, he calls “*Geist*” (spirit), or “das belebende Prinzip im Gemüte” (Kant, 10:249; the animating principle in the mind), can be instructive in assessing how Goethe’s philosophical concept works, because—as with “aesthetic ideas”—*Begriff* is linked to the senses. As the compositional ingredient of networks of forces, relations, and becomings, it is “immanent” to the world. In other words, no less than Kant’s animating principle and its ideas—which are experienced as sensible intuitions—the philosophical concept for Goethe, as a thought object of experience, resides in the phenomenal world and is animated from within by its own elusive governing rule.

Like Kantian *Geist* (spirit, mind), moreover, which in §49 animates the creative work of the “conceptual persona” called the “Genie” (Kant, 10:313-19), *Begriff* has a capacity to organize and sustain itself by producing partial manifestations of the unknown, unreachable, and ineffable rule that regulates the flow of its fugitive appearances. Within this framework, the drive, or animating principle, of *Begriff*, as well as what animates all the new concepts it comprehends, ultimately drives Goethe’s heterodox practice of philosophical inquiry as well. If, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, “the object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 5), Goethe’s thinking is quintessentially philosophical and quintessentially heterodox. And if, as they also maintain, the “incorporeal” concept is nonetheless “incarnated or effectuated in bodies” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 21), understanding the work of *Begriff* and the work of philosophical inquiry requires understanding the basis of each in the kind of *aesthetic* (i.e. sensible) experience analyzed by Kant (and to a degree by Hegel), as well as by other aesthetic theorists like Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793), whom Goethe read and admired.²⁴

Yet if Goethe was not, strictly speaking, a Hegelian, he was not a rigorous Kantian either. Nonetheless, much in the spirit of Kant’s rescue operation on metaphysics, he was able to salvage bits and pieces of the critical system and reinsert them into his own project, saving what he found useful in Kant and making it his own, but also discarding what he did not. In a retrospective essay from

1820 entitled “Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie” (FA 1.24:442–48; The Impact of Recent Philosophy), Goethe describes this kind of operation by considering his sometimes respectful and sometimes fraught relationship with the professional philosophers who had overturned the dogmatic metaphysics of Wolff and his followers a quarter-century earlier. If Kant and the Kantians had revolutionized German philosophy, however, theirs was a conservative revolution that aimed to save systematic metaphysics from both dogmatic slumber and skeptical restlessness. By contrast, Goethe’s extended adventure in philosophical conceptualization was triggered by a natural aversion to the “proper” methods and received beliefs (*τα ἔνδοξα*; *ta endoxa*) of both the deposed and reigning philosophers at German universities, whose systematic inflexibility he energetically opposed. Consequently, and in defensive response to what “Einwirkung” describes as the hostile ingressions of their “intrusive world” (FA 1.24:442; eindringenden Welt), which aimed to preserve “Philosophie im eigentlichen Sinne” (FA 1.24:442; philosophy in the proper sense), Goethe developed an “improper” (or figurative) approach to philosophical inquiry. Later described in the same text as an oppositional maneuver on the battlefield of philosophy that had produced a self-perpetuating “series of counteractions” (FA 1.24:442; fort dauernde Gegenwirkung), this brand of philosophical conceptualization assumed the underlying phenomenality of the concept, which, in turn, required Goethe to develop “eine Methode [...], durch die ich die *Meinungen der Philosophen, eben auch als wären es Gegenstände, zu fassen und mich daran auszubilden suchte*” (FA 1.24:442, emphasis added; a method through which I attempted to *grasp the beliefs* [i.e., notions or concepts] *of philosophers as though they were objects* and tried educating myself with their assistance).

Like the fleeting effects of things gathered in sense intuitions, the informing *ta endoxa* of “philosophy in its proper sense” became ingredient in Goethe’s own philosophical edification²⁵ over time, but only after he challenged the logically structured *orthē doxa* (*ὀρθή δόξα*) of systematic metaphysics, thereby also subverting the misguided reliance of its practitioners on the kind of conceptual abstraction that Hegel attacked as the false foundation of secure knowledge. In fact, by consistently exploiting the degradation of the philosophical concept first satirized in *Faust*, later reconsidered by Hegel, and subsequently criticized by Hans-Georg Gadamer as “begriffliche Not”

(conceptual poverty),²⁶ Goethe reinvented metaphysical conceptualization. According to his heterodox approach, *Begriff* would ultimately demonstrate that it is more beneficial for philosophy to treat its concepts as productive “problems” than conclusive keys to the most basic questions philosophers ask in pursuing the truth. “Man sagt, zwischen zwei entgegengesetzten Meinungen liege die Wahrheit mitten inne,” Goethe proclaimed along similar lines in a late maxim. “Keineswegs! Das Problem liegt dazwischen, das Unschaubare, das ewig tätige Leben, in Ruhe gedacht” (FA 1.10:584; People have speculated that the truth lies somewhere between two opposing opinions. Not at all! It is the problem that lies in between these opinions; something that cannot be observed, life in its eternal activity, peacefully contemplated in thought). Rhythmically alternating on its journey of self-perfection between systolic moments of clear focus that hold onto objects by delimiting them in thought and an unbounded exploration of the diastolic process that generates them in the first place, *Begriff* finds its ontological place in a force-field of pure liminality between things that are observable and are not.²⁷

***Begriff* as a Living Form and Babelgedanke**

For both dogmatic and Kantian metaphysics, philosophical concepts must be universal and outside all experience. Fixed by the unshakable rules of reason, such concepts ask and then answer questions by defining the terms and delimiting the fields of their inquiries. By contrast, skeptical empiricism assumes that the philosopher’s concepts are as variable as their accompanying perceptions. Its concepts are, therefore, fundamentally unstable and, ultimately, as unreliable as the imperfect subjects that produce them.²⁸ In light of Goethe’s maxim about truth as a problem, however, the elusive “truth” of his plastic *Begriff* concerns the challenge it poses for cognition as a vital, or “living form” (FA 1.24:378, 574; lebendiger Begriff). More a problematic thought object than the key to a set of solvable problems, the philosophical concept in its Goethean construction follows a path of self-completion in pursuit of a set of morphological rules that reflexively express the process of its own emergence and self-completion through rhythmically alternating phases of systolic stability and diastolic change. Accordingly, it should not be surprising to find *Begriff* resonating with

Three 20th Century Philosophers Who Do Not Mention Goethe but Might Have During the first half of the twentieth century, Alfred North Whitehead coined terms like “prehension,” “ingression,” and “eternal object” to describe an ontological point-of-view that would avoid the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness.” By “confining [...] thoughts to clear-cut definite things,” or “abstractions,” bits of matter and thought are fallaciously fixed in one place and within a single duration of time and thus reified. Whitehead’s process philosophy, like Goethe’s morphological thinking, aimed to restore the totality of bodies and ideas to the dynamic reality that produced them in the first place and continues its work into the future. Despite his philosophical erudition, Whitehead rarely makes reference to Goethe.

Hans-Georg Gadamer privileged philosophical conceptualization as an interactive process between concepts and language. He recognized a line of “begriffbildender Kühnheit” (Gadamer, 146; conceptual daring) that extends from the ancient Greeks and German mystics through Hegel and Heidegger. Gadamer inexplicably fails to count Goethe among the “audacious” philosophers, however, even though *Begriff* acts like their “Reflexionsbegriffe” (Gadamer, 146; reflective concepts) by giving new life to old concepts.

Without reference to Goethe, Whitehead, or Gadamer, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari analyze the philosophical concept in *What Is Philosophy?* in a way that aligns with the approaches of all three predecessors. Their reconstruction in terms of immanence and creativity could serve as a useful frame of analysis for Goethe’s conceptual creativity more than a century-and-a-half earlier. In the words of one of a number of their responses to the question “What is a Concept,” we could also say of *Begriff* that it “is real without being actual, ideal without being abstract” (Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 15-34, esp. 22).

i. See Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 58.

other pneumatic terms in Goethe’s philosophical lexicon like *Geist* (spirit, mind) and *spiritus* or even *Ach* (alas). “Die Systole und Diastole des menschlichen Geistes war mir, wie ein zweites Atemholen,” he would recall of his encounters with Kant during the 1790s, “niemals getrennt, immer pulsierend” (FA 1. 24:443; The systole and diastole of the human mind was always pulsating for me, never separated, but like another kind of drawing breath). Along similar lines, in a diary entry from Rome dated June 27, 1787, he had already connected the reanimation of old concepts with the life-breath of philosophy: “Alles was er mir sagte hat meine Begriffe nicht geändert, sondern nur erweitert und bestimmt” (FA 1.15:377; Everything he told me did not alter my concepts, it merely expanded and defined them instead). In dialogue with his artist friend Jakob Philipp Hackert (1737-1807) at the Galleria Colonna, Goethe explains, and through the shared medium of their conversations about painting, he experienced a diastolic *Erweiterung* (opening, expansion) of his conceptual field, as well as its systolic *Bestimmung* (determination, delimitation through language), without having erased the conceptual impressions he had gathered during his first visit there.

During the remainder of his stay in Italy, Goethe found additional opportunities, other than museum visits or conversations with Hackert, to “determine” and gradually “expand” his understanding of how philosophical concepts should work. In this connection, the first sentence of the second paragraph in “Einwirkung” prominently mentions his own and Moritz’s shared interest at the time in art and its “theoretical requirements” (FA 1.24:442; theoretische Forderungen), which demanded new concepts for the adequate comprehension of beauty and its internal purposiveness. And immediately following, in the second paragraph, Goethe recalls their discussions about the metamorphosis of plants as well. The proximity of these two autobiographical recollections is significant, because it implies that Goethe’s aesthetics and science engage objects with analogous conceptual demands and that their concepts are, therefore, mutually illuminating. Furthermore, as Moritz suggests in his seminal treatise of 1788, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen” (Moritz 2:549-78; On the Transformative Imitation of the Beautiful), the problem of the aesthetic concept does not differ substantially from the more general problem of *Begriff*. Because the concepts of aesthetics, science, and

Goethe's Science and his Philosophy of Language The eminent Swiss linguist and philosopher Uwe Pörksen (1935-) has explicated Goethe's heterodox approach to conceptualization ("eigentümliche Art der Begriffsbildung") in terms of the reciprocal relationship between his scientific and philosophical pursuits. Pörksen lists numerous features of Goethe's scientific language that also apply to his reconstruction of philosophical language. Goethe's language is not only matter-of-fact ("sachgebunden"), he explains, it is also flexible ("beweglich"), enthusiastic ("enthusiastisch"), useful ("dienend"), and intuitive ("anschauungsgebunden"). Furthermore, it combines the abstract and concrete ("verbindet Abstraktion und Konkretion"), expresses dynamic interactions succinctly ("versteht es, dynamische Wechselwirkungen knapp auszudrücken"), respects phenomena ("drückt Respekt vor den Phänomenen aus"), and possesses a high degree of self-awareness ("ist sich ihrer selbst [...] bewußt").ⁱ

i. See Uwe Pörksen, "Alles ist Blatt. Über die Reichweite und Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Sprache und Darstellungsmodelle Goethes," *Berichte zur Wissenschaftsgeschichte* 11 (1988): 133-48, here 143.

philosophy all serve similar functions, in fact, they are also in conversation with each other. No less than the new classical aesthetic that Goethe and Moritz explored together while in Rome, or the new botany that Goethe would develop on his return to Weimar, his heterodox way of doing philosophical work would require new concepts as well.

In a contemporaneous review (*Referat*) of "Über die bildende Nachahmung,"²⁹ which effectively prepared and conditioned Goethe's formative encounter with Kant and the Kantians shortly after his return from Italy, the writer approvingly cites a series of reflections about concepts in Moritz's founding document of Weimar Classicism. Significantly, the first of these citations introduces a neologism that had its origins in aesthetic discussions about genius from Shaftesbury through Herder, Goethe, and Kant and was typically associated with the renegade *homo faber* Prometheus.³⁰ This new concept, which expresses the capacity to do philosophical work, is "Tatkraft" (power to act), and together with "tätige Kraft" (active force), it appears some twenty-seven times in Moritz's essay. According to its first usage, an intuitive feeling ("Sinn") for the highest degree of the beautiful ("das höchste Schöne") informs "Tatkraft." This cognitive power, Moritz explains, extends the power of the imagination by comprehending a dynamic thought object "that the human power to present does not comprehend" (FA 1.18:217 and Moritz, 2:561; das die vorstellende Kraft des Menschen nicht umfaßt). Returning full-circle to Faust's divine $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ and its foundational power, the second citation in Goethe's review continues with a reflection about concepts that accords with his own unfolding understanding of *Begriff*: "Der Horizont der Tatkraft, umfaßt mehr als der äußere Sinn, Einbildungs- und Denkraft umfassen

können" (FA 18:257 and Moritz, 2:561; From its horizon, the power to act encompasses more than the sensorium, imagination, and power of thought can encompass). Or as explicated by Moritz-Goethe in the next sentence,

[in] der Tatkraft liegen [...] stets die Anlässe und Anfänge zu so vielen Begriffen, als die Denkkraft nicht auf einmal einander *unterordnen*, die Einbildungskraft nicht auf einmal *neben einander stellen*, und der äußere Sinn noch weniger auf einmal in der *Wirklichkeit* außer sich fassen kann. (FA 1.18:257 and Moritz, 2:561)

Continual opportunities and beginnings for so many concepts lie with the power to act that the power of thought cannot *subordinate* them all at once, nor can the imagination *coordinate* them all at once, and the senses, even less, encompass them all at once as an *external reality*.

In line with the circular course of Faust's translation of $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\sigma$ in the first study-scene, then, as well as with Moritz's explication of "Tatkraft," the perfect concept should be dynamic and open-ended. "So wenig faßt der äußere Sinn" (Moritz, 2:562; the senses are capable of grasping so little), Moritz observes, "daß, um dem reichen Fonds von Anlässen zu Begriffen, die in der Tatkraft schlummern, nachzukommen und alle zum Anschauen und zur Wirklichkeit zu bringen, kein Leben hinreicht" (Moritz, 2:562; that no single life suffices to keep pace with—or intuitively behold and make real—the full stock of conceptual opportunities lying dormant in the power to act).

Interestingly, Moritz's dynamic reconfiguration of the aesthetic concept as the unrealized potential within "Tatkraft" did not make its first appearance when he published "Über die bildende Nachahmung" in 1788. In fact, the staging of a primary *power to act* as an endless capacity for conceptual invention and complication was prefigured more than fifteen years earlier, when Goethe introduced a neologism in his 1772 essay on architectural conceptualization, "Von deutscher Baukunst" (FA 1.18:110–18), that linked the power to act to thought. "Wenigen ward es gegeben, einen Babelgedanken in der Seele zu zeugen" (FA 1.18:110; Few have been given the power to conceive a Babel-like thought), the essay's architectural enthusiast proclaims,

ganz, groß, und bis in den kleinsten Teil notwendig schön, wie Bäume Gottes; wenigern, auf tausend bietende Hände zu treffen, Felsengrund zu graben, steile Höhen drauf zu zaubern und dann sterbend ihren Söhnen zu sagen: ich bleibe bei euch in den Werken meines Geistes, vollendet das Begonnene in die Wolken. (FA 1.18:110)

whole, large, and necessarily beautiful through to its smallest part, like trees of God; even fewer [the power] to find a thousand outstretched hands that can excavate the rocky ground under cliffs, conjure steep heights upon it, and tell their sons then with dying breath: I will remain with you in works of my mind, complete what has been started into the clouds.

Apparently, well before his conversations in Rome about aesthetic concepts and their dynamic architecture, Goethe had already been thinking about the genius of Erwin von Steinbach and his "illicit" mental act of "conceiving" the "barbaric" Strasbourg Cathedral, which he dubbed "einen Babelgedanken" (FA 1.18:110; Babel-like thought). Interestingly, the German verb *zeugen* (to conceive, show, bear witness), which Goethe's narrative about Erwin's Promethean power to make things (*Tatkraft*) strategically deploys, is, like *begreifen*, the translation of a Latin verb: *concipere* (to conceive). In association with the Tower of Babel, moreover, the Latin past participle *conceptus* (embryo, fetus) problematically designates a transgressive act of making or conception, as well as the living product of that act (a concept), which has retained the capacity to develop.³¹ As the architect's *Babelgedanke*, however, the Strasbourg Cathedral, including its chaotic western façade, has

conventionally been dismissed as something "barbarisch" (FA 1.18:114; monstrous), Goethe laments. It makes no architectural sense to dogmatic theorists, like the neoclassical ideologue Laugier and his adherents, who have been schooled in ancient architecture and its basic concepts. As reassembled by Erwin, however, and subsequently reconceptualized by Goethe, the cathedral's rocky foundation, soaring walls, and ornamented façade become the constitutive pieces of an eternally vibrant whole. In accord with the Babel-like principle of a *living* building, moreover, these functional parts of architectural activity have "grown together" and emerged as an eternal object in the process of becoming. Or as Goethe's architectural enthusiast proclaims, Erwin "ist der erste aus dessen Seele die Teile, in ein ewiges Ganze zusammen gewachsen, hervortreten" (FA 1.18:112; is the first out of whose mind the parts emerge, all grown together, into an eternal whole).³² And while the building's reality as "ein lebendiges Ganze" (FA 1.18:116; a living whole) cannot be comprehended apart from the work of past generations, it is also still constantly emerging. Not just the product of a single moment in time, Goethe's "Denkmal" (FA 1.18:110; monument or thought-marker) embodies the point of inflection within all living thought processes that look to the past but remain eternally tensed toward the future.

Because Goethe would come to understand *Begriff*, analogously, as a living form with a morphological capacity, it became no less of a conceptual challenge than the *Babelgedanke* of Erwin's building. But how can *Begriff*—with its complex architecture—be grasped, if it remains in constant process? If the totality of its unfolding life as the master term of philosophical activity is expressed through an ongoing series of changes, how can it be defined and contained? What elusive principle holds it together and drives it through the endless modifications of its governing idea? Or asked differently, how can the divinely creative and all-comprehending concept of Goethe's philosophical work be defined without ignoring its essential capacity to change as well?

Ending as it does with a gesture to the divinity, this series of challenging questions about *Begriff* might be usefully addressed by considering it in relation to Herder's conceptualization of God in *Gott: Einige Gespräche* (1787; God: Several Dialogues),³³ which reconstructed the divinity as an analogous principle of ongoing self-organization and self-explication some fifteen years after the two friends in philosophy had left Strasbourg. By configuring *Begriff* as something alive, and in line with the

Leibnizian reconstruction of Spinoza's God in Herder's essay, Goethe implies that philosophy's endlessly creative concepts occupy an intermediate position between Spinoza's modes, which are immanent within God understood as nature (*deus sive natura*), and Leibniz's transcendent divinity, which encompasses the totality of monadic perception as pure potential. The most appropriate measure of *Begriff*, then, would be a Spinozist capacity of perfection to comprehend all things coupled with a Leibnizian awareness of what drives its self-expressive activities in the first place.

Begriff and Goethean Science

No less than Faust in his drive for self-perfection, *Begriff* passes through endless incomplete, and therefore imperfect, appearances on the stage of its long journey in self-explication. In this regard, the problem for philosopher and scientist alike is Faustian: how to grasp objects of thought that are no less dynamic and fugitive (and so no less problematic to hold onto) than material things like colors or the stages of plant growth. As transitional moments within larger generative processes, both the distinct chromatic effects of light's "Taten und Leiden" (FA 1.23:12; active and passive modifications) and the metamorphosing organ of botanical propagation (*Blatt*) are experimentally reconstructed in Goethean science as ontological problems for a mind that wants to grasp what a circle of colors or an annual plant *really* is by grasping the elusive "how" of its passage of transitional "becomings," as well as the conditions that make such passage possible. To succeed in this, according to Goethe, the investigator must develop a self-aware method that is adequate to the dynamic world of observable phenomena, each of which, according to an untitled essay from 1798 (FA 1.25:125-27), can be graded in a series according to its degree of comprehension as "empirical" (FA 1.25:126; empirisch), "scientific" (FA 1.25:126; wissenschaftlich), or "pure" (FA 1.25:126; rein). In pursuit of the "pure phenomenon" (FA 1.25:125; das reine Phänomen), Goethe explains, the scientist "sucht das Bestimmte der Erscheinungen zu fassen und fest zu halten, er ist in einzelnen Fällen aufmerksam nicht allein wie die Phänomene erscheinen sondern auch wie sie erscheinen sollten" (FA 1.25:125; tries to grasp and hold onto whatever is determinate in appearances; he is attentive in individual instances not only to how phenomena appear, but also to how they should appear).

In other words, in order to understand the fugitive appearances of nature (*natura naturata*), the scientist—ever mindful of movement and modification—must reach out to an elusive regulating principle that can only be observed and evaluated through a series of transitional effects. Or, to borrow Aristotle's phrase from Book 7 of *Nicomachean Ethics* (1145b1ff.), because our perceptions of the world's things are fleeting, the scientific observer, as well as the philosopher, must "set down the appearances (*phainomena*)" (Nussbaum, 240). The Goethean experiment ("Versuch"), in this regard, entails mental operations and produces serialized conceptual objects that can be understood, to lesser or higher degrees, as dynamic expressions of the otherwise elusive essence of color production or plant growth. Goethe's color wheel (*Farbenkreis*), for example, with its six basic colors, offers a technology to track down and grasp the essence of "color coloring" by capturing and connecting the full spectrum of fugitive chromatic effects that Goethe produced (physiologically, physically, or chemically) in a series of carefully staged experiments. And as the version featured on the cover of this volume suggests, much like Goethe's color-things, his concept-things are similarly in process and so difficult to grasp. Ultimately, then, *Begriff* functions like an experimental technology with the capacity to stage, or "set down," endless subsidiary concepts, each of which strives toward a more or less perfect moment of self-awareness.³⁴

For the philosopher Goethe, as for Spinoza, Leibniz, or Kant, no single concept or finite mode or monadic perception or determinate judgment can conceptually fix the essence of a living thing in isolation from the emerging totality of an infinitely full assemblage of related concepts, modes, perceptions, or judgments. As implied in the "Vorwort" (preface) of *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810; Theory of Colors), what defines red as red cannot be captured all at once in a single concrescence or observation. As the ground of all change, the binding principle of things, which is also the internal engine of their transformations, should not be reified by fixing it with "clear and distinct" concepts or logical categories: "Denn eigentlich unternehmen wir umsonst, das Wesen eines Dinges auszudrücken. Wirkungen werden wir gewahr, und eine vollständige Geschichte dieser Wirkungen umfaßte wohl allenfalls das Wesen jenes Dinges" (FA 1.23:12; For in truth we undertake to express the essence of a thing in vain. We perceive effects, and a complete history [record] of these effects would certainly in all events encompass the essence of that thing).

While the concepts of rationalist metaphysics had failed to track down things in their essences, and while Kant's thing-in-itself remained beyond the grasp of the understanding, for Goethe the thing (*Ding*)—understood as a perceived object or *Gegenstand*—would itself become the key to thingness. Philosophical thinking, he put forth in “Einwirkung,” must be “gegenständlich” (object-oriented).³⁵ That is to say, to be rigorous, conceptual thinking must remain aware of its grounding in process and attend to the thing-like phenomenality of thought. In this context, thinking philosophically about *Begriff* appears to suggest “setting down its appearances” in a serialized thought-experiment of graded effects that resembles the ideal *Versuch* (experiment, essay, attempt, test, or trial) as elaborated in 1792 in the *essay* “Der Versuch als Vermittler von Objekt und Subjekt” (FA 1.25:26–36; The Experiment as Mediator of Object and Subject). Such an experiment, according to Goethe's *essay*, would *test* how a scientific observer can get at “what holds the things and the thoughts of the world *essentially* together”³⁶ by staging series of partial *experiments* in an *attempt* to observe and describe the conditions that allow some piece of a thing or a thought to emerge and be given to the mind for further reflection. The real *trial* for science is to arrange all experimental, or provisional, data in a way that demonstrates the essential reality of a thing by inquiring *how it appears* throughout its progressive emergences and in turn *becomes*, rather than by examining what it *is* at any given point of time. For Goethe, such serialized experiments produce *a posteriori* knowledge of a higher order (“von einer höhern Art”) in the scientific observer.³⁷ Accordingly, in terms of structure and function, it seems apt to think of his *Begriff* as an ideal *Versuch*: an *essay* in the making about an *experimental* thought object that perpetually *tests* and *tries* to express the ineffable rule of its own conceptualization, understood as a process of progressive emergence and increasing self-awareness.

An instructive theoretical comment about compiling and interpreting experimental data, including the graded self-expressions of *Begriff* as variable objects of Goethean thought, can be found in a posthumously published maxim that initially defines *Begriff* and *Idee* by setting a fixed and clear boundary between them. At first it appears that Goethe's definitions privilege the philosophical “idea” as the work of the higher faculty of reason: “Begriff ist *Summe*, Idee *Resultat* der Erfahrung; jene zu ziehen, wird Verstand, dieses zu erfassen, Vernunft erfordert” (FA

1.13:86; Concept is the *sum*, idea the *result* of experience; in order to draw the former out, understanding is required, to conceive or comprehend the latter, reason). By attaching both *Idee* (idea) and *Vernunft* (reason) to *Erfassen* (grasp), however, and both *Begriff* (concept) and *Idee* to *Erfahrung* (experience), Goethe blurs the boundaries he initially set up between the terms to suggest that the relationship between his oppositional pairs of concepts is not binary, but reciprocal. That is to say, because *Begriff* and *Idee* share *Erfahrung* as the transcendental ground of their emergence, they stand in mutually determining relationships to one another, as do *Verstand* (understanding) and *Vernunft* (reason), *Summe* (sum) and *Resultat* (result), or *ziehen* (draw) and *erfassen* (comprehend). Thus aggregated in a conceptual series, these concepts augment each other and so equip the mind to conceptualize all formative processes (*Bildung*) in terms of the dynamic nexus (*Zusammenhang*) of their concrete phases of emergence (*Erscheinung*).

As suggested in “Einwirkung,” a revealing analogy from the physical world for Goethe's reconstruction of the philosophical concept as a self-generating and self-governing apparatus can be found in his botanical writings. Much like the elusive principle of botanical conceptualization that he discovered in the Botanical Garden in Palermo as a budding philosopher of plant life, the problem of the philosophical concept required a conceptual machine that would be as adequate to the underlying variability in the life of *Begriff* as his *Urpflanze* (primal plant) and subsequently his *Blatt* (leaf) were to the equally challenging variability in the life of the plant. As famously described in his letter to Herder on May 17, 1787, the primal plant initially offered Goethe a key to the secret of botanical propagation that further allowed him,

Pflanzen in's Unendliche [zu] erfinden, die consequent sein müssen, das heißt: die, wenn sie auch nicht existieren, doch existieren könnten und nicht etwa malerische oder dichterische Schatten und Scheine sind, sondern eine innerliche Wahrheit und Notwendigkeit haben. Dasselbe Gesetz wird sich auf alles übrige Lebendige anwenden lassen. (FA 1.15:346)

to invent plants endlessly that must be consequent, that is to say, certainly could exist, even if they do not actually exist. They would not be

painterly or poetic shadows and illusions, but have an inner truth and necessity. The same law could be applied to all other living things.

Despite Goethe's enthusiasm for "das wunderlichste Geschöpf von der Welt" (FA 1.15:346; the most amazing creation in the world), however, his letter implies that his modeling device ("Modell") was just a starting point for further reflection: "Den Hauptpunkt, wo der Keim steckt, habe ich ganz klar und zweifelos gefunden, alles Übrige seh' ich auch schon im Ganzen und nur noch nur noch einige Punkte müssen bestimmter werden" (FA 1.15:346; Doubtless, I have clearly found the main point where the germ lies hidden; the rest I already see in its totality, and only a few remaining points must be better defined). As suggested here, no less with thought things than with the familiar world of rocks, plants, animals, and even colors, Goethe typically moved from passing moments of conceptual clarity and certainty through a recognition of their imperfection to a more fundamental appreciation that all things propagate and generate themselves over time. Dynamically grasping them as fragmented totalities, then, in effect seeing time in this new way, required visualizing dynamic lines of flight that are constituted by, but not reducible to, a series of fixed and uniform points (i.e., chronological time).

As far as the *Urpflanze* (primal plant) was concerned, the conceptual refinement that Goethe's letter hints was still needed happened once he returned to Weimar, where his key to plant life metamorphosed into the problem of the self-organizing, self-propagating, and self-maintaining *Blatt* (leaf) in the 1790 treatise "Versuch die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären" (FA 1.24:109-51; Essay to Explain the Metamorphosis of Plants). As explicated there, *Blatt* generates a graded sequence of plant organs through a rhythmically organized series of systolic and diastolic moments on the way to sexual union and conception. This leaf of a higher order of experience, which Goethe meticulously observes in its successive modifications as it moves up the plant stem but eludes observation in its entire progression, virtually contains the complete reality, or dynamic essence, of "plantness." Furthermore, the progression of Goethean "leafiness" terminates here, as well as in Goethe's didactic elegy of 1799, "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" (FA 1.1:196-98; The Metamorphosis of Plants), with an act of sexual union and conceptualization. *Blatt*, therefore, also suggests that the essence

of all concepts, including the master concept *Begriff*, is virtual. If in botany Goethe could hypothesize "alles ist Blatt" (FA 1.24:84; all is leaf), it would seem reasonable to proclaim for philosophy that "alles ist Begriff" (all is concept). That is to say, as a material figure of botanical propagation and growth, *Blatt* shares with *Begriff* its unity, universality, variability, and endless potential for self-expression and self-perfection. And in both instances, things with morphological capacities exhibit themselves through processes of emergence that produce series of transitional modifications: of leafiness (in the case of botany and a plant's succession of organs) and of living thought (in the case of philosophy and its foliating concepts).

***Begriff* as a Philosophical Metaconcept**

An important influence on both Moritz and Goethe during their Italian sojourns was Herder's philosophical dialogue about God of 1787, which offered an important response to Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi's (1743-1819) polemical treatise of 1785 against Spinozism, *Über die Lehre von Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (On the Teachings of Spinoza in Letters Addressed to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn). According to Jacobi, Spinoza's rationalism and materialism had combined to undermine the belief of orthodox Christianity in a personal and transcendent divinity. Herder countered Jacobi's polemic by reconceptualizing God as an omnipresent and impersonal power of nature (*natura naturans*) in perpetual modification of itself. His version of the divine substance thus partly resembles Spinoza's God, which is its own cause and expresses itself within the world *modally*. But it also shares features with Leibniz's God, whose universal mind comprehends an infinite number of *monads* with various degrees of clarity all striving harmoniously to produce the "best of all possible worlds." As discrete units of potential energy, moreover, each of these elementary units of Leibnizian perfectionism is internally compelled to complete itself by mirroring, more or less clearly, the all-encompassing and fully self-aware divine monad.

In line with Herder's reconceptualization of God, Goethe's *Begriff*—as a meta-, or master concept—serves as the creative divinity of his heterodox philosophical work. As a unified generative principle it expresses itself modally, like Spinoza's God, in an endless process of self-explication. *Begriff* is not just modal, however, it is also monadic. That is to say, it shares an awareness, or apperceptive capacity, with

Leibniz's God of its power to achieve perfection through the combined striving of all the modifications and subsidiary concepts it virtually contains, each of which is driven to achieve an enhanced degree of perfection. Whether viewed through a Spinozist or Leibnizian lens, however, Goethe's master concept, together with its innumerable subsidiary expressions, comprehends the dynamic reciprocity of its modal or monadic features in relation to the elusive totalizing process that its constitutive networks of imperfect moments of clarity represent.

A curious example of the kind of layered unity that *Begriff* strives to achieve can be found in the term *Nachahmung* (imitation) as analyzed in Moritz's "Über die bildende Nachahmung" and then reformulated by Goethe in the review of his friend's essay on the "theoretical demands" (FA 1.24:442; theoretische Forderungen) of art and its concepts. As the master concept in Moritz, *Nachahmung* (imitation), in Goethe's almost verbatim iteration, generates a linear series of interrelated concepts that trace the outline of a circle:

Das Edle und Gute steht zwischen dem Schönen und Nützlichen gleichsam in der Mitte; gut und edel steigt bis zum Schönen hinauf. Nützlich kann sich mit schlecht verbinden, schlecht mit unnützlich; und *da wo sich die Begriffe am weitesten zu entfernen scheinen, treffen sie gleichsam in einem Zirkel wieder zusammen.* (FA 1.18:256, emphasis added)

The noble and good, lies, so to speak, in the middle between the beautiful and useful; good and noble ascends to the beautiful. Useful can combine with bad, bad with useless; and *just where the concepts appear to have the greatest distance from one another, they are, so to speak, joined in a circle.*

Goethe's interest in Moritz's circular rendering of the conceptual organization of aesthetic *Nachahmung* might have been motivated by a passage in his essay that discusses the same cluster of concepts. There Moritz implies that a circular "Abstufung der Begriffe" (Moritz, 2:552; gradation of concepts) could provide the most accurate and useful model for philosophical conceptualization:

Nun schließt sich aber im Sprachgebrauch das Gute und Nützliche, so wie das Edle und Schöne, natürlich aneinander; und diese vier verschiedenen

Ausdrücke bezeichnen eine so feine Abstufung der Begriffe, und bilden ein so zartes Ideenspiel, daß es dem Nachdenken schwer werden muß, das immer ineinander sich unmerklich wieder Verlierende gehörig auseinanderzuhalten, und es einzeln und abgesondert zu betrachten. (Moritz, 2:552)

In normal usage then the good and the useful combine with each other, as do the noble and the beautiful; and these four different expressions designate such a subtle gradation of concepts and constitute such a delicate play of ideas that it must be difficult for thought to keep separate and observe as unique and isolated that which imperceptibly loses itself again and again by combining with another thing.³⁸

By repeating (without much comment) these parts of Moritz's essay, Goethe appears to have agreed. In fact, Moritz's circular visualization of concepts as the moving parts of a generative process was so compelling that he would adapt it two decades later in order to illuminate the process of color generation in terms of the reciprocal interaction of chromatic opposites in several versions of his color wheel that have since become ubiquitous. As Goethean "imitations" of Moritz's attempt to understand a key aesthetic concept (*Nachahmung*), these visual aids collect groups of commonly used words, or closely connected expressions, to produce a "refined gradation of concepts" and a "delicate play of ideas." Accordingly, they also model the kind of philosophical work that all Goethean concepts must do.

Conclusion: Conceptualizing the Variability of *Begriff*

Late in life, Goethe revisited and augmented his remarks about concepts in Italian gardens and museums, as well as in his conversations with Moritz, in a maxim that addresses the morphological capacity of words and the concepts they generate:

Kein Wort steht still, sondern es rückt immer durch den Gebrauch von seinem anfänglichen Platz, eher hinab als hinauf, eher ins Schlechtere als ins Bessere, ins Engere als Weitere, und an der Wandelbarkeit des Worts läßt sich die Wandelbarkeit der Begriffe erkennen. (FA 1.13:99)

No word stands still. Instead, due to usage, it moves away from its initial location, more likely in a downward than upward trajectory, toward something worse rather than better, more contracted than expanded, and the variability of words allows the variability of concepts to be recognized.

Words and their concepts are in motion. They pulsate, although typically, they fetter and confine thought rather than contain and consolidate it. But the capacity of language to change further implies that its path through philosophy can reanimate and enhance a philosopher's lexicon of concepts as well. And this is precisely what happens when *Begriff* finds itself wandering along a path of self-transformation that is rhythmically marked not only by systolic moments of consolidation—even to the point of conceptual impoverishment—but also by diastolic moments of exploration and reinvention.

In the same letter of June 27, 1787, where the term “lebendiger Begriff” (FA 1.24:378, 574; living or vibrant

concept) occurs twice, Goethe mentions another attribute of concepts, which can also be “anschauend” (intuitive). His transformative visit with Hackert to the Gallery at Colonna, where he observed his artist friend copying paintings by Poussin, Claude Lorrain, and Rosa, occasioned thoughts about *Nachahmung* (copy, imitation, emulation), he recalls, especially as it concerns the scientific investigation of nature and its concepts. All these experiences, he goes on to explain, “muß die Seele erweitern, reinigen und ihr zuletzt den höchsten anschauenden Begriff von Natur und Kunst geben” (FA 1.15:378; must expand and purify the mind and ultimately offer to it the most elevated concept of nature and art as a product of the capacity to see things intuitively).

To understand how the process of conceptual purification works we can turn to a later autobiographical record of an earlier gallery visit that Goethe would publish in Book Eight of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* (*Poetry and Truth*) in 1814. About two decades before he and Hackert visited the Gallery at Colonna, according to this account, Goethe

Begriff and Karl Philipp Moritz's “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen” (1788) Moritz brought a draft of “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen” to Rome, which he completed there after suffering a broken arm. His convalescence was eased by extended discussions with Goethe, who not only helped care for his recovering friend, but also became his philosophical interlocutor. More than any other contemporaneous document, Moritz's essay, which Goethe helped to complete, became ingredient in the writer's ongoing philosophical and aesthetic edification.

Moritz uses the lexeme *Begriff* almost seventy times in his essay, which also frequently deploys related lexemes like *fassen*, *fangen*, and *zeugen*. Additionally, he analyzes how philosophical concepts work by considering their organization, in a very Goethean way, according to the degree of comprehension they attain. In this connection, words and phrases like *Stufenleiter*, *höchste Stufe*, *Abstufung*, *Leiter*, and *aufsteigend-absteigend* (Moritz, 2:570, 556, 552, 557; stepladder, highest degree, gradation, ladder, rising-falling) occur throughout the essay in close association with *Begriff*. Significantly (and in accord with Goethe's proclivity to use circles to schematize concepts), Moritz suggests a number of times that series of related concepts can be organized in circles. Hence his use of *Zirkel* four times in the essay, as well as *Erdkreis* and *Kreislauf*. (Moritz, 2:556, 557, 565, 578, 559, and 562; circle, globe, and circuit).

In one of the more complex renderings of his color wheel, Goethe—following Moritz's “Über die bildende Nachahmung”—superimposes the nouns *Vernunft* (reason), *Verstand* (understanding), *Sinnlichkeit* (sense perception), and *Phantasie* (imagination) on the wheel's outer ring of basic colors along with the attributive adjectives *schön* (beautiful), *edel* (noble), *gut* (good), *nützlich* (useful), *gemein* (base), and *unnötig* (unnecessary) on its inner ring. In this connection, see Goethe's essay of 1789, “Einfache Nachahmung der Natur, Manier, Styl” (FA 1.15:872-77; Simple Imitation of Nature, Manner, Style), which was drafted in Italy in close communication with Moritz. Beginning with “imitation”—and so apparently under Moritz's influence—Goethe distinguishes and organizes three modes of aesthetic production in a graded series of concepts with reciprocal connections. After performing his detailed analysis of these connections, he concludes that they are all “genau mit einander verwandt” (FA 1.15:874; precisely related to one another), even if “eine in die andere sich zart verlaufen kann” (FA 1.15:874; one can gently stray into the other). The author thanks Daniel Carranza for this reference.

had already begun to understand that to be true and effective, concepts must be experienced. Or, as he reflects almost fifty years after first visiting the Dresden Gallery in 1768, *Anschauung* (intuition) and *Begriff* are reciprocally determined. The “commanding glory” (FA 1.14:346; Herrlichkeit) of these two “key foundational concepts” (FA 1.14:346; Haupt- und Grundbegriffe), according to Goethe’s retrospective reconstruction, lay with their capacity to affect “das Gemüth” (the mind), “auf welches sie ihre unendliche Wirksamkeit ausüben” (FA 1.14:346; on which they exert an infinite potential to act). During his early days as a student in Leipzig, Goethe explains, an important aesthetic treatise by G.E. Lessing (1729-1781)—*Laokoön: oder über die Grenzen der Malerey und Poesie* (1766/88; Laokoön: or Regarding the Limits of Painting and Poetry)—had captured the attention of a youth culture that yearned to free itself from the straightjacket of neo-classical theories of art. Thus in the grip of this and a few other seminal new works on aesthetic conceptualization, he continues, he decided to visit the art galleries in Dresden, where he hoped to further his aesthetic “education” (FA 1.14:345; *Bildung*) by supplementing his newly acquired theoretical understanding of works of art with concrete examples of “dignified objects” (FA 1.14:345; würdige Gegenstände). But if Goethe’s characteristic “realism” initially expressed itself in a plan to “lay his eyes on a larger body of significant works of art” (FA 1.14:347; bedeutende Kunstwerke in größerer Masse zu erblicken), it was also motivated by an as yet unreflected appreciation for “how concept and intuition reciprocally produce [or call forth] each other” (FA 1.14:347; wie sich aber Begriff und Anschauung wechselseitig fordern).

The reciprocal determination of *Begriff* and *Anschauung* in Goethe’s reconstruction distinguishes his understanding of philosophical conceptualization from that of Kant, whose first critique enlists a regime of concepts and their logical categories to process the “pure intuitions” of space and time in the production of reliable knowledge. While Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/87) would constrain the powers of the mind in search of secure knowledge, however, the “pure intuiting concept” featured in Goethe’s Italian and Dresden reflections allows the mind to grow and to see differently and to renew itself. In other words, the purity of *Begriff* does not depend on its independence from all experience as a Kantian *a priori*. Instead, it emerges over time in a series of mental effects

that engage the senses, especially vision, and together enhance the *experience* of phenomenality, including its own. In this regard, the philosophical concept for Goethe is both “anschaulich” (visual, accessible to intuition) when thought about, and “anschauend” (visualizing, intuitive) when thinking. It is firmly rooted in the living world, and so, not given abstractly to thought as a universal category (or concept of the understanding) that subsumes the particulars of an intuition under it. Nor does it subject phenomena to the power of a *bestimmende Urteilskraft* (determining judgment), which speaks through universal laws before all experience, as in the first critique. As noted earlier, however, there are mental processes in Kant’s third critique that execute their work outside the regimes of Euclidean geometry and Newtonian physics. In judgments of the beautiful or the sublime in nature, as well as when judging works of art or nature as purposive systems, the Kantian mind finds itself in Faustian pursuit of a universal principle of judgment without ever attaining it, and another power to judge (*Urteilskraft*) is summoned, which Kant calls reflective (*reflexiv*).

Kant’s analysis of this power in both its aesthetic and teleological forms is probably why Goethe, despite his resistance to systematic philosophy, read the *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790; Critique of the Power of Judgment) with interest and sympathy.³⁹ In fact, his reconceptualized *Begriff* works much like Kant’s power of reflective judgment in the “Analytic of the Beautiful,” where an internal purposiveness is assumed for beautiful objects, especially in nature, although the unfathomable principle, or concept, that propels thought on its journey to self-completion can never be defined, but only reflected upon.⁴⁰ Along similar lines, Goethe’s *lebendiger Begriff*, which means “living,” “vibrant,” and “fresh,” as well as “new,” stands in essential relationship to a logically unfathomable order of things. This order, as the didactic poem “Metamorphose der Tiere” (1820; Metamorphosis of Animals) sets forth, is fundamentally “beweglich” (FA 1.2:500; in motion) and, therefore, beyond the reach of the “power of determining judgment,” which must possess the conceptual principles it requires in order to execute its work. According to Goethe’s Kant-inspired morphological way of thinking, however, the dynamic orders of animals and plants and colors and philosophical concepts, which are all in motion, articulate conceptual problems rather than produce conceptual *aporias*. If

the order of *living* things, “das ewig tätige Leben” (FA 1.10:584; life in its eternal activity), is in constant motion, the concepts of living forms must also be in motion. As such, they are impossible to “grip firmly” (FA 1.7:11.3; *fest zu halten*), as the poet in “Zueignung” (Dedication) says of the “schwankende Gestalten” (FA 1.7:11.1; *wavering forms*) that he reports seeing emerge on the stage in the opening lines of *Faust*.

At the same time, however, problematic things can become objects of thought and conceptualized (*Begriffen*) through the sum of their concrete appearances across time. The task for *Begriff*, then, is to tabulate the *Summe* (sum) of such phenomenal appearances through its entire lifetime. But the philosophical concept must also acquire self-awareness, so that the historical sum of its modifications can be further conceptualized as the *Resultat* (result) of an internally driven process of self-perfection that is regulated by an ineffable rule. This seems to be what Goethe was thinking, when—in an attempt to set a boundary between *Begriff* and *Idee*—he asserted that “concept is the *sum*, idea the *result* of experience” (FA 1.13:86). It might be just as useful to say that wherever one finds a morphological capacity, *Summe* and *Resultat* relate to each other as two successive moments in a graded series of conceptual experiences, with *Resultat*, as the reflexive reconceptualization of *Summe*, enjoying the higher position.

In this regard, the “Schlußbetrachtung über Sprache und Terminologie” (FA 1.23:244-46; Final Observations about Language and Terminology) in the *Theory of Colors* (1810) calls attention to certain things in natural science that behave like the fugitive colors of the spectrum. Because they are “in constant motion” (FA 1.23:244; *immerfort in Bewegung*), they are also difficult to pin down with words. A list of such things would include both the metamorphosing leaf of plants and the elusive, self-regulating *Begriff* of philosophy, which along with colors, are appropriately called “*Tätigkeiten*” and “*Gegenstände*” (FA 1.23:244; *activities or work and objects*). But there is also an unavoidable conceptual problem haunting the category of things defined by their *Wandelbarkeit* (capacity for change): “Sie lassen sich nicht festhalten, und doch soll man von ihnen reden” (FA 1.23:244; *They will not be pinned down, and still one is obligated to speak about them*).

A fruitful approach to the problem of the fluidity of language and its concepts might lie with the concept

Wandelbarkeit (variability) as explicated by Aristotle. The capacity for change, according to Aristotle’s understanding, involves motion and process. Aristotelian “things,” which he calls substances, find themselves moving through processes of change from states of potentiality (*in dynamis*) to states of actuality (*in energiea* or *entelecheia*). *Wandelbarkeit*, then, conceptualized as the capacity of material things, or objects, to act and be acted upon is, more generally, an activity, or a process, of actualization. As such, it is also a concept commensurate with the morphological capacity of all philosophically invested words and their concepts. When understood as *Tätigkeiten*, such words and concepts—including *Begriff*—exist in states of perpetual becoming that are marked by the actuality of all past endings (i.e., their passive affections) and the *possibility* of all as yet unrealized *actualizations* (i.e., their active affections) into the future. A language that is sensitive to both the potentiality and actuality of its concepts exhibits the same kind of morphological capacity as the annual plant or the spectrum of colors. But the “actions” (*Tätigkeiten*) of such a language and its conceptual products can only be grasped figuratively: “Man sucht daher alle Arten von Formeln auf, um ihnen [the *Tätigkeiten*] wenigstens *gleichnisweise* beizukommen” (FA 1.23:244, *emphasis added*; one therefore searches for all kinds of formulae in order to come to grips with [the activities or actions] at least *figuratively*). Or in the words of the *Chorus Mysticus* near the end of *Faust II*, “Alles Vergängliche, / Ist nur ein Gleichnis” (FA 1.7:464.12104; *Everything fugitive is mere metaphor*).

The Ganymedian challenge for the philosophical concept, then, is twofold. *Begriff* must firstly remain active in its drive to embrace the essence of things, while also understanding that its power to act, or comprehend the fugitive things it pursues, requires an ongoing negotiation of potentiality and actuality. In this regard, it is “umfangend” (comprehending), but only provisionally. Secondly, as *Begriff* moves closer to its self-perfection as “pure concept” and enjoys increasingly higher degrees of self-awareness, it also understands itself to be “umfassen” (comprehended) within the same morphological process of self-production, self-organization, and self-maintenance that is the mark of other living things. And with this realization, *Begriff* can imagine itself to be content with the rhythmic process of conceptual

purification that ultimately contains it. Goethe seems to have been thinking along similar lines in the “Schlußbetrachtung” when he wrote,

[k]önnte man sich jedoch aller dieser Arten der Vorstellung und des Ausdrucks mit Bewußtsein bedienen und in einer mannigfaltigen Sprache seine Betrachtungen über Naturphänomene überliefern, hielte man sich von Einseitigkeit frei und faßte einen lebendigen Sinn in einen lebendigen Ausdruck, so ließe sich manches Erfreuliche mitteilen. (FA 1.23:245)

[i]f, however, one could only make conscious use of all these kinds of presentations and expressions and transmit one’s observations about natural phenomena in a varied language; if one-sidedness could be avoided and a vibrant meaning grasped in a vibrant expression, some joyfulness might be communicated.

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Finis The last word of *Faust*, Goethe’s “absolute philosophical tragedy”ⁱ is not “hinan” (FA 1.7:464.12111; on and on), but “finis,” which means “border” or “boundary” in Latin. A synonym for *finis* is *terminus*. The writer’s most important philosophical work thus ends where terminological work begins. Goethe used the word *terminus* in relation to boundaries or borders just once, in a letter to Lavater that he drafted from December 3-5, 1779 (FA 2.2:226-27). There he offers a lengthy description of his concept for a monument dedicated to the goddess *Fortuna* (Good Fortune) that would celebrate the felicitous conclusion of his Swiss journey. His comment imagines the divinity flanked on either side by her sons *Genius* (who is a pathfinder and instigator) and *Terminus* (who oversees border regions and is outfitted with the healer’s caduceus). The Latin verb *terminare* means to set borders or limits and is related to the verb *determinare*. Interestingly, this concept for the *Denkmal* (monument or thought marker), which was never erected, involves the same kind of reciprocal play between diastolic moments of creative expansion (*Genius*) and systolic moments of conceptual consolidation (*Terminus*) that is at work in the poem “Ganymed,” the essay on Erwin von Steinbach’s architectural *Denkmal* in Strasbourg, as well as in *Begriff*, Goethe’s endlessly creative reinvention of philosophical conceptualization.

i. “In der ersten Rücksicht will ich nur an die absolute philosophische Tragödie, an Goethes *Faust* erinnern, in welcher einerseits die Befriedungslosigkeit in der Wissenschaft, andererseits die Lebendigkeit des Weltlebens und irdischen Genusses, überhaupt die tragisch versuchte Vermittlung des subjektiven Wissens und Strebens mit dem Absoluten, in seinem Wesen und seiner Erscheinung, eine Weite des Inhalts gibt, wie sie in ein und demselben Werke zu umfassen zuvor kein anderer dramatischer Dichter gewagt hat” (Hegel, 15:557; As far as the first case is concerned, I need only recall the absolute philosophical tragedy, Goethe’s *Faust*, where a range of content is offered that that no dramatic poet has yet ventured to encompass. This content, however—which extends between a lack of satisfaction with the academic disciplines, on the one hand, and the vitality of worldly pursuits and earthly pleasures, on the other—tragically fails in its attempt to mediate the extremes, or more generally, [to mediate] subjective knowledge and striving with the Absolute in its essence and appearance).

Notes

¹ Throughout this entry *Begriff* is used to designate Goethe's master philosophical concept (metaconcept), as well the vast array of subsidiary concepts that populate his works. In both its singular and plural forms, *Begriff* marks Goethe's ongoing and heterodox reconceptualization of all philosophical concepts.

² See the essay "Anschauende Urteilskraft" (1820; The Intuitive Power of Judgment), where Goethe discusses his response to Kant and the Kantians during the 1790s by contrasting his own heterodox approach to philosophical problems with the orthodox methods of the systematic philosophers. He also invokes Kant's "Abenteuer der Vernunft" (FA 1.24:448; adventure of reason) there to describe the conceptual challenge that life forms represent for the cognitive faculties. Unless otherwise noted, works by Goethe are cited by section, volume, and page numbers according to the Frankfurt edition, abbreviated FA: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*, eds. Hendrik Birus, Dieter Borchmeyer, Karl Eibl, et. al., 40 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1987–2013). All translations are the author's own. Quotations from *Faust* and Goethe's poems, which are usually rendered in prose translations, are cited with page numbers in the FA followed by verse numbers.

³ Besides Adelung's dictionary, Goethe had two other works in his personal library that offer instructive overviews of how *Begriff* was understood at the time. See "Begriff" in Johann Christoph Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart: mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten, besonders aber der Oberdeutschen*, ed. Franz Xaver Schönberger, 2nd rev. ed., 4 vols. (Vienna: B. Ph. Bauer, 1811), 1:807-08. https://lexika.digitale-sammlungen.de/adelung/lemma/bsb00009131_4_1_1068; Johann August Eberhard, *Versuch einer allgemeinen Synonymik in einem kritisch-philosophischen Wörterbuch der sinnverwandten Wörter der hochdeutschen Mundart* (Halle: Joh. Gottfr. Ruff, 1795), 289–96; and Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus, *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyclopädie für die gebildeten Stände. (Conversations-Lexicon)* 6th ed. (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1824), 1:630–31. Also of interest are two important essays by Johann Heinrich Lambert (1728–1777) in the tradition of Leibniz and Wolff that share the title "Von den Begriffen und Erklärungen." See J. Heinrich Lambert, *Fragmente über die Vernunftlehre*, ed. Hans-Werner Arndt, 6 vols. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965), 1:4–50 and 6:193–214. The first essay was published in Lambert's *Neues Organon* (1764). The second one appeared in his *Fragmente über die Vernunftlehre* (1782).

⁴ According to Deleuze and Guattari, the network of forces, relations, and becomings that they call the "plane of immanence" is "the foundation on which [philosophy] creates its concepts." See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 49, hereafter cited in the body of the text as Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*

⁵ See the entries "Begriff (German)," "Concept," and "Conceptus" in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, ed. Barbara Cassin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014), 90–93 and 164–66. The *Dictionary* is also available online with a subscription.

⁶ See the entry "Begriff" in the *Goethe-Wörterbuch*, ed. Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Deutsche Akad-

emie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, and Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1978), 2:columns 235–43. <http://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/GWB?lemma=begriff>.

⁷ The texts of the first and second versions vary slightly. The one cited here is from the 1778 manuscript, known as "Die erste Weimarer Gedichtsammlung" (The First Weimar Collection of Poems).

⁸ For a discussion of this term, see Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 61–83.

⁹ See *Ethics*, IIIp11s in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994), 160–61. <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1665part3.pdf>. See also the introduction to Goethe's hymn in Karl Philipp Moritz, *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (Berlin: Johann Friedrich Unger, 1791): "In diese Sehnsucht nach dem Genuß eines höhern Daseyns, löst, nach der erhabnen Darstellung eines neuern Dichters, die schöne Fabel vom Ganymed sich auf" (331; According to the sublime presentation of recent poet, the beautiful fable of Ganymede resolves itself in this kind of longing for the pleasures of a higher level of being). http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/moritz_goetterlehre_1791/?p=399&hl=Ganymed.

¹⁰ See Gilles Deleuze, *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 192–93. Spinoza's "immediate infinite mode," which the twenty-second Letter to Oldenburg describes under the attribute of extension as "motion and rest," offers a useful tool for interpreting the rhythm of systolic and diastolic moments that conceptually structures Goethe's poem. For Spinoza's three examples of the infinite modes, see his letter to Schuller from July, 29, 1675. <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1661.pdf>, 91–92.

¹¹ The doubled dative inflection of the first-person singular in the last strophe suggests a higher level of subjective experience than the accusative and nominative inflections in strophes 1 and 2 respectively. The divine gift to the self-reflexive human subject works reciprocally by informing it with God's creative capacity to affect things as well as to be affected by them.

¹² See Spinoza's letter to Meyer on April 20, 1663. <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/spinoza1661.pdf>, 17–18.

¹³ See *Ethics*, Ip15: "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God," in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works*, 94.

¹⁴ See the final verses of the *Chorus mysticus* in *Faust II* (FA 1.7:464.12104–11), which celebrate the work of metaphor ("Gleichnis") as the engine of Faust's redemption. Through this special kind of verbal machinery, which is linked to the feminine, the striving human monad (i.e., Faust) can attain, describe, and preserve what would otherwise remain unreachable ("Das Unzulängliche"), indescribable ("Das Unbeschreibliche"), and transitory ("Alles Vergängliche").

¹⁵ See Yitzhak Y. Malamed, "The Enigma of Spinoza's *Amor Dei Intellectualis*," in *Freedom, Action and Motivation in Spinoza's Ethics*, ed. Noa Naaman-Zauderer (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 222–38.

¹⁶See Goethe's poem "Im ersten Beinhaus" (1826/29): "Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen, / Als daß sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare? / Wie sie das Feste läßt zu Geist verrinnen, / Wie sie das Geisterzeugte fest bewahre" (FA 1.2:685.31-34; What more can humans gain from life than the revelation of God as Nature? seeing how [this divinity] dissolves all that is firm into mind, how it firmly preserves what mind has conceived).

¹⁷See Tamsin Lorrain, "Lines of Flight," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia UP, 2005), 144-46: "A 'line of flight' is a path of mutation precipitated through the actualization of connections among bodies that were previously only implicit (or virtual) [...]. Deleuze and Guattari deliberately designed *A Thousand Plateaus* to foster lines of flight in thinking—thought movements that would creatively evolve in connection with the lines of flight of other thought-movements, producing new ways of thinking [...]" (145).

¹⁸In addition to the reading of "Ganymed," see the last line of "Parabase" (1820) in the "Gott und Welt" (God and World) cycle of poems: "Zum Erstaunen bin ich da" (FA 1.2:495.12; I am here to be amazed). For a recent discussion of this philosophical poem with reference to Schelling's conceptualization of the forces of attraction and repulsion, see Gabriel Trop, "Poetry and Morphology: Goethe's 'Parabase' and the Intensification of the Morphological Gaze," *Monatshefte* 105 (2013): 389-406. Trop's analysis of "Parabase" as an example of Goethe's "morphological poetry" succinctly describes the relationship between *poiesis* and modality/modification in terms that recall Ganymed's journey between the finite and infinite more than forty-five years earlier (391). Interestingly, Trop begins with a question about phenomena that, like Goethe's *Urphänomen* (primal phenomenon), "elude [...] one's grasp" (389). He then concludes with an engaging analysis of the complex phenomenology of Goethean wonder (*Erstaunen*).

¹⁹"Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains. There have been added, however, some grasp of the immensity of things, some purification of emotion by understanding." Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: The Free Press, 1938), 168-69.

²⁰See Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986), 240-63: "Here, as in all other cases, we must set down the appearances (*phainomena*) and, first working through the puzzles (*diaporēsantas*), in this way go on to show, if possible, the truth of all the beliefs (*ta endoxa*) we hold about these experiences" (240).

²¹See Mephistopheles' contrastive pairing of logic and "spanische Stiefeln" (FA 1.7:83.1913; Spanish boots) with the philosophically resonant neologism *irrlichtelieren* (FA 1.7:83.1917; will-o'-the-wisp around), which is also an entry in the current installment.

²²G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, 20 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), 13:127-28.

²³Immanuel Kant, *Werkausgabe*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 20 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968), 10:249. Further references are cited by volume and page number.

²⁴For how "Begriff" works differently in Kant (who uses it in the plural) and Hegel (who uses it in the singular), see "Begriff (German)" in Cassin's *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, 90-92.

²⁵I am using "edification" in Richard Rorty's sense of the long tradition of "edifying" philosophy, which offers a heterodox response to traditional epistemologies. See Chapter 8 in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1979), 357-94.

²⁶Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Begriffsgeschichte als Philosophie," *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte* 14 (1970): 137-151, here 146.

²⁷See the last excursus for Goethe's reflection on the twin sons of the Goddess of Good Fortune, *Genius* and *Terminus*, who embody the reciprocal moments of diastolic openness and systolic closure that together drive all processes of philosophical conceptualization.

²⁸Kant discusses these two mutually exclusive constructions of the philosophical concept in both the first and the second Prefaces ("Vorreden") to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781/87; *Critique of Pure Reason*), 3:12, 24ff.

²⁹"Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen. Von Karl Philipp Moritz. Braunschweig, 1788, in der Schulbuchhandlung" (FA 1.18:256-60).

³⁰Moritz republished Goethe's poem "Prometheus" in 1791 in his *Götterlehre (Treatise on the Gods)* after Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi had already illicitly published it in *Über Die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (1786; On the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters Addressed to Mr. Moses Mendelssohn). The final sentence of Goethe's "Von deutscher Baukunst" associates Prometheus with an aesthetically astute "Knabe" (FA 1.18:118; ephebe) who at some unspecified moment in the future will continue the work of the genial Erwin by effortlessly practicing his talents on all living forms (FA 1.18:118; "Gestalten").

³¹Using the same lexeme "zeugen," Goethe later summarized the generative power of concepts and conceptualization in a maxim that he published with the last installment of "Makarie's Archive" in Book 3 of *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* (1821/29; Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years): "Wir Menschen sind auf Ausdehnung und Bewegung angewiesen; diese beiden allgemeinen Formen sind es, in welchen sich alle übrigen Formen, besonders die sinnlichen, offenbaren. Eine geistige Form wird aber keineswegs verkürzt, wenn sie in der Erscheinung hervortritt, vorausgesetzt daß ihr Hervortreten eine wahre Zeugung, eine wahre Fortpflanzung sei. Das Gezeugte ist nicht geringer als das Zeugende, ja es ist der Vorteil lebendiger Zeugung, daß das Gezeugte vortrefflicher sein kann als das Zeugende" (FA 1.10:750; We human beings are attentive to extension and motion; it is these two general forms in and through which all other forms are revealed, especially the sensible ones. The process of spiritual [or mental] formation, however, is in no way cut short when it emerges and makes itself manifest, so long as its emergence is a true conceiving, a true propagation. What is conceived is no less no less significant than what conceives; in fact, it is advantageous for all living processes of conceiving that what has been conceived can be more excellent than what conceives).

³²See the previously cited statement by Hegel that describes the "Absolute Begriff" (absolute concept) as "konkret" (Hegel, 13:127-28; concrete). As John H. Smith pointed out in a personal communication, the Latin verb *concrecere*, from which "konkret" derives, means "to grow together." When some fifty years before Hegel Goethe used the German translation of *concrecere (zusammenwachsen)* to describe the relation of parts to whole in Erwin's architecturally challenging build-

ing, he was apparently already reconfiguring its recalcitrant concept—which he linked to the verb *zeugen*—as a “conrescence.”

³³Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, eds. Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, 10 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1994), 4:679-794.

³⁴In addition to the cover illustration, see the editors’ “Introduction” for a brief commentary on how Goethe uses this visual aid to schematize an analogical relationship between colors and philosophical concepts: “By engaging the four faculties that collectively power all processes of conceptual production, his [Goethe’s] heterodox metaphysics, like his heterodox science of color, equips us to see each new expression of a concept in the production process provisionally, as an essential working part in the totalizing process of its own comprehension.”

³⁵See the essay “Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort” (FA 1.24:596-99; Significant Progress through a Single Ingenious Word), as well as “Einwirkung,” where Goethe recalls treating the “Meinungen der Philosophen eben als wären es Gegenstände” (FA 1.24:442; opinions [beliefs, *doxai*, concepts] of philosophers as though they were objects).

³⁶Faust’s initial rejection of words is driven by his desire to understand “was die Welt / Im Innersten zusammenhält” (FA 1.7:34.382-83; what holds things together in their innermost core). As his philosophical adventure begins, he feels driven to attain an unmediated vision of “alle Wirkenskraft und Samen” (FA 1.7:34.384; the germ of all power to make things happen). As it ends, however, his vision is mediated through blindness and a celebratory reconstruction of time that empowers him to see intuitively, or with the mind’s eye.

³⁷“Eine solche Erfahrung, die aus mehreren andern besteht, ist offenbar von einer höhern Art” (FA 1.25:34; Such an experience, which is comprised of a number of others, is of a higher order).

³⁸The use of the singular form of the verbs with compound subjects in this passage suggests that within the process of conceptualization they constitute one dynamic unit.

³⁹See “Einwirkung” for Goethe’s explanation of his positive reception of Kant’s third critique (FA 1.24:444-45).

⁴⁰“Denn es ist nur die reflektierende Urteilskraft, der diese Idee zum Prinzip dient, zum Reflektieren, nicht zum Bestimmen” (Kant, 10:89; for it is only the reflective power of judgment that this idea serves as a principle, but in order to reflect and not to determine).

Related Entries in the GLPC

Ach (alas) *Aperçu* (insight) *Anschauchen* (perceive intuitively) *Bewegung* (motion, movement) *Bildung* (process of formation) *Blatt* (leaf) *Dauer und Wechsel* (permanence and change) *Denken* (to think) *Erfahrung* (experience) *Erscheinung* (appearance, phenomenon) *Erstaunen* (sense of wonder, amazement, awe) *Figur* (figure) *Form* (form) *Gleichnis* (parable, metaphor, comparison) *Gott* (god) *Irrlichtelieren* (will-o’-the-wisp around) *Kraft* (power, force)

Kreis (circle) *Leben* (life) *Metamorphose* (metamorphosis) *Monade* (monad) *Morphologie* (morphology) *Phänomen* (phenomenon) *Polarität und Steigerung* (polarity and intensification or gradation) *Schauen* (to behold or look at something intensively) *Schwanken* (vary, fluctuate) *Spirale* (spiral) *Sprache* (language) *Streben* (to strive) *Subjekt* (subject) *Symbolik* (symbolic perception) *Systole und Diastole* (systole and diastole) *Tat, Tätigkeit* (deed, action, activity) *Urphänomen* (primal phenomenon) *Verstehen* (to understand) *Versuch* (experiment, essay, attempt) *Wandelbarkeit* (variability, morphological capacity) *Wort* (word) *Zeugen* (to conceive) *Zusammenhang* (nexus)

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