

# Introduction

## THE EDITORS

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## Introduction

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.<sup>1</sup>

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1788)

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.<sup>2</sup>

—Karl Philipp Moritz (1788)

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In his seminal essay on aesthetic conceptualization, “Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen” (1788; On the Transformative Imitation of the Beautiful), Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793) performs an extensive analysis of the aesthetic concept *Nachahmung* (imitation). The result of this linguistic experiment is a demonstration of the term’s complex unity, which is gradually revealed by positioning the essay’s master concept in relation to a group of subsidiary concepts from ethics and aesthetics. While the imitation of noble or good acts works differently than that of useful or beautiful things, according to Moritz, all four concepts can be linked to each other within a circle that schematizes the dynamic nature of their underlying semantic connections.

Moritz’s circular visualization of philosophical concepts as the working parts of a self-clarifying generative process was so compelling for Goethe that he repeated it *verbatim* in an early review of his friend’s essay and then subsequently adapted it more than two decades later by designing a series of *Farbenkreise* (color wheels) in order to illuminate the elusive process of color generation in its dynamic totality. As a creative “imitation” of Moritz’s analysis of aesthetic *Nachahmung*, Goethe’s device enabled him to conceptualize luminosity and produce for color the same kind of “refined gradation of concepts” and “delicate play of ideas” that he and Moritz had

collaboratively developed while investigating art and its “theoretical requirements”<sup>3</sup> in Rome in 1787.

In the spirit of this new kind of analogical thinking, the version of the *Farbenkreis* that Goethe designed in 1809 and is featured on the cover of the *Goethe-Lexicon of Philosophical Concepts (GLPC)* superimposes the faculties of reason (*Vernunft*), the understanding (*Verstand*), sense perception (*Sinnlichkeit*), and the imagination (*Phantasie*) on the wheel’s outer ring of basic colors and the qualities attributed to these faculties— beautiful (*schön*) noble (*edel*), good (*gut*), useful (*nützlich*), base (*gemein*), and unnecessary (*unnötig*)—on its inner ring. Goethe’s point here, which is also why we are using this color wheel as our lexicon’s logo, is that these concepts, like the colors doing the work of light, do the work of philosophy through the legibility of their fugitive effects. As his multi-layered color wheel instructs, by engaging the four faculties that collectively power all processes of conceptual production, Goethe’s heterodox thinking, like his heterodox science of color, equips us to read each new expression of a concept in the production process provisionally, as an essential working part in the totalizing process of its own comprehension.

And this is just what Goethe set out to teach in *Zur Farbenlehre* (1810; Theory of Colors), where he famously describes the spectrum of colors as the “active and passive modifications”<sup>4</sup> of light. Luminosity is an ideal

and ineffable thing, he suggests. As such, it cannot be comprehensively grasped in its essence, but only revealed in the record of light's chromatic transformations.<sup>5</sup> The *GLPC* assumes that an analogous appreciation for the elusive nature of philosophical truth, which rationalist metaphysics pursued through "clear and distinct" ideas, also drove Goethe's lifelong experiment in philosophical conceptualization. Just as his optics turned from pure light to the process of chromatic generation in order to grasp the essence of light in the spectrum of its "reflected colors,"<sup>6</sup> so must philosophy turn from the stable concepts of traditional metaphysics to a new paradigm of philosophical language and its variable concepts in order to gain access to the hidden secrets of their perpetual becomings.

An important goal of the *GLPC* is to facilitate sustained explorations of Goethe's philosophical work by offering critical accounts of such concepts and the dynamic networks underlying their complex interrelationships. Unlike traditional lexica, therefore, and in recognition of the challenges of his radically new doctrine of philosophical conceptualization, the lexicon's entries are more likely to interpret poems, plays, and novels than analyze axioms, definitions, propositions, and logical demonstrations. Our collaborative project understands that, for Goethe, concepts (*Begriffe*) were open-ended verbal experiments and, therefore, no less creative in their search for reliable "knowledge" than *Faust* or the poem "Ganymed." Furthermore, as parts of extensive networks that are

embedded in texts of all genres, they offer their own hermeneutical challenges and collectively reveal new ways to ask philosophy's perennial questions. In fact, some two-hundred years before Deleuze and Guattari would argue that "the object of philosophy is to create concepts that are always new,"<sup>7</sup> Goethe had already assembled a highly original collection of innovative philosophical concepts. Accordingly, a central mission of the *GLPC* is to understand each of these concepts as a variable element of Goethe's creative thinking, rather than as a fixed product of his thought. The degree to which the expanding collection of its entries comes to reflect the dynamic relation of parts to whole as the essence of Goethe's ongoing project in philosophical conceptualization will be one measure of the lexicon's success.

Some concluding remarks in the *Theory of Colors* about language and terminology<sup>8</sup> have guided our work from the outset. In them Goethe calls attention to other natural and cultural phenomena that, like color, are in "constant motion"<sup>9</sup> and, therefore, "difficult to fix with words."<sup>10</sup> In addition to colors, a list of such phenomena would include the metamorphosing leaf of plants and gothic cathedrals, as well as the elusive, self-regulating concepts of philosophy. This is because, for Goethe, words—like things—possess the morphological capacity for change and transformation. According to a late maxim, "no word stands still."<sup>11</sup> In fact, through constant "usage" a word, or a concept, typically moves from "its beginnings as a place holder" in a "downward trajectory" that often

**A Serious Quip about Lexicons.** As we embark on our project, we are well aware that Goethe would probably have voiced some skepticism about its value as a research tool. As one of his posthumously published maxims warns, "[w]enn einem Autor ein Lexikon nachkommen kann so taugt er nichts" (FA 1.13:106; if a lexicon can keep pace with a writer, he is worthless). How, then, someone might ask, can this lexicon do its work in good faith?

A possible response to the maxim would be to think about it as one of those "serious quips" (FA 2.38: 550; *ernsten Scherze*) that Goethe famously evoked upon recalling the original "concept for Faust" (FA 2.38: 550; *Konzeption des Faust*) in a letter written to Wilhelm von Humboldt about two weeks before his death. No less than this most philosophical of his literary works—which saw its original concept undergo many radical transformations over the course of its sixty-year composition—the concept for our Goethe lexicon, as we understand it, is something similarly fugitive and in process. However serious our editorial efforts may be to produce complete and concise treatments of Goethe's philosophical concepts, therefore, as heterodox lexicographers, we also appreciate that we cannot keep pace with our writer. A truly "Goethean" reference work should be dynamic. And this requires ironically undermining any and all misguided attempts to normalize and stabilize Goethe's heterodox thinking by substituting empty words and inadequate definitions for the elusive concepts and "delicate play of ideas" that constitute it.

“impoverishes” it by “constricting” its meaning. But the “capacity for change” that Goethe generally attributes to language and terminology also applies, more specifically, to the pulsating words of philosophy. Accordingly, a philosopher’s lexicon of concepts can always be expanded and enriched. And this is precisely what happens as Goethe’s own variable philosophical concepts wander along paths of self-transformation that are rhythmically marked by systolic moments of temporary consolidation and diastolic moments of ongoing exploration and invention.

While the alphabetical organization of *GLPC* is conventional, the inventory of entries we plan for 2021, as well as our expanding list of 350 entries planned for the next decade, suggests that Goethe’s vast archive of concepts can be organized and collected in clusters that more adequately reflect his morphological approach to philosophical conceptualization. Once the first 100 entries are online, therefore, we will publish a book version of the lexicon, as well as occasional topical volumes with supporting materials and essays. These curated compilations will group previously published entries as examples of concepts that Goethe drew from a variety of disciplinary practices and then reconfigured and reinvented to do new kinds of philosophical work. The various conceptual clusters will include concepts that Goethe borrowed from everyday words and expressions; concepts he appropriated from theology, science, and philosophy, including epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and poetics; concepts he constructed from grammatical structures; as well as concepts he invented as neologisms or portmanteaus and signature terms.<sup>12</sup> With the publication of such curated volumes, including a series of short books that feature Goethe’s exploration of philosophical conceptualization in individual works or groups of works beginning with *Faust*, the *GLPC* hopes to become a modest library of Goethe’s work as a philosopher that will be useful across a range of specialties both inside and outside of German Studies.

As entries accumulate with each new online installment of the *GLPC*, the affordances of our digital publishing platform will become increasingly obvious to scholars who want to ask new questions about Goethe’s approach to philosophical conceptualization and open new lines of inquiry that are out-of-reach for traditional print media. Specifically, by making use of the cross-referencing potential of metadata—which, for now,

include author and entry names, publication dates, keywords, and categories—the *GLPC* will enhance the discoverability of concepts that can be located alphabetically, chronologically, and topically. As a result, users will be able to review all published concepts with each successive installment. And we will enhance and deepen this cross-referencing potential in the near future in order to develop a dynamic technology—like the *Farbenkreis*—that with each new issue will position scholars to explore the underlying structures of Goethe’s dynamic project of philosophical conceptualization with increasing discernment.

In conclusion, we would be remiss, were we not to express gratitude to the many institutions, organizations, and individuals without whose encouragement, advice, assistance, and financial support the *GLPC* would not have grown and progressed as quickly and far as it has. Soon after Clark Muenzer presented the original idea for the project at the Presidential Forum of the Goethe Society’s 2017 Atkins Conference, he was encouraged by the many positive responses from colleagues to apply for a Chancellor’s Seed Funding Grant at his home institution, the University of Pittsburgh, which along with the Goethe Society of North America and the English Goethe Society, became major sources of *GLPC* funding during our crucial first years of operation. During the early phase of our work, we have used this financial support—which was supplemented last year by a generous grant from the Humanities Center of John H. Smith’s home institution, the University of California at Irvine—to sponsor our first two annual international workshops, support participation in international meetings of scholarly organizations like the German Studies Association and the Goethe Society of North America, and (most importantly), to cover operational costs for website design, construction, and maintenance; editorial assistance; as well as copy editing, HTML/PDF conversions, and the production of final galleys. Our institutional partner for all these activities is the University Library System (ULS) at the University of Pittsburgh, whose professional staff, including Dr. Kornelia Tancheva (University Librarian and Director), Aaron Brenner (Associate University Librarian for Digital Scholarship and Creation), Vanessa Gabler (Electronic Publications Manager), and Clinton Graham (Systems Developer), will continue to be our most important resource for the technical expertise that an open access and online project of this scope requires.

At the other end of the production process, and equally important for assuring the quality of the publication, are the many anonymous reviewers whose insightful comments and suggestions for revision are fundamental to the mission of the *GLPC* to achieve a comprehensive understanding of what a philosophical concept was for Goethe by examining the kind of philosophical work his concepts do. No person or organization, however, has been more crucial to our success than the hundreds of colleagues who already have contributed their support, their ideas, and countless hours of their intellectual labor to the project. In addition to the members of the Editorial Board, whose names are listed on our webpage, there is, importantly, the expanding group of scholars who have participated in or attended *GLPC* workshops, seminars,

and panels; submitted entries; or contacted us about working on concepts planned for future installments. Thankfully, a group of young colleagues who were early participants in *GLPC* events have also joined its editorial team. They include Bryan Klausmeyer, who (in addition to assisting with traditional editorial tasks and contributing entries) has guided and supervised all technical operations as our project's indispensable Digital Editor since its outset, as well as Daniel Carranza and Jennifer Caisley, our two Assistant Editors. Finally, all five editors would like to thank our Editorial Assistant Leyla Çolpan, whose rare combination of technical expertise and creative energy have been invaluable.

*The Editors*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Goethe's review from 1788 of Moritz's "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" (On the Transformative Imitation of the Beautiful): "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." 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), 1.18:256.

<sup>2</sup> See Moritz's "Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen" (1788; On the Transformative Imitation of the Beautiful): "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." Karl Philipp Moritz, *Werke*, ed. Horst Günther, 2 vols. (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1981), 2:552.

<sup>3</sup> "theoretische Forderungen" (FA 1.24:442).

<sup>4</sup> "Taten und Leiden" (FA 1.23:12).

<sup>5</sup> "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 we undertake in vain to express

the essence of a thing. We perceive effects, and a complete history of these effects is what would certainly in the best case comprehend the essence of that thing).

<sup>6</sup> See the last line of the opening scene in the second part of *Faust*: "Am farbigen Abblanz haben wir das Leben" (FA 1.7:206.4728; Life is ours in its reflected colors).

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 5.

<sup>8</sup> "Schlußbetrachtung Über Sprache und Terminologie" (FA 1.23:244–46; Final Consideration About Language and Terminology).

<sup>9</sup> "immerfort in Bewegung" (FA 1.23:244).

<sup>10</sup> "Sie lassen sich nicht festhalten, und doch soll man von ihnen reden [. . .]" (FA 1.23:244).

<sup>11</sup> "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).

<sup>12</sup> This installment of the *GLPC* features concepts that reconfigure the terminology from a number of discrete disciplines. *Begriff* (concept) and *Zusammenhang* (nexus) are both philosophical concepts, for example, while *Kraft* (force) is a scientific term and *Spirale* (spiral) a mathematical one from geometry. Similarly, *Form* (form) and *Spiel* (play) both come from aesthetics, and *Ach* (ah, alas) is borrowed from an everyday expression. Finally, *Irrlichtelieren* (will-o'-the-wisp-around) is a neologism, *Veloziferisch* (velociferian) a portmanteau word, and *Schattenriß* (silhouette) is a creative borrowing from material culture.