



**GOETHE-LEXICON**  
OF PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPTS

## **GSA 2019 Seminar**

### **Sponsored by the Goethe Society of North America**

“Goethe as a Heterodox Thinker”

Co-Conveners: Clark Muenzer (Professor, University of Pittsburgh), Karin Schutjer (Professor, University of Oklahoma), John H. Smith (Professor, University of California, Irvine)

### **SUMMARY**

This seminar will explore Goethe’s unique contribution to philosophical discourse. During the 2018 GSA, four panels were dedicated to “Goethe’s Philosophical Concepts.” They launched a multi-year project, a *Goethe Lexicon of Philosophical Concepts*, that will provide an ongoing online and print-on-demand collection of articles highlighting the novelty of Goethe’s thought. The project is inspired in part by Gilles Deleuze’s understanding of philosophy as the “creation of concepts,” and in part by Goethe himself, who wrote: “Kein Wort steht still sondern es rückt durch den Gebrauch von seinem anfänglichen Platz eher hinab als hinauf, eher ins Schlechtere als ins Bessere, ins Engere als ins Weitere, und an der Wandelbarkeit des Worts läßt sich die Wandelbarkeit der Begriffe erkennen” (Max. und Reflex. 983). The success of the panels encourages us to gather *Goethezeit* scholars of all ranks to discuss Goethe as heterodox thinker against the background of philosophical *doxa*.

### **ORGANIZATION OF THE SEMINAR**

We have divided the three days as follows: On the first two we will discuss the way Goethe’s *literary* work provides unique ways for putting conceptual thinking in motion. Karin Schutjer has provided an overview of how we might initiate discussion (where the actual discussion will go, will be guided by all of our contributions).

What role should Goethe’s literary works play in a lexicon of philosophical concepts? This seminar session can address broader theoretical questions about the relationship of literary form and poetic language to conceptual thought while also developing exemplary readings anchored in the assigned texts.

In a forthcoming lexicon entry, Clark Muenzer defines the Goethean *Begriff* as “a field of philosophical activity and discovery with fluid borders that is in constant motion.” *Begriff* in Clark’s expansive sense embraces nearly every aspect of Goethe’s dynamic thought, including literary representation. Nevertheless, for the purposes of clarity and specificity in our literary discussion, I would like to steer away from the term *concept*, which, at least in its more traditional usage, sits somewhat uncomfortably with the goals and resources of literary analysis, and substitute a broad application of the term *form*.

Taking a cue from Caroline Levine (2015), we should consider the specific “affordances” of the forms Goethe employs. Levine borrows the term affordance from design theory, where it “describe[s] the potential uses or actions latent in materials and designs.” The advantages of this term as applied to literary and other forms, according to Levine, is that “it allows us to grasp both the specificity and the generality of forms—both the particular constraints and possibilities that different forms afford, and the fact that those patterns and arrangements carry their affordances with them as they move across time and space.”

We will aim, then, to consider Goethe’s use of generic, metrical, rhetorical, and semiotic forms as they bear on his philosophical thought. How do literary forms interact with more theoretical conceptions (themselves “forms” of a sort), whether God, *Bildung*, *Geist*, or life. Do Goethe’s literary representations instantiate, perform, set in motion, expand, constrain, disrupt, contradict, render ambiguous, or perhaps link more abstract ideas within social, political, gendered, class or other networks of meaning? Position papers could take up questions—large or small—concerning, say, irony, creation narratives, repetition, Knittelvers, performance spaces (ex. das Proszenium), figures of address (ex. Parabase), interruptions (ex. caesura, the interjection “Ach!”), varieties of metaphor (ex. Gleichnis), character types (ex. der Schalk) as well as specific motifs and imagery (ex. weben/Gewebe, mirrors, clouds).

We have chosen two sources that we hope can stimulate broad participation. Obviously neither individual position papers nor seminar discussions need limit themselves to these works, but we encourage using them as reference points as much as possible. **On the first day**, we will focus on the cycle “Gott und Welt” from 1827 which anthologizes many well-known poems composed over the course of nearly three decades. As the title suggests, this cycle treats major theological, philosophical, and scientific conceptions with poetic means. **On day two**, we will turn to *Faust I* (supplemented by “Anmütige Gegend,” and Act V of Part II). Of all of Goethe’s works, this play offers a wide universe of Goethean philosophical conceptions and modes of representation (and has the advantage of already being well known to most of us).

**For the third day**, we will discuss a number of Goethe’s more “theoretical” texts. Here we will explore not only Goethe’s reflections on conceptualization, but also the wealth of concepts he brings to bear on his engagement with a wide range of philosophical problems and physical phenomena. Again to quote from Clark Muenzer’s forthcoming

article on “Begriff” in Goethe: “Unlike the clear and distinct concepts of rational metaphysics, however, which function as fixed universals beyond the reach of sense experience, Goethe’s *BEGRIFF* draws on an expressive power within language to generate sequences of cognitive moves and transitional moments of perception that stand in close relation to each other and can be gathered in graded series, where they are “saved,” like Aristotle’s *phainomena* (appearances), for further observation and reflection. As the driving mechanism of the writer’s “improper,” or transgressive, thinking, *BEGRIFF* proves to be more encompassing a structure of Goethe’s thought process and offers more responsive a perspective onto the fugitive things of the world (including its thought-things) than the conceptual machinery of traditional metaphysical systems with their limit-setting troops of terms.”

Clark has selected the following texts:

1. Ganymed FA 1.1: 205
2. Versuch als Vermittler FA 1.25: 26-36
3. Physik überhaupt FA 1.25:125-27
4. Über die bildende Nachahmung des schönen (Goethes Referat) FA 1.18: 256-60
5. Einwirkung der neueren Philosophie FA 1.24: 442-46
6. Anschauende Urteilskraft FA 1:24:447-448
7. Bedenken und Ergeben FA 1:24:449-50
8. Bildungstrieb FA 1:24:451-52
9. Schlußbetrachtung über Sprache und Terminologie FA 1.23/1: 244-46

## **PARTICIPANTS**

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