The Religion of Goethe

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FROM AN INDIAN POINT OF VIEW

[Page 1] THE idea of dealing with Goethe's religious and philosophical views from an Indian standpoint — with the double object of bringing the greatest German nearer to the East and showing him from an unknown side — will very likely be found highly objectionable by most western *literati*. Goethe, the strong one, the apostle of action, the realist, the individualist, the ideal of perfect humanity — how can one dare to compare him with the dreamers of the Ganges ? But the writer of these lines has reached the conviction that the science of Indian religions — which is, in his opinion, the most complete religious measuring scale of the world **[**The same view is held by Prof. Harnack with regard to the science of Christianity, but his works show that he is wrong**]** — whenever applied (with necessary caution of course) to the profound thinkers of the West, will bring to light facts not to be found by any other method; and he indulges in the hope that the **[Page 2]** following essay **[**Which is an elaboration of a lecture or lectures I gave on various occasions. My sources are the materials I have collected, in the course of years, from Goethe's works and letters, *Eckermann's Dialogues* and the Goethe literature, and lastly two recent and particularly useful books, viz. *Goethes Selbstzeugnisse über seine Stellung zur Religion und zu religiöskirchlichen Fragen. In zeitlicher Folge zusammengestellt von D. Dr. Theodor Vogel. Dritte Auflage. Leipzig 1903, and Meine Religion. Mein politscher Glaube. Vertrauliche Reden von J.W. V Goethe, zusammengestellt von Dr. Wilhelm Bode. Zweite Auflage. Berlin 1901.* There is also a third edition (1903) of the second book, but in it certain sayings on reincarnation, etc, have disappeared, apparently because the compiler has meanwhile adopted the standpoint of the first book, according to which all such sayings have to be ignored as mere caprices of Goethe**]**. will prove at least that, even by this seemingly inappropriate way of treatment, less violence is done to our poet-philosopher than, for instance, by pressing his ideas, as is the custom, into the Procrustean bed of Spinozaism. Goethe worshipped Spinoza, but no Spinoza could have sufficed him.

A few words of introduction, for Indian readers, on the import of Goethe's personality. He is very likely the most comprehensive genius ever heard of in the West. His writings are to many an educated German what, to an Indian, Kãlidãsa, *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad-gîtã* may be *together*: the highest possible satisfaction of artistic, religious, and philosophical need, and more than that, for Goethe was also a man of science. He studied chemistry, physics, anatomy, zoology, botany. He took a keen interest in history, geography, the development of commerce, technical sciences, education; nay, there is almost no branch of human knowledge on which something important has **[Page 3]** not been said by Goethe in the course of his literary activity which, indeed, extends, apart from the attempts of his boyhood, over a period of sixty-five years (1767—1832). He was a sage and a poet in one person: a kavi in the Vedic sense. His mind belongs to those extremely rare ones in which science is in complete and unobjectionable harmony with art, religion, and philosophy. Of this his *Farbenlehre, Theory of Colors* his *Wahlvenwandschaften*, *Electric Affinities*, and his *Metamorphose der Pflanzen, Metamorphosis of Plants,* are instances .

Now to the subject itself. I am perfectly aware how risky a thing it is to bring into a system the religious

ideas of a great man who has himself never cared for systematizing his creed. Yet the attempt is surely justifiable, and the danger we may practically avoid by confining ourselves to the general features for which there is sufficient material, and giving the reader every possible chance of judging for himself. Accordingly, I shall not so much speak about Goethe as make Goethe speak for himself, and I shall, with one or two exceptions, give a prose translation only, even in the case of metrical quotations, though this implies, of course, the loss of a great deal of the beauty of the original. He who wants to enjoy the latter has anyhow to learn German.

The young Goethe did not attend any school, but, together with his sister, received a very careful and comprehensive private education in the house of his **[Page 4]** parents, and, the latter being Protestants, he had also to pursue a continual and progressive religious instruction. This, however, was not at all congenial to him. He wrote about it, later on, as follows:

> The ecclesiastical Protestantism handed down to us was, indeed, not much more than a kind of dry morality: there was no attempt at an original exposition, and the teaching could please neither heart nor mind.

Thus the idea arose in the mind of young Goethe that he had to approach the Deity on his own account, and he did this in his own particular way. Already at that time his idea of nature and God was a pantheistic rather than a theistic one; he understood the world to be a self-manifestation of God, and so he decided to address himself to the greatest visible symbol of the Deity, to the *sun*. After much pondering, he found that he had to perform a *fire*-sacrifice; that he had to get the fire for it from the sun itself; and that the appropriate fuel would be neither wood nor coal, but incense-sticks, because — his own words — " this gentle burning and evaporating seemed much better to express what is happening in the mind, than an open flame". So he took a small table, fastened on it some incense-sticks, and kindled these by means of a burning glass, as soon as the sun (which had already risen a considerable time) appeared over the roofs of the neighbouring houses. Now the devotion of the boy was perfect, and, at the repetition of the ceremony, his absorption was so deep that he noticed **[Page 5]** too late the damage done by the burnt-down incense-sticks to the fine flowers painted on the table.

To this *Sandhyã-vandana* Goethe came, as I said, quite spontaneously. He did not know anything about India or Persia at that time. Yet I believe that already then, as later on, he liked to compare the energy of the soul with that of the sun, and that something was in the mind of the boy like that idea which is the esoteric key to the *Sandhyã-vandana* of the twice-born, the idea expressed, e.g., in the *Ânanda-Vallî* of: the *Taîttirîya-Upanishad*: *Sa yac cãyam purushe yac cãsãv âditye sa ekah*, "This one who dwells here in man, and that one who dwells in the sun, they are one." And here is also the place for a splendid saying of *old* Goethe, spoken a few days before his death to Eckermann, his Secretary:

> If you ask me whether it suits my nature to pay to Him (the Christ) adoring awe, I say: By all means ! I bow to Him as to the divine manifestation of the highest principle of morality. If you ask me whether it is in my nature to worship the sun, I again say: By all means ! For he is likewise a manifestation of the Highest, and that the most powerful one which we children of the earth are allowed to perceive. I worship in him (the sun) the light and the generating power of God, by which alone we live and breathe and are, and all plants and animals with us. If, however, you ask me, whether I am inclined to stoop to the thumb-bones of Saint Peter or Paul, I say: "Spare me, and keep at a distance with your absurdities! "

We are told by Goethe that his doubt of the Christian God had already begun when he was hardly seven years old, namely in consequence of the earthquake **[Page 6]** of Lisbon. The report of that fearful catastrophe in which the angry God, without a visible cause, not only killed sixty thousand human beings, good and bad, but even destroyed His own temples, produced a very strong impression on the young mind, and his distrust was still more confirmed by a most violent hail-storm breaking out soon after, which desolated the corn-fields and even broke the windows of his parents' house.

The growth of the seed of unbelief, however, was retarded during all the years he was at home, by the Christian *milieu* in which he had to live, and the many edifying stories of the Old Testament he became acquainted with.

All the more complete was the self-emancipation of Goethe during his University career, when he developed into an unmistakable *atheist* (*an-îcvara-vãdin*), in the sense in which the word is understood in the Christian Church. Once for all he freed himself from the religious and social prejudices he had been so far subject to, and in the proud consciousness — thus he tells us in his autobiography, in the kârmic consciousness, I should like to say — of his having to thank nobody but himself for whatever he was and would become, he wrote that grand poem with which we have now to acquaint ourselves — the *Prometheus*.

There is hardly anything like it in Indian literature. We might think of certain hymns of the *Rg-Veda* (ii, 12; ix, 112; x, 119), full of a secret scorn **[Page 7]** about the King of the Gods (Indra), or of the fine speech of Draupadî in the Vanaparvan of the *Mahãbhãrata* (Adhy. 30), where that brave lady reproaches the Îcvara with arbitrariness and ill-natures: *Na mãtr-pitr-vad rãjan dhãtã bhûtesu vartate; roshãd iva pravrtto'yam yathãyam itaro janah*. "Not like a mother or father, 0 king, the Creator behaves towards the beings; but he is carried along by his passions like an ordinary man."

But all this is feeble, when compared with the *Prometheus*. Judge for yourselves !

Prometheus belongs to Greek mythology. He was a Titan, a sort of Asura who rebelled against Zeus, the King of the Gods. He formed the first men from earth-slime, and stole fire from heaven for them. He is imagined by the poet as sitting before his hut and watching the rise of a thunderstorm sent by his deadly hated enemy.

> Cover thy sky with the vapour of clouds, 0 Zeus ! and, like a boy who pleases himself in decapitating thistles with his stick, practise at oaks and mountain-tops; yet you must leave to me my earth and my hut which thou hast not built, and my fire-place, the glow of which thou enviest me.
>
> I do not know anything poorer under the sun than you gods ! You miserably feed your majesty by sacrificial imposts and whiffs of prayer, and would have to starve, were not children and beggars hopeful fools.

And now, on a sudden, the poet acts out of character, the following verse being fit for *his* childhood but not for that of the former denizen of Heaven.**[Page 8]**

> When I was a child, not knowing where to turn, I lifted my wandering eye to the sun, as if beyond there were an ear to hear my complaint, a heart like mine, to have compassion for the distressed
>
> Who helped me against the haughtiness of the Titans ? Who saved me from death, from slavery ? Hast not thou done everything thyself, thou sacred-glowing heart ? And thou, glowing in youth and goodness, deceived, gavest thanks for deliverance to that sleeping one above ?
>
> I pay homage to thee ? For what ? Hast thou ever soothed the pains of the afflicted ? Hast thou ever dried the tears of the anguished ? Have not almighty time and eternal fate, my masters and yours, forged me a man ?
>
> Didst thou fancy perhaps, I should hate life, flee into the deserts, because not all my flower-dreams have ripened ?
>
> Here I am sitting, forming men after my image, a race which shall be like myself, to suffer, to weep, to enjoy, to rejoice and to despise you, as I do !

So far the *Prometheus*. Now let us compare another poem entitled *The Limits of Mankind* (Grenzen den Menschheit), which originated only a short time after *Prometheus* and yet seems as opposite to it as possible; in reality, however, it does not at all mean a change of opinion, but is only the expression of *another* religious feeling which, alternately with the first, dominated our poet's mind, until the idea of the pantheistic One and All definitely conciliated the two; it is the *feeling of dependence*, the idea of a necessary dependence of mankind on higher beings or powers, of a dependence on what people like to call fate. Goethe alludes to it already in *Prometheus*, but it is eclipsed there by the gospel of freedom from the Gods. Every one of us has this feeling, and everyone **[Page 9]** has the other one also. Whenever we look inside, we find ourselves independent and free; we feel the presence of a something within ourselves which will last from eternity to eternity, indestructible, not liable to the least loss. That is the Prometheus feeling. But on the other hand: when we look outside, when we see how helpless we are against old age, sickness and death, when we behold the sun and moon and stars moving aloft according to iron laws, and see the irresistible change of the seasons; when we consider that infinity surrounds us everywhere, then we feel how small and dependent we are; then we understand the *limits of mankind* .

The condition at the beginning of the poem, is the same as in Prometheus: a thunderstorm ; but in the place of the challenging Titan we find a deeply devoted worshipper of the Gods. **[**Observe the quiet, majestic metre of the German original**]**

> When the holy, ancient father with gentle hand from rolling clouds is sowing blessed lightnings over the earth, I kiss the last border of his garment, with childlike awe in my faithful heart.
>
> For with the gods no man should dare to compare himself. When he rises upwards and touches the stars with his crown, nowhere then his unsteady feet are clinging, and with him clouds and winds are playing.

> When with firm, pithy bones on the well-established lasting earth he is standing, he cannot dare to compare himself even with the oak or the vine.
>
> What is the difference between men and gods ? Before them, many waves are rolling, an eternal stream: we **[Page 10]** are lifted by the wave, devoured by the wave, and down we sink.
>
> A small ring limits our life, and many generations are perpetually being added to the infinite chain of their existence.

So we see that Goethe was at the same time a bold atheist and a humble theist: the first, in that he firmly declined the idea of a God who governs the world from outside, whom you may bribe by prayers, who, whenever he likes, may disregard the laws of nature; the second, because he was thoroughly convinced of the existence of superhuman powers to the influence of which man is subject.

To a more definite *Weltanschauung* (darsana) Goethe evidently did not attain during his student's time, and it is just this vacillating between the two extremes which seems to me to characterize the student Goethe, as far as religion is concerned, and, indeed, in other respects too.

We therefore take leave here of young Goethe, and, overleaping the intermediate links of the next decennia (a description of which is excluded by our plan), we turn to the last quarter of our poet's life, with but occasional references to earlier years.

Once more we must remember here that Goethe was all his lifetime not an abstract thinker but a poet, full of life, whose thinking always followed his feeling, rather than *vice versa*. His confession concerning his study of the history of philosophy, viz "in the most ancient men and schools I liked best that poetry, **[Page 10]** religion, and philosophy wholly blended into one" (*Aus meinem Leben*, *II*) may, indeed, be claimed not only for his youth but for all his life.

Such being the case, it is only to be expected that the two great philosophical view-points known in India as *Advaita* and *Visistãdvaita*, and in the West as *Idealism* and *Pantheism*, have both been felt as true by a man like Goethe, so that it is sometimes the one, sometimes the other, view which predominates in his mind, as I have now to show.

Idealism (*Advaita*) is the knowledge that "I am God" *(aham brahmãsmi*), or, as the German mystic Angelus Silesius has put it: "without me God could not subsist for one moment" (*Ohn' mich könnnt' Gott nicht einen Nu bestehen*); i.e., the knowledge that, although as an individual I am a part of the world, yet there is a something in me which is beyond space, time, and plurality, and therefore identical with the essence of all beings.

Now, as already explained, the poem *Prometheus* is, in a certain, respect, the expression of a positive religious feeling, a half-conscious "I am Brahman". And this Prometheus feeling in Goethe reached a more philosophical aspect in the course of time.

In the *Ultimatum* composed in 1822, Goethe calls out to the materialistic men of science:

> You follow a false track; do not think we are jesting! Is not the kernel of Nature in the heart of man ?**[Page 12]**

In another poem of Goethe's, *The Wise and the People* (Die Weisen und die Leute), the latter ask:

> But what is infinity ?

To which one of the sages (Parmenides) answers:

> Why do you torment yourself so much! Enter into your self ! If you do not find there infinity in spirit and mind, then there is no hope for you!

This we may parallel with such sayings as *Kãthaka Upanishad*, II, 20:

> *Anor anîyãn mahato mahîyãn ãtmãsya jantor nihito guhãyãm*.
>
> Smaller than the smallest, *bigger than the biggest*: thus the Self is dwelling in the heart of this creature.

And the same idea is thus expressed in one of the latest poems of Goethe's entitled *The Legacy*, (1829):

> Truth connecting noble souls had already been found a long time ago; ancient Truth, lay hold of it! Son of the earth, give thanks for it to the wise one who commanded her to turn round the sun and showed the course also to the sister (the moon). *And now, at once, turn inwards: thou wilt find the centre there; no noble man can doubt that.*

Still more distinctly the idea of the oneness of Âtman and Brahman, soul and God, comes out in a stanza of a somewhat earlier date (*Zahme Xenien* III):

> Were not the eye sun-like, never would it behold the sun; were not in us God's own power, how could we be charmed by the divine ?

The consequence, however, of this teaching, playing such an eminent part in the East — the doctrine of Mãyã or the unreality of the world — is almost entirely **[Page 13]** absent from Goethe's works. This must, I believe, be attributed to his deep affection for nature. Yet, at the end of that work which he himself considers his ripest production and his very life-work, at the end of *Faust* we read: *Everything transient is only a simile*.

Further, in the *Epirrhema*, the oneness and absolute inseparability of the visible universe and its invisible essence having been asserted, Nature is called a *true illusion* and a *serious play* .

And in *All-Life* we have the idea of Mãyã, in the contrast of two similes: God is said there to give *life's* simile by the image of the *gnat* — i.e., the play or the dance of the *gnats*, transitory, substanceless, a mere spectacle; and a simile of *Himself* by the eyes of our lover, i.e., by the eternally inconceivable,

complete self-renunciation and self-oblivion shining forth from the eyes of true love.

Another idealistic (advaitic) feature in the works of Goethe is the firmness with which he emphasises over and over again the absolute transcendentality of God, notwithstanding his immanence.

Speaking about the name of God, Goethe says to Eckermann:

> People treat Him as if *the inconceivable*, *absolutely unimaginable highest being* (das unbegreifliche, gar nicht auszudenkende höchste Wesen) were not much more than their equal. Else they would not say: the Lord, the *dear* God, the *good* God. He becomes to them, particularly to the clergymen who talk of Him every day, a phrase, a mere name by which, indeed, they really do not **[Page 14]** think any thing at all. *Were they penetrated by His greatness*, they would grow dumb and not dare to name Him for veneration.

Again, in the famous dialogue on God, between Faust and Margaret, the inconceivableness of God is most emphatically expressed; and that in a way which reminds one very much of the Buddha's way of deciding the question concerning the nature of the deceased Tathãgata; and, further, the knowing one will easily discover in it the Vedãntic assertion of the oneness of the soul and God, *Âtman and Brahman*:

Margaret:...." Dost thou believe in God ?

Faust: My darling, who dares say:

Yes, I in God believe ?

Question a priest or sage, and they

Seem, in the answer you receive,

To mock the questioner.

Margaret: Then thou dost not believe !

Faust: Sweet one ! my meaning do not misconceive !

Him who dare name

And who proclaim:

Him I believe ?

Who that can feel,

His heart can steel,

To say: I believe him not ?

The All-embracer,

All-sustainer,

Holds and sustains he not

Thee, me, Himself ?

Lifts not the Heaven its dome above ?

Doth not the firm-set earth beneath us lie ?

And beaming tenderly with looks of love,

Climb not the everlasting stars on high ?

Do I not gaze into thine eyes ?
[Is not the *gaze* connecting our souls a proof
of their being one with each other and with God?**]**

Nature's impenetrable agencies, **[Page 15]**

Are they not thronging on thy heart and brain,

Viewless, or visible to mortal ken,

Around thee weaving their mysterious chain ?

Fill thence thy heart, how large soever it be;

And in the feeling when thou utterly art blest,

Then call it, what thou wilt,—

Call it Bliss ! *Heart* ! Love ! *God*! **[**Âtman, Brahman**]**

I have no name for it !

' 'Tis feeling all;

Name is but sound and smoke
[Cf. Chãndogya-Upanisad, vi. I, *Vãcãrambhanam vikãrah***]**

Shrouding the glow of heaven. **[**Translation by Anna Swanwick**]**

Very remarkable too, from the idealistic (advaita) point of view, is the following stanza of Goethe's on the Self (Âtman): **[**With which may be compared Goethe's objection to Kant, quoted below, and the saying to Kanzler Müller on the *Urtypus* (Vogel *Selbstzeugnisse* p. 60)

> You try to find a *name* for men, and believe you know them by their names. He who looks deeper, freely confesses to himself that there is *something anonymous* in it.

The *anonymous* is the Self in the Indian sense, i.e., soul and God at once, and therefore necessarily "beyond the realm of thought and speech" (Upanishads).

But the predominant view of Goethe is not the idealistic antithesis of Self and World, as we find it in the Sãmkhya system and in the Sãnkara-Advaita; it is, on the contrary, the *standpoint of identity* seemingly opposed to the former: *the pantheistic idea of the All in One.***[Page 16]**

God is the world, the world is God — this point of view, with all its uncertainties and forebodings, has best suited the poetical mind of Goethe. He likes to look at *the world as the manifestation of God*, and so to use for both the one word *God-Nature*.

Meditating on the skull of Schiller he exclaims:

> What more can man gain in life, but that God-Nature manifests Herself to him, how She makes the solid to dissolve into spirit, how She keeps solid that which is spirit-born ?

And in *Faust* listening at the bosom of nature he whispers:

> How all things are weaving themselves into one whole!
>
> How one is working and living in the other !
>
> How celestial powers are rising and descending, interchanging the golden buckets !

Again, in the *Epirrhema* we read:

> In contemplation of Nature thou must always look at the one as at the all; nothing is inside, nothing is outside; for what is inside, that is outside !

And in the *Prooemion* our poet says:

> In the name of Him who created Himself from eternity according to His profession of creating .... What were a God who could only push from outside, and make the universe revolve at his finger! Him it behoves to move the world in its interior, foster Nature within Himself, Himself in Nature!

Characteristic is Eckermann's little tale:

> People had lately brought me a nest of young hedge-sparrows together with one of the parents. Now I had to admire how the bird not only continued feeding its young ones in the room, but even, if let out through the **[Page 17]** window, came back again to them. A love like this, overcoming danger and captivity deeply moved my heart, and today I expressed to Goethe my astonishment at it. *Foolish fellow*, he answered with a significant smile, "if you believed in God, you would not wonder!.....Did not God animate the bird with this almighty impulse towards its little ones, and if the same did not take place with all living beings of the whole creation, then the world could not exist! Thus, however, divine force is spread everywhere and the eternal love is effective everywhere."

The most magnificent expression of Goethe's pantheism is *Ganymedes*, a poem, of about the time of the *Limits of Mankind*. *Ganymedes*, the favourite of the Gods, was taken away to heaven by Zeus in the form of an eagle: with this idea in the background, the poem is meant to represent the poet's ardent longing for liberation (*moksa*) in the sense of a union with God-Nature.

The poem begins with an address to spring:

> How, in the splendour of morning, thou art glowing on me from every side, 0 Spring, beloved one; with thousandfold delight of love is thronging on my heart the holy feeling, the infinite beauty of thy eternal warmth! oh that I might keep thee within these arms of mine !
>
> Ay, at thy bosom I lie, languishing, and thy flowers, thy grass are pressing upon my heart. Thou coolest the burning thirst of my bosom, lovely morning wind, when the nightingale is calling out its love-cry to me from out the misty valley. I am coming, I am coming! Whither ? Ah, whither ?
>
> Upwards ! upwards it is striving. The clouds are hovering downwards, the clouds are coming to meet the yearning love. To me! To me! Upwards in your lap! Embracing, embraced ! Upwards to thy bosom, all-loving father! **[Page 18]**

It is, I believe, a most interesting fact that, although Goethe was not acquainted with the *Indian* version of the myth of Ganymedes,**[**This myth is probably of indo-European origin, though the similarity of the names *Kãnva mêdhãtithi* and *Ganymêdês* is apparently but accidental. Otherwise the Greek story must be secondary, for the Indian name is all right but the Greek one is problematical**]** his poem has a more intimate relation to it than to the Greek one. The latter is purely aesthetical and sensual; Zeus kidnaps Ganymedes because he wants the beautiful youth as his cup-bearer. Goethe turns the story into the mystical: he sees only the wonderful idea of the *unio mystica*, the melting away of man into God, And the Indian version **[**Preserved in the *Bãskalamantra-Upanisad* (published with a *Vrtti* in the Descriptive Catalogue of the Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Adyar Library, Vol I, Appendix) and in certain traces in the Samhitã and Brãhmana literature**]** makes God (Indra) carry off the young bard because of his fervent devotion, and makes Himself known to him during the flight to heaven in a dialogue which must be reckoned among the most beautiful productions of Indian literature. **[**For a German translation of which (made from the Latin translation of the Persian translation and consequently not altogether satisfactory) see Deussen, *Sechzig Upanishads des Veda,* page 838 fil**]**

With regard to Indian thought, then, Goethe's theological standpoint may be briefly characterized as follows:

Theism (Dvaita), i.e., the assertion that God is both transcendent and personal, was early abandoned by him **[Page 19]** and so much abhorred later on as unworthy of God that he would prefer even the polytheist to the theist. **[**Cf. the poem *Grosse ist die Diana der Epheser,* etc**]**

Pantheism (*Vis'istãdvaita*) which denies that God-Nature (to use a term of Goethe himself) has an inside and outside, or — especially when accused of materialism or atheism — designates the world as a self-expression, the visibleness, or body, as it were, of God, **[**Cf. Goethe's saying (Vogel *Selbstzeugnisse,* p 35) "To speak of God and Nature as of different things, is as difficult and dangerous as if we think separately of the body and the soul. Neither can we have a knowledge of the soul without the mediation of the body, nor of God unless we understand nature. Therefore it seems to me absurd to accuse those of absurdity who by a highly philosophical argumentation unite God with the world.' **]** was the view to which Goethe felt most attracted, owing to his joy of action and attachment to " this beautiful world". **[**Letter to Lavater (Vogel, loc. cit. p 81)**]**

Idealism (Advaita), where the reality of the many is renounced for the absoluteness of the One, is in Goethe's writings like a beautiful star which alternately appears to our sight and disappears, sometimes invisible for a long time, sometimes hardly visible, sometimes visible in all its brilliancy.

Goethe's idealism was confined to his feeling, to momentary flashes rather than to any logical insight, whereas he was a pantheist both in feeling and thinking. Sometimes he felt inclined to attack idealism, confounding it with theism. This insecurity of attitude becomes intelligible if we realize that idealism is at one with pantheism in asserting that there is nothing **[Page 20]** but God, and with theism in the thesis that God is not the world but above nature, i.e., transcendent. **[**The mutual relation of the three Darsanas is easily understood if we bear in mind that God is (1) transcendent and personal in theism; (2) immanent and impersonal in pantheism; (3) transcendent and impersonal in idealism. This explains also why Christian theologians are, as a rule, more inclined to tolerate or even accept idealism than pantheism. The personality of God in Rãmãnuja's system is an inconsistency**]** The former idea was welcome to Goethe, the latter he struggled against in vain.

This conflict, in Goethe, between pantheism and idealism, of which he was, as a rule, not conscious, finds an interesting expression in his relation to his old friend F. Jacobi, one of the most eminent philosophers of the age of Kant. Jacobi had, under the influence of Kant, attained to a standpoint which is commonly spoken of as theism by historians of philosophy, but is essentially idealism. Jacobi's God is *pretermundane* and without any causal relation to the world, though the latter has no existence independent of God. The theological theories of creation and miracles and the " natural history of the Absolute" (of Schelling, etc.), are therefore equally wrong to him because they involve God in time and cause and effect, thus making Him relative and limited. According to Jacobi, God is so incomprehensible that we can merely say *that* but never *what* He is. He reveals Himself within us through immediate intuition, but not at all in the outer world.**[Page 21]**

No wonder, then, that Goethe, whose favourite idea it was that God reveals himself in the whole world, outer and inner, did not feel quite comfortable when Jacobi began to expound his views. When Jacobi's book *On Divine Things and Their Revelation* had appeared, which was mainly intended as a protest against the *System of Identity*, of God and the world **[**Not to be confounded with the Indian *Advaita* which means also *identity* (*a-dvaita=non-two-ness*) but refers to the oneness, in the highest sense, of the Self

and God**]** — i.e., pantheism — Goethe wrote in his diary:

> Jacobi, ' On divine things ' did not suit me well. How could the book of this dearly beloved friend be welcome to me where I had to see the thesis established: ' Nature hides God ' !... However, I did not indulge in any painful indignation, but rather took refuge in my old asylum and found my daily entertainment, for several weeks, in the Ethics of Spinoza.

For several weeks! Surely, the impression of Jacobi's book cannot well have been a weak one. And the cure, by means of Spinoza, did not after all prove radical. Over and over again idealism looks forth from the writings of the old poet, though he could never resolve to give up his pantheistic stronghold. And possibly his attitude was not so far wrong. For it is a great question whether we should try to transcend the knowledge that there is nothing but God, and should not rather conclude from its contradictory nature that we have reached with it the borders of our understanding, which cannot be transcended except by mysticism. Goethe's objection to Kant is:

> We should not speak of *things-in-themselves* but of the One-in-itself.....But to speak of this One — who is capable to do so ? **[**Dialogue with Riemer, Vogel, loc. cit. p 45**]**

To the *intimate contact with nature* Goethe had actually reached, he himself bears testimony in a letter to Frau von Stein:

> How readable the book of nature becomes to me, I cannot express to you.

And this is borne out by many an incident of his life, one of which at least may be related here in concluding our account of Goethe's idea of God-Nature.

One night Goethe was found lying in his iron truckle-bed, which he had rolled to the window in order to watch the sky. He said that somewhere a big earthquake was going on, and he persisted in his opinion, though the others were unable to perceive anything. Several weeks later the news came that on that very night a part of Messina had been destroyed by an earthquake.

From the contemplation of God we have now to turn to that of the *individual*. What is the meaning of life to Goethe ? Did he share the Christian idea of the world as a moral institution, and of men as mere probationers for eternal beatitude or damnation ? Or had he a deeper and more comprehensive conception of life's course and end ?

The very simple answer to these questions is: *through reincarnation*.**[Page 23]**

This may, indeed, be unknown and surprising to many people, even to professional Goethe expounders, but it can none the less be proved unanswerably. **[**According to L Deinhard, *Das Mysterium des Menschen*, p 210 Goethe’s idea of reincarnation has been treated by Prof Max Seiling in his book *Goethe und der Materialismus* (Leipzig 1904) p 61 et seq. This book I have not seen so far, but I trust that it will not make superfluous what I am going to say**]**

That the materialistic idea of the soul as a product of the body was not approved by Goethe, need hardly be said. But probably it is less well known that he had an original proof for the existence of the soul **[***Sit venia verbo.* It is undesirable, in papers like this, to dispense with such words, vague though they be**]** as a separate entity. It is given in the following words to Eckermann:

> The tenaciousness (*Hartnackigkeit*) of the individual, and the shaking off by man of what is not suitable to him, is to me a proof that such a thing (a separate soul) exists. — Leibniz has had similar ideas on such independent beings, using the term Monad for that which we designate by *Entelechie*.

[This term Goethe borrowed from Aristotle, according to whom every product of nature (being the oneness of *form* and *matter*) develops from a stage of latency through a stage of unfolding to a stage of complete expression or realisation (entelecheia). It seems that Goethe chose the term with regard to the *tenacious* being which, though existing from the beginning, is fully manifest only in the stage of manhood, as it were, the stage of *sthiti* or stability, to use an Indian term**]**

Dying, therefore, far from being the end of the soul, is rather *an escaping, a growing pale of the soul-light abandoning matter.* **[**Dialogue with Riemer; Vogel, *Selbstzeugnisse*, page 134**]** **[Page 24]**

And not to any eternal heaven or eternal hell does the soul go, but from birth it passes to birth until it reaches liberation.

So far as I can see, Goethe came to the belief in reincarnation from at least six sides.

(1) He found it *impossible to imagine originating*. Speaking on the foundations of natural science he says:

> The conception of originating (*der Begriff von Entstehen*) is altogether unthinkable for us; hence, when we see something becoming, we think that it existed already.

And in a stanza: **[**The place of which I cannot find at present**]**

> Whence, then, should come a something, had it not existed long since ?

(2) He found it equally *impossible to imagine a cessation of existence*.

To Kanzler Müller he said **[**In a saying the exact wording of which is not preserved to us; Vogel page 137**]** that it was altogether impossible to a thinking being to imagine non-being, a ceasing of thought and life. In this regard everybody was carrying within himself and quite involuntarily the proof of his immortality.

And to *Eckermann:*

> I have the firm conviction that our spirit is a being of wholly indestructible nature; it continues producing its effects from eternity to eternity; it resembles the sun which seems to set but to our earthly eyes, which, however, properly speaking, sets not at all, but continues shining **[Page 25]** without end ..... Every Entelechie is a piece of eternity, and the few years it is connected with the earthly body do not make it old.

And to Falk:

> There can be no idea of annihilation. (*An eine Vernichtung ist gar nicht zu denken*.)

(3) He had rightly recognized that the law of the conservation of force needs to be understood not only cosmically but also individually, if development in the wider sense (Darwin) is thinkable at all. He consequently combined it with the *law of economy* he had not failed to discover in nature, so closely watched by him.

Referring to Wieland's death he said to Falk:

> Never and under no circumstances can we speak of an annihilation in nature of such high soul-forces; she never disposes so extravagantly of her capital. Wieland's soul is by nature a treasure, a real jewel, to which we must add, that his long life has not diminished but augmented these spiritually beautiful talents.

And to Eckermann he confessed:

> I do not doubt our continuance, for nature cannot miss the Entelechie.

And the same idea is implied in the beautiful aphorism **[***Die Natur;* loc cit page 130**]**

> She [Nature] has introduced me, she will lead me out. I entrust myself to her. She may dispose of me; she will not hate her work.

(4) Closely connected with this argument is a fourth one which appears to have been practically the strongest of all to Goethe. He said to Eckermann: **[Page 26]**

> The conviction of our continuance is proved to me by the *conception of activity*; for, if I work restlessly up to my end, it is the duty of nature to assign me another form of existence, when the present one is not able any longer to endure my mind.

(5) He believed in what the Indian calls *pûrva-janma-sambandha*, a continuation of pre-natal connections. Of this we shall speak presently.

(6) Goethe was influenced by *Leibniz*' *monadology*, of which reincarnation is nothing but a logical consequence. This influence is especially clear in the following sayings to Falk **[**Vogel loc cit page 134**]**

> Some of these *monads* . . . . are so small, so insignificant, that they qualify themselves at best for a subordinate service and existence. Others, however, are very strong and powerful. The latter, therefore, are wont to draw everything approaching them into their circle. Only the latter I would call *souls*, properly speaking. Death is the setting free of the subordinate monads by the higher one and the separation from each other of the single ones. There is no question of annihilation; but to be stopped on the way by a powerful and at the same time vile monad and to be subordinated to it, this danger has no doubt something inimical in it and the fear thereof I, for my part, could not quite remove by the way of a mere contemplation of nature.

Taking all this together, it is quite unmistakable *that Goethe had no possibility of avoiding the theory of repeated births*; and, that he actually embraced it to the fullest extent, I shall now show by some remarkable instances.

We have already seen, in the second example to the second argument above, how Goethe compared

[Page 27] death and birth with the setting and rising of the sun. **[**The same idea in the dialogue with Riemer; Vogel loc cit page 134**]** In an analogous way in the little poem, " *Song of the Spirits* over the Waters", the coming and going of the Entelechie is compared with the falling down of the water as rain and its consequent ascending again to the sky in the form of vapour, followed again by the downfall, etc.

> The soul of man is like the water: from the sky it comes, to the sky it ascends, and down again to earth it is forced, eternally changing.

Exactly the same idea appears as follows in "God, Mind, and World":

> And thus it comes down to the earth again, that to which earth gave origin. Just like that we are also bred; now consolidated, then evaporated.

And in a letter to Mrs. Yon Stein, Goethe says:

> I have a strong longing to get away from here. The spirits of the old times do not allow me here a single happy hour. . . . How good it is that man dies precisely to extinguish the expressions and comes back bathed. ' **[**Referring to the Greek idea of *Lethe, Oblivion,* the river in which the dead bathe**]**

Also the *continuance on other planets* is a matter of serious consideration to him.

Some years before his death (1825) he wrote to the chancellor Müller:

> Besides, I should not know what to do with eternal beatitude, unless it would offer me new tasks and **[Page 28]** difficulties to be conquered. But these will be provided. We need only look at the planets and the sun: there we shall also have nuts enough to crack.

Probably in this sense also his saying to Countess Stolberg **[**Vogel loc cit page 137**]** must be understood:

> In our father's empire there are many provinces.

Again, in *Wanderjahre* III, we have the striking sentence (cf. the Bodhisattva renouncing Nirvâna):

> We hope that such an Entelechie will not altogether leave our solar system, but having arrived at its borders, will long to come back again, to enter once more terrestrial life and beneficence, in favour of our great-grandsons.

One of the most interesting instances of Goethe's belief in reincarnation is his metric letter to Mrs. Von Stein of the 14th of April of 1776. Here we have the Indian and likewise Platonic idea that two persons who perfectly understand and love each other must have lived in some intimate union already before this life. The philosophical exposition of this idea of *prenatal connection* is the subject of the poem *Wiederfinden*, (" Meeting again, Re-discovery ") which we shall deal with later on in connection with the problem of evolution.

The letter is the practical application of this ancient belief. Goethe was connected by a deep friendship with Mrs. Von Stein, the wife of a Prussian minister. It seemed to our poet as well as to her that she was just the only existent complement to his own mind, and consequently both had to suffer a good deal from **[Page 29]** the impossibility of being constantly united. "How are we to explain this painful state of ours" the poet asks in the letter:

> Say: what is fate going to prepare for us ?
>
> Say: how did it bind us so purely, so exactly ?

And the answer follows:

> Ah, *in times past thou used'st* to my sister or my *wife*; *used'st* to know every feature of my character and to watch how the purest nerve was sounding ; and with one look thou wert able to read *me*, who am so hard to be penetrated by mortal eye. Thou would'st pour moderation on the hot blood, directing its wild, erring course, and in thy angelic arms the torn heart would respire again.....And of all that a remembrance only is hovering about the uncertain heart: it never ceases feeling the old truth, and the new state becomes pain to it.

If it be objected that all this is mere poetry, that Goethe never seriously believed in these things, we may refer the doubter to a letter of Goethe's to Wieland containing the following prose saying on the very same point:

> I cannot explain to myself the significance of the power which this woman has over me, unless by metempsychosis. Yes, we were once man and wife.

And this he often repeated later on, and he also spoke of the Roman Emperor Hadrian as his grand-uncle, and of his friend Boisserée as having lived on the Nether-Rhine in the fifteenth century. **[**Bode, *Meine Religion*, etc., 2nd edition, page18 fll. This idea of meeting again is not, after all, so fanciful as it appears to be. For, granting the reality, in this life, of psychical forces tending to unite and re-unite certain persons, and granting the *tenaciousness* of the individual and its pre-natal and post-mortem existence, — why should not these forces go on exercising their influence also beyond the grave ?**[Page 30]**

Even the *act of Reincarnation* has been described by Goethe in a poem, the most wonderful poem, perhaps, existing in the West, and, it need hardly be added, one of the most misunderstood. **[**The honour of having first recognized the real meaning of the poem, must, I believe, be ascribed to Dr. Hûbbe-Schleiden**]**

In this poem, which evidently shows that Goethe thought of reincarnation as taking place in the way of the chemical attractions, the sensual pleasure of the parents is compared with a *flame*, and the reincarnating soul with a *butterfly* attracted by the flame and burnt in it — a really grand image partly evoked, as it seems, by the soul-butterfly of Greek art and of Celtic and other folklore. The poem is entitled *Selige Sehnsucht*, *Blessed Longing*, that means: "The Longing of the deceased", namely, for reincarnation; but the original title was *Vollendung* (*Perfection*) referring to the poet's view of life as an evolution, as is also evident from the third verse calling the act of reincarnation a "*higher* copulation".

Even the beginning of the poem is characteristic. As many an Upanishad *ends* with the emphatic exhortation not to impart its secret teaching to anybody who is not one's son or disciple (*nãputrãya nãsisyãya*), so Goethe begins his Upanishad with the words:

> Tell it to nobody, only to the wise ones — for the multitude will but scoff at it — the ever-living I will praise, how it is longing for death in the flame !

The poet now addresses the soul-butterfly:

> In the delight of the nights of love which generated thee [i.e., in former births], and in which thou generatest **[Page 31]** [as a father or mother], a strange feeling is overcoming thee [the attraction of the parental aura], when the quiet candle is glowing.
>
> No longer thou stayest shrouded within the shadow of darkness [i.e., the post-mortem state], and a new longing is carrying thee away to a higher copulation.
>
> No distance is a hindrance to thee, thou comest flying, under the ban [i.e., the aforesaid attraction], and, at last, greedy for light, thou, 0 butterfly, art burnt.

The last verse is for the public:

> And as long as you have not obtained this 'Die and be born !' so long you are but a dull guest on the dark earth.

The most convenient title to this incomparable poem would perhaps have been a saying of Heraclitus the Dark, referring likewise to the act of reincarnation: "It is a pleasure to the souls to become wet [and fall into birth]", or another saying of the same: "For it is death to the souls to become water", to which may, for explanation, be added a third one: "Hades and Dionysos [i.e., death and birth] are the same".

Looking back again and surveying once more the materials collected as testimonials of Goethe's belief in reincarnation, we are necessarily struck by the fact that most of them are not from the works proper, but from the letters and private conversations of our poet. And here, then, we have the answer to the question why Goethe's belief in reincarnation has up to the present day remained an unknown thing, not only to the great public but even to the majority of Goethe **[Page 32]** enthusiasts. To a man so full of the joy of action as was Goethe, the certainty of a continued activity of the individual in ever new lives must have been a precious possession; it was *his holy secret* of which he spoke plainly only to his intimate friends, on which he avoided publicity as one avoids informing the public of one's love affairs. In his publications he was *intentionally dark* wherever he touched that belief, and how perfectly he succeeded, every one can easily convince himself by taking into his hand H. Düntzer's famous commentary on Goethe's poems.

Intimately connected with the belief in metempsychosis is, in India, the belief in *Karman*, — an ethical law of causation. Had Goethe any idea like it?

Of course, we must not expect to find with Goethe anything like the anthropocentric popular belief in Karman as a law of retribution for gods, men, and philosophizing animals. The unreasonableness of any such view has been well elucidated by Mrs. Besant, in one of her lectures, by the short sentence : “There is no connection between money and virtue".

But we may very well ask whether Goethe believed, in another and deeper sense, in the teaching expressed in the sentence: " Whatsoever a man soweth, that also shall he reap".

The answer to this is contained in the significant words Goethe spoke to Eckermann on the first of

September, 1829: **[Page 33]**

> We are not all immortal in the same way, and, in order to *manifest* one's self in future a« a great Entelechie, one must also *be* one.

Which means: Man is reborn as what he has *made* himself; if he has worked at his character, he will have a satisfactory rebirth; if he has neglected himself, has become weak and subjected to vices, the circumstances of his rebirth will naturally be unfavorable.

Nothing can be clearer than this. But still a second question waits also to be answered, and it is this: Are we *totally* our own work, or only *on the whole* or *partially ?*

This question leads us once more to a striking agreement between Goethe and India.

The long and passionate dispute in India on *Karman*, free-will and necessity, (on the history of which a big book will be written some day), had, generally speaking, produced the knowledge that at least two factors have to be recognised as making man and his life, namely, *purusa-kara*, *human activity* and *daiva*, "the divine, the fatally ordained". This distinction is up to the present day maintained with the Jains, whereas with the Hindus the difference is obscured by the word *Karman* being applied (with what right, is another question) to both of these factors.

Quite an analogous conclusion was arrived at by Goethe, nay, he even used to call the second factor by a word which might appear to be a translation of [Page 34] the Samskrt *daiva*, namely, *das Dämonische*, *the demoniac* .

Goethe was perfectly aware that every Entelechie is inevitably *unfree* to a certain extent, namely, in that it is only a limb of a higher whole and consequently, besides going its *own* way, is used as an instrument by that higher unit. In accordance with this he distinguished between those actions and events of ours the causation of which we see, as it were, with our eyes, and those other ones for which we cannot find any karmic explanation, and which appear to us as the work of some unintelligible higher power (*providence*). The latter Goethe calls *the demoniac*, or, occasionally, *the dear thing*, "the dear thing they call God, or however it's called", " the dear invisible thing that leads and trains me", and the like; and he has uttered quite a number of important sayings on it, some of which are the following:

> Although that demoniac may manifest itself in everything corporeal and incorporeal, nay, expresses itself in a most remarkable way with the animals, it is most wonderfully connected especially with man, and it forms *a power though not opposed to the moral order of things, yet thwarting it.* **[***Aus meinem Leben,* iv**]**

> .....the demoniac which usually accompanies every passion and finds its proper element in the love between man and wife.

> As a checking, retarding power, the demoniac often shows itself also in the history of the world.

> Every extraordinary man has a certain mission which he is called to execute. After he has accomplished it, he **[Page 35]** is no longer wanted on earth in this form, and providence employs him again for something else.

> Every productivity of the highest kind, every important *aperçu*, every invention, every great thought bringing fruits and having consequences, is in nobody's power and beyond all terrestrial might..... In such cases man is often to be regarded as an instrument of a higher government of the world, as a receptacle found worthy for receiving a divine influence.

> The higher a man, the more is he under the influence of the demons**.[**All these sayings are from Eckermann's *Dialogues with Goethe.***]**

We are coming now to the problem of *evolution*. What is the course of the migrating soul, what its beginning and what its end, provided there be beginning and end ?

The general answer to this question is given by the already mentioned poem, *Wiederfinden* (*Meeting again*). It shows that in this respect also Goethe stands on classical ground, namely, on the ground of Empedoklean-Platonic philosophy. The process of the world consists of two periods: a period of increasing diminution or differentiation, and a period of increasing growth or unification. In the first period Neikos or egotism becomes stronger and stronger; in the second period it is conquered more and more, and, at last, is completely overcome by Philotes or altruism. In the first period the One becomes many, in the second the many become One again. So in the first period separation is the ruling principle, in the second period union. And this union is not a **[Page 36]** vague one: it is fancied by our poet, in a mystical way, to be a *re-union* of those who had been separated in the period of differentiation. Thus the problem of love is solved to him, and thus he begins his cosmogonic poem with a passionate salutation to his love, looked for unconsciously by him for millenniums and now found at last:

> Is it possible, star of stars, do I press thee to my heart again ? Ah, what an abyss and pain is the night of farness ! Yes, thou art it, the sweet, dear partner of my pleasures ! Mindful of past sufferings, I shudder, thinking of the present.

And now the poet proceeds to explain the *night of farness* by describing, first, the creation of the world, i.e., the process of differentiation, and then, the retro-creation, so to say, — the process of re-integration, or unification up to his present *Wiederfinden*.

> While the world was lying in the deepest depth on the eternal breast of God, He, with august desire of creating, fixed the first hour. And he spoke the word: "Let there be !" *Then a painful Alas was heard*, when the All, with a gesture of power, broke out into reality.

This corresponds to the *death of God* in Empedokles' poem: *Mighty hatred*, it is said there, i.e., mighty egotism, "mighty hatred was gradually destroying the limbs of God ". Goethe continues:

> Light appeared and thus Darkness shyly parted from it; and all at once the elements, separating, fled asunder. Rapidly, in wild, vague dreams each was striving for farness, with tenacity in unmeasured voids, without longing, **[**Without Love, the uniting factor**]** without harmony.**[Page 37]**

And thus, at last, the state of complete dissolution is reached, the Chaos so beautifully described in the poem of Empedokles by the words: "There the glorious frame of the sun does not welcome us, nor the hairy body of the earth, nor the sea; for the All was hateful and loveless and uncondensed". And now, hardly perceptible at first but constantly growing, the adversary of egoism appears: the *Moryenröte*, dawn, as Goethe calls it — the striving for oneness: *love*.

> Silent was everything, still and desert, lonesome was God for the first time ! Then He created dawn: she had compassion on the torture: she developed for the afflicted a sounding play of colours, and what first fell asunder now could love again.
>
> And with hasty endeavour those who belong together are looking for each other; and to *unmeasured life*, feeling and look are turned. Whether it be a seizing, whether a snatching: if they do but take and keep each other ! Allah need no longer create **[**There is a bit of irony in this, the theistic idea being here voiced by Goethe not as his own but as that of the people. For his anti-theism, see above, page 19 etc..**]** *we* create his world.

In the poem *Soul of the World* (*Weltseele*), this theory of cosmic expansion and contraction, of the exhaling and inhaling of Brahman, is likewise alluded to. But we can hardly learn from it anything essentially new. There are, however, some other passages which complete, as we shall see, in a remarkable way the picture of the soul returning to God.

If we ask for the *end* of the process, the answer given by the poem Wiederfinden seems to be, that **[Page 38]** it is the complete ceasing of individuality, the absorption into God. So it would result that the *great question of liberation* (moksa) was decided by Goethe in favour of the highest of the four states taught by Brahmin philosophy: the *sãyujya* or *complete union* of pure Advaita. And this *is* so. Although it doubtless suited better the heart of the poet longing for activity to believe in an *eternal* development, and, indeed, he sometimes expressed himself to that effect, yet he was not able to resist the knowledge, proclaimed by Buddha and Sankara and other deep thinkers, that *every* individual separate existence, even the highest imaginable, is necessarily imperfect, and that, consequently, *all* life is pain, in the deepest sense, and therefore redemption from life, absorption into God, is logically the highest goal of man.

Compare the following sayings:

> 0 that I might at last be filled out by thee, Eternal One ! Alas, this long, long torment on earth, how lasting it is!
>
> I am longing for home; I have no more business in the world (Letter to Herder).
> All of us suffer from life.
> Alas, at the breast of earth we are born for sorrow !
> Ah, I am tired of the world !
> For what all that pain and pleasure ?
> Sweet peace,
>
> Come, ah, come into my heart!

Observe that the peace Goethe is yearning for, is a deliverance from pain and pleasure, *sukha-duhkhavimoksa*, i.e., Nirvãna.**[Page 39]**

This idea of Nirvãna is most conspicuous in the first verse of the poem "One and All":

> To find itself absorbed in the Absolute the individual would willingly disappear. There all satiety dissolves; instead of hot wishing, wild willing, instead of tiresome demanding, and the strict *you must* — to give up one's self, is a bliss.

And another saying:

> Man would not be the most noble creature on earth, if he were not *too noble for it.*

When, then, will *moksa* be reached, and under what *conditions* ?

Thales in *Faust* speaks of the development of individuality "through thousands and thousands of forms, and till thou reachest mankind thou hast time", to which is added a few lines later:

> For, no sooner hast thou become man, than it is all over with thee.

And at the end of *Faust* we read that the earthly life of both Margaret and Faust directly terminates with liberation.

This clearly shows that Goethe shared the Indian view, so much emphasized particularly in Buddhism, that *human* existence is precisely the only condition of life where the redeeming knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of the unreality of the ego (*anattã*), can be reached and must be reached in the course of time. And it seems further to show that Goethe, like Schopenhauer, concluded from this that with the highest form of mankind the line of development **[Page 40]** comes to an end, and that therefore we need not admit the existence of superhuman beings.

But this is not so. For it can be proved by many instances that Goethe believed in the existence of superhuman beings.

In the poem, *Das Göttliche* (*The Divine*), he exclaims:

> Hail to the unknown higher beings whom our hearts divine !

And in another poem, (*One and All*), we read:

> Good spirits, highest masters, gently leading, guide with sympathy to Him who was and is creating everything.

And the whole of *Faust* is pervaded by this belief.

Thus, if we want to unite this belief with the above-mentioned ideas of our poet on liberation, then there is only one way left open to us: we must assume that Goethe believed in something like the *krama-mukti* or " gradual liberation " of the Vedãnta, i.e., that, in his belief, not directly extinction **[**This term is unsatisfactory because it expresses but negative side of the event. But since the positive side cannot be expressed by words and since the other Brahmanic terms, *apavarga, moksa, etc,* either means the same as Nirvãna or are too wide, it is best to use the Buddhist term**]** (*nirvãna*), but first only *sãmîpya*

*"*nearness*"* (sc., of God) can be reached. So the superhuman beings asserted by Goethe would correspond to the *muktas* or redeemed ones in the latter sense — the unseen helpers of *God* . And this is, indeed, the teaching of the whole last scene of *Faust* (II) with its " angels, fathers, mothers,and penitents". They enjoy the *nearness* of **[Page 41]** God — the forerunner of absolute moksa. They have overcome all conspicuous earthly deficiencies, but their work of self-perfection is not yet completely finished. This is shown by the facts: (1) that they are individuals; (2) that also Margaret and Faust, though liberated, continue as separate beings; (3) that there are younger angels and *more perfect* Angels; and, finally, that even the latter directly confess that they have still to bear " some remnant of earthly existence" (*einen Erdenrest*), which, although seemingly an excellence, is *not cleanly.*

There are further two separate poems which evidently evince this belief of Goethe's in a *gradual liberation with the extinction at the end.* The one points already by its title to the two states in question: the nearness and oneness, *sãmîpya* and *sãyujga*. For it is entitled, "The higher and the highest " (*Hoheres und Hochstes*), and its description of Heaven concludes as follows:

> And now I am more easily passing everywhere through the eternal spheres which are permeated by the pure essence of the word of God.
>
> No check to the longing impulse, no end is to be found there, *until in the contemplation of eternal love we pass away,* **[***Ver-schweben.* cf *Nirvãna***]** we disappear.

The other little poem, called *Cirrus*, has its name from the technical designation of the highest clouds: it describes the passing away of the soul from *sãmîpya* to sãyujya, by comparing it with a dissolving cirrus or feather-cloud.**[Page 42]**

> And always higher the noble impulse is ascending. Liberation is a heavenly light restraint. A heaped up mass, *it dissolves* into small flakes, tripping like lambkins, lightly combed, in a crowd. Thus at last that which easily originated below, quietly floats within the reach and hand of the father above.

And so I also believe that likewise the last stanza of *Faust*, the words of the chorus Mysticus, refers to the *end* of *sãmîpya*, i.e., to *nirvana* or *final* liberation, and not, as in all the previous verses, to *sãmîpya*. For even the most perfect angels belong to the *transient*, to that which is called here *a mere symbol*, and which is said to be replaced, in this final Nirvãna, by something absolutely unimaginable.

> Everything transient is only a symbol; here, the inadequate becomes an event.

These words, are they not a striking counterpart of the last words of the dying Buddha ?

> *Vaya-dhammã sankhãrã; appamãdena sampãdetha!*
> All things existent are subject to decay; strive for perfection with incessant care !

And the *way* to perfection ? Already as a student Goethe found the answer to this question, viz., in the works of Spinoza. "That which particularly attracted me to him", he says, "was the boundless *disinterestedness* shining forth from every sentence. That strange word: ' Who loves God in the right way, must not desire that God love him again 'with all the premises on which it is based, with all the consequences springing from it, was filling all my mind. To be disinterested in everything, most disinterested **[Page 43]** in love and friendship, was my highest wish, my maxim, my practice, so that that bold later word: ' When I love you, what's that to you ? ' is just as if spoken from my heart".

And in another passage he says: "Our physical as well as social life, customs, manners, art of life, philosophy, religion, nay, even many an accident, all are crying out to us *that we shall renounce*." **[**Italics in the original *Aus meinem Leven,* xvi**]**

And this is also the key to the last part of *Faust*, as Goethe himself tells us. Faust is taking up an altruistic activity, and in the same degree the contract with the devil, Mephistopheles (*Mãra*), ceases to be binding, until at last he cannot hinder Faust from being redeemed by the " eternal love coming to his assistance from above."

> Saved is this noble soul from ill,
> Our spirit-peer. *Whoever*
> *Strikes forward with unswerving will —*
> *Him can we aye deliver*;
> And if with him *celestial* love
> Hath taken part — *to meet him*,
> Come down the angels from above;
>
> With cordial hail they greet him. **[**Anna Swanwick**]**

So we have the satisfaction, at the end of our enquiry, of stating that the practical philosophy of Goethe is in exact harmony with that of the *Bhagavad-Gîta*: liberation by means of an unwavering altruistic activity, and, finally, of an irrational factor besides, divine love.