
DIE
PHILOSOPHIE DER FREIHEIT.

GRUNDZÜGE
EINER
MODERNEN WELTANSCHAUUNG.

VON
DR. RUDOLF STEINER.

Beobachtungs-Resultate nach natur-
wissenschaftlicher Methode.



BERLIN.
VERLAG VON EMIL FELBER.
1894.

Rudolf Steiner had a six-month contract, which was repeatedly extended under increasingly difficult conditions. In the end, he stayed in Weimar for seven years. Before his arrival he had shown little or no interest in what he would earn as an editor in the Archives. This question he only discussed with Suphan when he arrived in Weimar. It was a great distinction to be asked to work at the Goethe and Schiller Archives. The remuneration Steiner received in the end (180 Marks per month plus 10 Marks for each printed sheet submitted) was less than what his co-workers earned² and hardly enough to live on. More and more difficulties arose over time and the atmosphere at work grew quite oppressive. The Grand Duchess Sophie was keen for the edition to be published and Suphan was under an obligation to both her and the Goethe Society to achieve this as soon as possible. The arrangement he had with them envisaged the publication of ten volumes per year, starting in 1887, although the extensive literary estate had not even been fully inspected, ordered, or edited yet. These circumstances were not a good starting point for such an ambitious scientific edition and the section assigned to Rudolf Steiner was the most complicated. “None of the other editors of the Weimar edition was faced with difficulties of the same order and complexity as Rudolf Steiner. The numerous manuscripts were widely dispersed within the Archives; some of them were so fragmentary they could hardly be allocated. All kinds of excerpts and draft letters were scattered among the body of Goethe’s works. Some bundles had been opened and ‘reorganized’ before Steiner arrived in Weimar. Even more tragic was that it was impossible to establish with any certainty which of the arrangements and compilations were Goethe’s own and which were edited for publication by Eckermann and Riemers without Goethe’s authorization, for both had also corrected and prepared texts for publication under Goethe’s direction.”³

On September 30, 1890—the day he started work in Weimar—Rudolf Steiner wrote to Pauline Specht in Vienna’s Kolingasse:

I was quite well received in Weimar. This morning Suphan told me that he “hoped to find in me not only a helper with the Archives but also the kind of spiritual support he had been looking for ever since he came to Weimar.”⁴

For Rudolf Steiner, leaving Vienna meant leaving behind all his friends and social contacts, his family and the warm home that the Specht family, their children, and many acquaintances had afforded. Now he was living alone in two rooms he rented in Junkerstrasse 12 in the west of Weimar. He was not able, or willing, to make his apartment more like home by adding personal touches. Although he had, at some point, rented his own accommodation in Vienna in the Kolingasse, he was clearly not used to living by himself. He longed for a warm, loving environment, especially since he soon encountered major obstacles at the Archives that would affect the entire time he spent in Weimar. He was “quite lonely,” as he wrote to Ladislaus Specht two weeks after starting work.⁵ A few days later he wrote to Rosa Mayreder with whom he had enjoyed so many philosophical conversations in Vienna: “I stand alone here. There is no one who has the slightest understanding for the things that move and inspire me.”⁶

After four weeks in Weimar he wrote to Friedrich Eckstein:

You cannot imagine how lonely and misunderstood I feel here. I have not been able to exchange one meaningful word with anyone since leaving Vienna.⁷

In a later letter to Rosa Mayreder Rudolf Steiner spoke of his Weimar “exile.”⁸ He not only felt lonely, he also had no one who understood him at a spiritual level.

His friends in Vienna, the Specht family and his parents and siblings also missed him sorely and sent regular letters to Thuringia. Karl Julius Schröer was another reliable correspondent. Rudolf Steiner’s

childhood and youth in and around Vienna, his profound spiritual experiences and friendships in Vienna, his evolving thinking and his work—all of this had been surrounded by an inner and outer warmth that he was missing now in his thirtieth year. He had started life in 1861 under very special circumstances, feeling in many respects like a novice or stranger (like a guest, even). He needed human warmth around him in order to work, and any sign of friendship or attachment he received gratefully. To Pauline Specht he wrote, “You all bestowed on me what I needed so much: kindness and warmest friendship.”⁹ He also kept in contact with her children, wrote to them and sent small gifts on their birthdays, at Christmas, and in between.

But it was Goethe’s spirit that was so essential for Rudolf Steiner in Weimar, from the first moment and in the face of all obstacles. This spirit moved, occupied, and inspired him and bestowed new impulses on him. “*I may be dissatisfied with my present outer life, but I feel an urge and courage to work that I never knew before. Whether the people around me understand me or not—I follow my own star,*” he wrote in another letter shortly after leaving Vienna.¹⁰ He mentioned a “Goethean philosophy” that he planned to write down. On October 20, 1890, three weeks after he had started work, he wrote to Rosa Mayreder:

Every day, the papers left by this unique mind reveal something new and bring me closer to gaining a more complete picture of Goethe. There are thoughts and ideas of which I thought that Goethe must have written them and now I find them—actually recorded by him. Every day brings confirmation of what I had expected all along, the realization of what I had deemed only bold presumption.¹¹

At the beginning of November 1890, Rudolf Steiner also wrote to Joseph Kürschner that, in Goethe’s unpublished writings, he had found striking confirmation of what he had pointed out already in the “Introductions” he had written in Vienna. (“The more I see of Goethe’s scientific legacy here in Weimar, the more I find confirmed what I described in my introductions. The writings left by Goethe,

once they are published in my edition, will—each in itself—be solid proof of my views.”)¹² To Mayreder he wrote in more general terms:

I see Goethe increasingly as the focal point in which the rays of the Western worldviews and styles converge. We will, however, not understand him unless we achieve a similar way of thinking and observation. If we then see how everything we ourselves have thought and aspired to comes toward us from those boundless spiritual expanses, we will sense that it has become consecrated and ennobled by the authority that we must consider to be the highest.¹³

Rudolf Steiner would later write in his autobiography that the “spirit of Goethe worked powerfully from every direction in Weimar.”¹⁴ In his anthroposophical lectures he described how the effect the dead have on the world can enter a new stage three decades after their earthly death.¹⁵

The wealth of manifold details Rudolf Steiner discovered in Goethe’s manuscripts helped him to gain a picture of Goethe that was not only “more complete,” as he had written to Rosa Mayreder, but also one that was more precise. In Weimar, Goethe’s nature research lay open to him, richly and distinctively, in ways that had not been possible in Brunn am Gebirge or Vienna. There, Rudolf Steiner had only had access to printed texts. Here in Weimar he was in close proximity to Goethe’s manuscripts, but also to the places where Goethe had worked and to Goethe’s comprehensive natural-historical collections that so impressively reflected his love of the world’s sensory phenomena as well as his scientific diligence and method. “My manuscripts, letters, collections of all kinds deserve the greatest possible care. A similar multitude and variety of possessions of the most interesting kind, brought together by one individual, will not be easy to find,” Goethe had said to his appointed executor, Friedrich von Müller, on November 15, 1831.¹⁶ For Rudolf Steiner, Weimar, therefore, represented not only a particular life but also an important achievement that did not exhaust itself in manuscripts; nor could it be found there in its entire fullness.

Who knew of Goethe's precision and diversity, his eschewal of any timidity or repulsion in conducting all kinds of anatomical experiments? How he dissected a child's skull or examined a human embryo with his own hands; how he cautiously dissected female and male snails, recording all his observations down to the reproductive organs; how meticulously he studied and compared the bones of younger and older pigs, oxen, horses, sheep, cats, and dogs to derive from this observation ideas and mental images of their evolution, metamorphosis, and diversity; in order to discover forms capable of growing into the lowest or the highest manifestation. He made it accessible for everyone.¹⁷

Steiner must have been astounded to see how objectively Goethe observed, how he sketched his findings in pencil, tracing them again in ink to show them more clearly and even had lithographs made of them. For Goethe, the minutest deviation from the norm was important or significant as a new impulse for growth: the tiniest leaf, protrusion, or shoot, which Steiner himself would probably not even have noticed let alone considered significant. *'There's naught outside and naught within, for she [nature] is inside out and outside in.'* It was this meticulous, reverent observation that brought Goethe close to the creative world spirit."

Rudolf Steiner made many discoveries in Goethe's written work and in the rest of his estate. On July 12, 1891, he wrote to Pauline Specht in Vienna:

One more thing: when I recently reviewed the botanical objects in the Goethe House I had a look at Goethe's collection of skulls. The following thought struck me at once: When Goethe discovered the vertebral nature of the skull bones, a discovery that was so crucial for his time, he surely brought the ram's skull, on which he made the discovery, with him from the Lido in Venice in order to preserve it. I made the following hypothesis: the exact same ram's skull must be among the skulls in Goethe's collection. Councilor Ruland, professor Bardeleben and I promptly made a search for it, and it was not long before the very same skull lay before us in all its glory. We have the satisfaction to have been the lucky finders

of the sheep's head from which Goethe derived one of his most important ideas. And this occurred in Weimar at the end of June 1891, *a hundred and one years after the original discovery*.¹⁸



In the late fall of 1890, Rudolf Steiner still met people in Weimar who had known Goethe personally, as only 58 years had passed since his death. One of these people was the Grand Duke Carl Alexander who occasionally paid a visit to the Archives that were situated in his palace. As a new coworker in the Archives, Rudolf Steiner was also invited to dine with him. The Grand Duke was highly educated, fluent in several languages, but at the same time unworldly and reticent. For many years he had made it his task to attract important artists to Weimar. Up to his fourteenth year he had been Goethe's protégé while also undergoing the ambitious education program devised by his mother, Maria Pavlovna. For Carl Alexander, the Weimar classicism and German idealism remained something he felt he needed to cultivate, even in politics. Two and a half years earlier he had forcefully, albeit in vain, spoken against a German-Austrian war. Throughout his reign he was devoted to peacekeeping through communication. Social life in Weimar was still informed by court etiquette and tradition, a fact that Rudolf Steiner perceived with some amusement. ("When Carl Alexander sends for a professor of the Weimar Art School, which he founded in 1860, that professor, very much to his chagrin, has to don court dress: a gold-embroidered tailcoat, breeches, buckled shoes, and sword."¹⁹) The Grand Duke was an amiable man, however, for whom the legacy of his one-time teacher Goethe was very important. Many decades later Rudolf Steiner said of him that "he was a personality of extraordinary charm."²⁰

In Weimar, Rudolf Steiner also made the acquaintance of the German scholar and art historian Herman Grimm, son of Jakob Grimm and son-in-law of Bettina von Arnim. As a *'redactor'* Grimm was co-responsible for the edition. As early as 1881, while in Vienna, Rudolf Steiner had studied Grimm's highly acclaimed lectures on



*Weimar Castle, northeast facade.
The Archives were on the second floor, to the left*

Goethe, given in Berlin in 1874 and 1875 and published in 1877. (“It was most probably Karl Julius Schröer who passed them on to Steiner.”²¹) Steiner’s first article on Goethe, written for a magazine in Vienna in 1884, began with three citations from those lectures. “Goethe had the kind of impact on the spiritual life in Germany that a powerful natural event would have had physically.” “Goethe’s effect on the spiritual atmosphere in Germany is comparable to the climate change induced by a tellurian event that drives up the temperature by several degrees: the vegetation, the farming methods, the foundation of our whole existence would change.” “Goethe has created our language and literature” (Rudolf Steiner, *Goethe’s Superiority in the Natural Sciences: A Saving Grace*²²). Now Rudolf Steiner met Grimm repeatedly in person and spoke with him. Grimm was no advocate of scientific philology but was deeply devoted to Goethe’s living spirit. “When Grimm came to Weimar and to the archives, one felt that hidden spiritual threads connected Goethe with the place of his literary legacy.”²³ “In my view Grimm personified the most profound devotion to the spirit that could be found here in the second half of the nineteenth century.”²⁴

Unlike her husband or Herman Grimm, Sophie von Saxony-Weimar, the only daughter of William II of Orange, no longer had a direct connection with Goethe, but had visited Weimar at the age of seven with her mother, the Russian princess Anna Pavlovna. This was in 1831—one year before Goethe’s death. Later she married her cousin Carl Alexander, eight years her senior. They left Holland for Weimar, moving into Weimar Castle in 1853. After her marriage, Sophie, a “brave and lonely woman,”²⁵ devoted herself mainly to the sick, elderly, and disabled, founding model institutions such as a home for the blind and deaf-mute and a hospital with a nurses’ school for which she felt personally responsible. In 1883, the eccentric Walther von Goethe named her as sole heir to Goethe’s manuscripts, “to show his deeply felt and deeply rooted trust,” as he stated in his last will. Sophie was well aware of the immense responsibility and obligation associated with this inheritance. One day after the reading of the will, she moved all of Goethe’s papers from his house (*Am Frauenplan*),

which had long been shut up, to the Castle. There, they found a home on the second floor, in two rooms in the northwest corner of the building where Rudolf Steiner was now employed. She had been the first to inspect—with gloved hands—the valuable estate. She also used her own money to purchase more of Goethe’s manuscripts and soon made her plans known: she intended to commission an authoritative edition of Goethe’s complete works and a full Goethe biography. Her plan of establishing the archives in a separate, specially erected building did not come to realization until 1897. Herman Grimm’s doubts as to the feasibility of her plan she simply disregarded. (“My dear professor, you will find that I am in the habit of putting my plans into action.”²⁶) With great panache, she involved herself personally in aspects such as the quality of print and paper or the format and size of the edition that would bear her name. Everyone who worked in the archives (including Rudolf Steiner) was appointed under her personal supervision. She read and corrected Herman Grimm’s preface to the first volume and insisted on all her prerogatives. “It has been agreed that no important step will be undertaken by the redactors without my knowledge or consent, and they have been assured that I will perform my duty most conscientiously.”²⁷ Such proceedings were wholly unusual for a scientific edition and they would not have been possible anywhere else but in Weimar. Rudolf Steiner, who, from the beginning, was fully aware of the drawbacks associated with this situation, would nevertheless, many years later, refer to the “unparalleled and excellent protection of a German princess” to whom the Goethe and Schiller Archives owed their existence²⁸ and of his great “admiration for the Grand Duchess Sophie of the House of Orange who made herself responsible for the posthumous works of Goethe and attended to all the details necessary for their preservation.”²⁹ “What the Grand Duchess Sophie has done for Goetheanism is immeasurable.”³⁰



Rudolf Steiner’s immersion, as soon as he arrived in Weimar, in his editing of the scientific volumes allocated to him did not prevent him

from pursuing the topics he had engaged with in Vienna. He looked for, and found, Goethe’s manuscript of “The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily,” informing Friedrich Eckstein of his discovery at once. In his letter to Eckstein he referred to Goethe as an “esoteric in the very best sense of the word,”³¹ and investigated in depth the spiritual events underlying the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. “One cannot explain [the fairytale] without having gone through certain events that occurred in Germany *quietly and invisibly* between 1790 and 1820.”³² Rudolf Steiner did not mention the outcome of this research until 1924, and then only to the members of the Anthroposophical Society.³³ It is not known how much he was able to see at the end of 1890, but there had already been indications a year earlier when he spoke to the Vienna Goethe Society of Goethe’s diaries and letters. The turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century and the spiritual works of that time continued to be of great interest to Rudolf Steiner—as did Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, the first version of which had come out at the same time as Goethe’s *Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. Rudolf Steiner did not manage to complete, while in Vienna, the theory of knowledge he envisaged for his doctoral thesis. He planned to continue this work that would contain an appreciation as well as a productive critique of Fichte, devoting much time to it in the first weeks after his arrival. On November 30, 1890, he wrote to Richard Specht, “Thirty or more articles on Fichte are piled up on my desk.” Of his studies he wrote in the same letter:

I find it remarkable how *Fichte* and *Goethe* work their way up from two sides, meeting at the summit in perfect union. I think I understand my time well enough when I say that the idealism of Fichte and Goethe must come to its final fruition in a philosophy of freedom, for with both of them that concept relates to ‘freedom.’³⁴

The “quiet and invisible” events that occurred in Germany between 1790 and 1820 and that Rudolf Steiner investigated in the context of Goethe’s *Tale of the Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily* had to do

with the philosophical and spiritual development of Central Europe and its history of consciousness, which found its first culmination in German idealism and was awaiting its further development. The “Philosophy of Freedom” that he had contemplated ever since 1881 was for Rudolf Steiner part of this development. It was, as he wrote so remarkably to Pauline Specht on October 18, 1890, in his thirtieth year, part of “what I have always had in mind as my object in life.”³⁵



With all the interest and respect you inspired in me, allow me to be open and add one comment for *your* own good. Since you still have to submit a separate doctoral thesis I would advise you to choose a strictly scientific form for your thesis. We have made it our concern for a long time to apply the highest standards in this respect. You must make thorough and visible reference to the relevant literature on the subject in question and include precise citations and methodical argumentation. The publications you kindly sent me clearly pursue a generally literary purpose rather than a “proper” (*sit venia verbo*) scientific one. They read well and reveal