

**Goethe, Kant and Intuitive Thinking
in Rudolf Steiner's *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity***

by Michael Muschalle

Translated from the German original "Goethe, Kant und das intuitive Denken in Rudolf Steiners *Philosophie der Freiheit*" by Terry Boardman and Gabriele Savier

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Foreword

The following study presents a 'thought-sketch' which describes in broad strokes a development of ideas stretching from Kant via Goethe to Rudolf Steiner. It has been a broad and incomplete sketch until now, and various details remain to be filled in, which would in itself be an extensive and certainly worthwhile task. It has been my aim to make visible in outline how Kant's purely hypothetically conceived perceptive understanding (*anschauender Verstand*) of a divine being is radically reworked by Steiner. An intuitive use of reason that perceives the supersensible being of the world of appearances and which, according to Kant, is beyond all human capabilities and therefore only possible for a divine being, is, according to Steiner's understanding, to be found in the human being's actual daily cognitive life.

As with most of the studies published here, this essay will probably be added to and elaborated on in the course of time.

Jost Schieren on Goethe's 'judgment through intuitive perception' (anschauende Urteilskraft)

One of the most worthwhile works of recent years, which should be on the bookshelves of anyone interested in anthroposophical topics who seeks a deeper philosophical understanding of Rudolf Steiner's worldview, is a PhD dissertation by Jost Schieren, published in book form in 1998.¹⁾

This book does not actually address itself to Steiner's philosophy but rather to Goethe's understanding of science. However, the meticulousness and breadth with which the author approaches his subject makes the book a most valuable contribution to an understanding of Steiner's anthroposophy, which is known to have developed out of his conception of Goethe's worldview. In this sense, one can therefore think of Schieren's Dissertation as a filling out and deepening of Steiner's Goethe-oriented philosophical writings in that it provides an elaborated, multifaceted yet solid illumination, rich in detail, of numerous elements which Steiner embeds in broader philosophical contexts and therefore only indicates in a comparatively general manner. It is also illuminating in a conceptually clarifying sense in that it presents many ideas and supports that serve, through a philosophically contextualised approach, to bring a number of concepts from Steiner's philosophy into a clearer focus. At the centre of Schieren's endeavours stands above all - as the title already states - Goethe's concept of 'judgment through intuitive perception', or 'intuitive power of judgment'. In linking onto this, I would like to take up several of Schieren's ideas, this time from a rather different angle than those in other contributions published at this website, and once again guide the reader's attention to Steiner's concept of *intuitive* thinking in his *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*.

Rather surprising indeed for many perhaps is the quite decisive conclusion that Schieren comes to towards the end of his Dissertation (p.210) when he summarises: "Intuitive power of judgment in Goethe's sense" is, according to the author, "not only - as it seems at first to a naive understanding - a thinking that operates with illustrative elements and supports itself by these. *Intuitive judging* is a thinking that perceives, or intuits, in the sense of applying concepts that guide the inner gaze, and indeed, successful scientific judgment intuits *objectively* its own ideal content as the constitutive principle of the world of appearances and *subjectively* itself in its own ideal movement within the world of appearances." With regard to the first part of this conclusion, I would like to agree unreservedly with the author, above all in respect to the context within which Goethe comes to this conceptualisation of *the intuitive power of judgment* - in a narrower sense, it is Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Goethe's *intuitive judgment* is an intuitive thinking that perceives the world content, which it has conceived in an objectively scientific way as it is in fact also objectively present in an ideal sense, as the constitutive being of the world of appearances. It directs its cognising interest, so to speak, onto the essential kernel of the world of appearances. It perceives this constitutive kernel not in a *sense-perceptible*, but - and this follows from Kant's theoretical premise in regard to this concept - in a *supersensible* way.

With regard to the second part of the conclusion, as to whether thinking simultaneously observes itself subjectively, I should like to express a reservation and allow myself the question as to whether today, ten years after the completion of his Dissertation, Jost Schieren would judge matters in quite this way. There is no question that Goethe really racked his brains over his own thinking and conceiving much more than one of his most quoted sayings - that he had never thought about thinking - superficially leads one to suppose, and to have made this visible is one of the most commendable fruits of Schieren's work. Epistemological and cognitive-psychological observations such as those in Goethe's essays *The Experiment as Mediator Between Subject and Object* or *The Intuitive Power of Judgment* can hardly be found anywhere other than on the path of a contemplative reflection upon one's experiences in thinking and cognising. This signifies a scientifically and philosophically-oriented illumination of introspective findings in relation to this thinking and cognising. Therefore, the general assumption that Goethe had an aversion to introspection and self-knowledge has to be taken reservedly. Schieren, incidentally, makes great efforts (see p. 145 ff and in various other places) to come to a differentiated view and he is in no sense guilty of a premature evaluation. No doubt, intuitive power of judgement is a means to also observe thinking. However, *simultaneous* observation of one's own thinking is a very special problem in terms of cognitive psychology and requires a very particular appraisal. [2](#)) I mention this in parenthesis only: at this point I regard the first part of Schieren's work as especially important and would wish to underscore it emphatically; I shall leave the second part for further discussion.

It seems above all relevant for an understanding of these matters that this thinking, in the sense of an *intuitive power of judgment*, should address itself in its intuitive perception towards the ideal-spiritual content of the being of the world and not to the sense-perceptible element of that world-content. In its essential meaning, it is not a graphic kind of thinking that visualises things, but a thinking that is free of any sensory impressions, even though this may sound paradoxical to some ears. It seems to me most necessary to call attention to this, because forms of understanding have established themselves within the context of a certain popularising trivial philosophy in anthroposophical circles, which assign this central supersensible aspect of Goethean *intuitive judgment*, as a matter of course and without further enquiry, to the life of mental pictures, which never even reaches the stage of pure thinking. Such a conception is represented, for example, in the idea that *intuitive judgment* belongs at the level of a sensorially saturated life of mental pictures, in the sense of dealing with individualised concepts, and lies below the level of pure thinking. This particular way of understanding *intuitive judgement* can be found in the chapter on methodology in the most recent book by Sergei Prokofieff, a member of the Vorstand in Dornach, where it is presented without the slightest verification or support, and completely bypasses the core of this whole question.

On page 13 Prokofieff describes the different stages of anthroposophical cognition and after he has dealt with the lowest stage, that of sense perception, he goes on to say:

The second stage is 'the mental picture', which Rudolf Steiner also calls 'individualised concept'. This always has an image-like character. The capacity for 'intuitive judgment' belongs to this as a further intensification of it, and by means of this the human being seeks to participate spiritually in the creative work of Nature around him. Goethe describes this as the ability "with which, through intuition (Anschauung), we would make ourselves worthy of spiritual participation in the productions of an ever creative Nature"... This means that this 'intuitive judgment' unfolds within the soul space that lies that between outer perception and pure thinking. 3)

In view of such appalling literary products by of an author who (p. 34) serves his readers with the declaration that he will be approaching the Philosophy of Spiritual Activity with a "real anthroposophical understanding" and straightaway in the first chapter purports to give informed instruction on anthroposophical method, the question necessarily arises: How can a Dornach Executive Council member actually be so ignorant in scientific questions? The author seems to me to be completely clueless in the subject under discussion. And in fact what Prokofieff puts before his readers here is something scandalous; it also in a certain sense throws an incisive light on the entire anthroposophical movement, which allows such things and accepts them from their council members so uncritically.

Quite aside from the fact that the description of the stages of cognition on p.13 appear to me in many respects like a muddle of misunderstanding, it is obvious that the author nowhere seriously engages with Goethe's essay and its philosophical background. Just as little does he occupy himself with secondary literature about it. And yet Schieren's Dissertation was written almost ten years ago, was officially commissioned by the German Anthroposophical Society and even discussed in anthroposophical journals. In essence, Prokofieff ought to have known better, especially since various other anthroposophical authors, such as Herbert Witzmann and Günter Röscher (see below) have given sufficiently clear indications in the right direction. And when finally, one looks at the reference Prokofieff makes in this connection on p.13 to Steiner's lecture *Goethe as the Father of a New Aesthetics*, the picture becomes even more dismal. One asks oneself whether he has even read the source in question. There, namely, one finds no evidence of his interpretation - that Goethe's intuitive judgment lies somewhere in an intensified mental picturing, below pure thinking.

Rather, in that lecture Rudolf Steiner sees the matter much along the lines of what Jost Schieren develops in his book as the kernel of reason: for Steiner, the Goethean intuitive power of judgment has nothing to do with sense perception or mental pictures but lies in the realm of the sense-free, pure experience of the Idea, where it also fittingly relates in its philosophical context to Kant. In this matter Steiner is unambiguous when he says there: "Goethe does not flee from reality in order to create an abstract world of thoughts which has nothing in common with reality; no, he goes deeper into reality, into its constant changes, its becoming and moving, in order to find the immutable laws; he confronts the individual (phenomenon) in order to

see the archetype *in* the individual. Thus there arose in his mind the archetypal plant and the archetypal animal which are nothing other than *the Idea of the animal, the Idea of the plant*. These are no empty, general concepts which belong to some grey theory; they are the essential bases of organisms, with a rich, concrete content, full of life and clarity. This is obviously not a clarity for the outer senses, but only for that higher capacity of perception that Goethe discusses in his essay on "Intuitive Judgment". In the Goethean sense, ideas are just as objective as the colours and shapes of things but they are perceptible only for *those* who are equipped with the means to perceive them, just as colours and shapes are perceptible only to the sighted and not to the blind. It is precisely when we meet what exists objectively without a receptive mind that it remains veiled to us." 4) And there on p.32 he comments on Goethe's closing words: "Goethean archetypal images are therefore not empty patterns, they are the driving forces behind appearances." One could elaborate by adding: perceived archetypes or Ideas are the supersensible driving forces behind sense-perceptible appearances.

A short note on sources with analysis:

One can also compare Steiner's remarks in his *Goethes Weltanschauung* (Goethe's World View)(GA 6, paperback edition Dornach 1979) in the chapter *The Idea of Metamorphosis*, p.103: "Goethe's fundamental conviction was that something reveals itself in the plant and in the animal that is not accessible to mere sense perception. What the physical eyes can observe in an organism appears to Goethe to be only the consequence of laws of formation working through one another in the living whole and which are accessible only to the *spiritual eyes*."

In *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung* (A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception) (GA 2, German edition, Dornach 1979) in his discussion of the organic sciences (p.110), Steiner equates Goethe's concept of intuitive judgment with the concept of Intuition - clearly nothing that lies below the level of pure thinking:

For this reason, the mind must work far more intensively in grasping the type than in grasping the natural law. It must create the content with the form. It must take upon itself an activity which is the function of the senses in inorganic science and which we call perception (Anschauung). The mind itself therefore must be perceptive on this higher plane. Our power of judgment must perceive in thinking and think in perceiving. We have here to do with a perceptive power of thought, as was first explained by Goethe, who thereby pointed out as a necessary form of conceiving in the human mind that which Kant wished to prove to be quite

unattainable by man because of the nature of his whole constitution [...] What the type is in organic nature, natural law is in inorganic nature (primal phenomenon). Correspondingly, in studying organic nature, intuition (perceptive power of thought) is the means employed, whereas the study of inorganic nature is based on the power of judgment through proof (reflective judgment).

That this concept of intuition is enormously generalised later in *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* and expanded to the whole field of idealist and spiritual perception and does not remain restricted to knowledge of the organic is certainly one of the most notable changes in Steiner's theory of knowledge, to go deeper into which would be a far-reaching theme in itself. We shall look closer into a quite crucial way stage on the path towards this theme: Steiner's comparison, in his book *Truth and Science*, of pure thinking with Kant's concept of *intellectual intuition*.

See further Steiner's book *Vom Menschenrätsel* (The Riddle of Man) (GA 20, Dornach 1984) p.159f. Steiner's discussion there relates to the training of the capacity of supersensible perception; he writes as follows:

One only gets beyond what the natural scientific form of ideation can give when in one's inner soul life one has the experience of an awakening from ordinary consciousness; an awakening to a manner and direction of soul experience which relates to the world of ordinary experience as the latter relates to the picture world of dreams. Goethe speaks in his way of this awakening out of ordinary consciousness and names the soul capacity that is achieved through it, "intuitive (power of) judgment. For Goethe, this intuitive judgment gives the soul the capacity to see the higher reality of things, which conceals itself from the understanding of the ordinary consciousness. With the acknowledgment of such a capacity in human beings, Goethe placed himself in an oppositional stance to Kant who denied a human capacity of "intuitive judgment". But Goethe knew from the experience of his own soul life that an awakening of ordinary consciousness to a consciousness that possessed intuitive judgment is possible"

Steiner continues on p.160:

"In what follows, the awakened consciousness will be termed seeing consciousness. Such an awakening can only occur when one forms another relationship to the world of thinking and willing than is experienced in ordinary consciousness."

Steiner locates Goethe's intuitive judgment quite unmistakably in the realm of supersensible, seeing

consciousness. In this context, he even links quite explicitly his own term 'schauendes Bewusstsein' (*seeing* consciousness) to Goethe's term 'anschauende Urteilskraft' (intuitive judgment) in order to bring to expression the objective relationship of seeing consciousness with Goethe's intuitive judgment.

From Steiner's 'seeing consciousness' and Goethe's 'intuitive judgment' there is a direct relation to pure thinking in that this pure thinking in Steiner's sense is located at the level of seeing consciousness. Steiner makes the following comment in relation to the passage cited above:

"In my recently published book "The Riddle of Man", I described 'seeing consciousness - following the Goethean idea of 'intuitive judgment'. By this I understand the human capacity to make a spiritual world directly perceptible and observable to him self. The way I discuss pure thinking in my earlier writings makes it obvious that I consider it to belong to the activities of 'seeing consciousness'. In this pure thinking I see the first, still shadowy, revelation of the stages of spiritual cognition. In all my later writings one can see that I consider to be higher spiritual powers of knowledge only those which the human being has developed in the same way he develops pure thinking." (GA 35, Dornach 1984, p.321)

By 'earlier writings' Steiner means his philosophical and epistemological works, and among these, above all, (p. 319) *Truth and Science* and *Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*. It is clear from Steiner's comments that for him, Goethe's intuitive judgment can in no way be located below the level of pure thinking and as belonging to the life of mere mental picturing, as Prokofieff describes it. Rather, it can, as Steiner regards pure thinking here, only be located either on the same level as pure thinking, or extend beyond it.

See also Rudolf Steiner in GA 67, Dornach 1962, p.82 ff., lecture of 21 Feb. 1918: *Goethe als Vater der Geistesforschung* (Goethe as a forefather of spiritual research): "Goethe sought everywhere to pass on from mere thinking to inner spiritual perceptions, from mere consciousness, permeated as it is in with thinking, to seeing consciousness, as I have already described it in my book "The Riddle of Man". Goethe is therefore not satisfied when Kant says that man cannot in his researches approach the thing-in-itself, let alone the secret of existence, and that Kant called it "a fantasy of reason" if man were to want to rise from the ordinary power of judgment, which combines things, to "intuitive judgment", which in this way awakens combinatory thinking to the inner life."

I believe that in view of the foregoing, there can be no remaining doubt as to *where* Steiner locates Goethe's intuitive judgment, namely, in a supersensible, seeing consciousness. And for him, this relates in a very specific way to pure thinking, the most elementary stage of seeing consciousness, which we shall investigate in somewhat more detail later on. Here too, as with the concept of intuitive judgment, the philosophy of Kant plays a special role. The few quotes presented here provide further evidence that Goethe's concept of intuitive judgment plays a kind of key function for a philosophical understanding of Steiner's Anthroposophy, which calls for a fundamental reappraisal. The few essential markers and viewpoints dealt with in this essay can, and are intended only to stimulate such a reappraisal.

That is, as mentioned earlier, Rudolf Steiner's understanding of intuitive judgment in the Goethean sense of the term. And it leads far away from what Prokofieff lays out before his readers. What seems to me to need emphasising once again is that it is not helpful for the cause of anthroposophy and for readers when a member of the Executive Council in Dornach expresses himself in public writings on matters of which he evidently has no understanding.

Now it may of course be that Goethe himself, who was certainly no systematising philosopher, did not always very clearly and conclusively define intuitive judgment, in semantic terms, which always presents interpreters with a problem of sources. The *ambivalence* and *vagueness* of Goethe's statements, which Schieren too bemoans on p. 145 of his text as going "as far as to be contradictory" - and that applies also to Goethe's personal assessments of his mental experiences of his own ideals and thoughts - easily leads to conflicts of interpretation with regard to the use of specific conceptualities. For example, when Goethe in his essay *Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort* (Significant Help from One Single Intelligent Word) speaks of an *objective* thinking. And in the same breath he had said that his thinking was a seeing and his seeing a thinking [5](#)) which the anthropologist Heinroth had attested to him. It is not easy to determine from the facts of the matter what Goethe means when he speaks there of a *seeing* thinking. Did he also mean intuitive judgment? Much would suggest so. But it would be more likely that he is here referring to the aforementioned objectivity of his thinking in the sense that the extensiveness of the object in its manifoldness and complexity is grasped by thinking. It is therefore a matter of a thinking and cognising that is as full of experience as possible. This does in fact belong to the theme of *intuitive judgment* insofar as the ideas and archetypes can only be gained from objects by means of a cognising that is filled with experience. But from an epistemological viewpoint, this again poses quite a different problem from the one that presents itself in the concept of *intuitive judgment*. In the latter case, it is a matter of the non-sensory perception of archetypes or ideas - of the inherent, driving supersensible forces behind appearances, while in the former case, the way to cognition of these essential archetypes and ideas requires

orienting oneself as extensively as possible to the sense-perceptible objects of cognition. The perceived archetypes themselves no longer belong to the realm of the sense-perceptible but are only perceptible in a supersensible realm.

At least, in the case of the essay *Anschauende Urteilskraft* (Intuitive Judgement) the issue is clearer for the interpreter because Goethe here explicitly deals with philosophical content that is narrowly outlined and clearly formulated. In his conclusion on intuitive judgment, Jost Schieren clearly emphasises the intuitive perception of the *ideal*; that is, the non-sensory component in the world of appearances, which does correspond to Steiner's conception. Schieren expresses himself very clearly in this sense in other places in his book. For example, p.73:

Goethe sees just such an [intuitive - MM] understanding, which Kant regards as beyond human possibilities, in the perspective of the development of human capacities. In the essay Anschauende Urteilskraft he himself cites the above-mentioned quotation from Kant [from the Critique of the Power of Judgment - MM] and states that for him, in his scientific research, it was always a matter of such a concept of an intuitive understanding, of such a capability.

And also on p.79 in relation to Goethe's essay *Anschauendes Urteilskraft*,

Goethe is not concerned with a Nature, which adds to the conditions of knowledge, but rather, he strives to develop the capabilities of knowledge so that it may grasp the unique lawfulness of whatever is being perceived in nature. For him, this perspective is provided by the possibility of the intuitive understanding, which Kant denies to the human being.

But he seems to me to be somewhat reserved when, in his summing up (p.210), he goes on to say in a rather qualifying manner that intuitive judgment is *not only* a thinking which operates with sensory elements and bases itself on these.

Perhaps I have misinterpreted Schieren here. Perhaps too the question of how narrowly Goethe orients himself here to Kant's use of the concept has, in the final analysis, (still) not been clarified with sufficient precision. If, on the other hand, one takes Kant's understanding of it as a criterion of comparison, and that also follows well enough with the aid of Schieren's research, then Goethe's intuitive judgment would in any case necessarily be far from anything that could be located below pure thinking at the level of the life of ideas. Provided therefore, that Goethe's concept of intuitive judgment orients itself to what Kant conceives of as *intuitive or divine understanding*, and much speaks for this, then the following would hold, namely that Goethe's (intuitive) judgment can, strictly speaking, be found nowhere within pure thinking, but must *at least* - this is already supported by the philosophical context from which Goethe produces this concept - lie on the same plane as sense-free thinking itself. And it could never in its quality of perception fall below this plane, but could only extend beyond it, and would be entirely predisposed to aim still further, beyond a more purely conceptual-ideal form of perception, in the direction of real spiritual perception. It

seems to me that this is what Steiner is speaking of in the quotations cited above and in the lecture *Goethe als Vater einer neuen Asthetik*. I would now like to give an indication of the underlying philosophical context here.

Intellectual intuition in Kant and intuitive judgment in Goethe

It is well-known that the core ideas of Kant's philosophy include the doctrine of the two poles of knowledge : receptive sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) on the one hand and spontaneous understanding (*Verstand*) on the other. In addition, there is the notion that the being of the world of appearances, the essential core of things, is completely inaccessible to the human being. The human being is not in the position to be able to make anything out of the kernel of the being of the world of appearances. Kant regards the infamous thing-in-itself as something about which we do indeed need to think and which stimulates our sense perception, but which is at the same time entirely inaccessible to our capacities of cognition.

Sensory preception provides understanding with the material for its thought operations, but without understanding it is not worth much, or as Kant puts it, it is *blind*. Understanding, for its part, without the perceptive material provided by the senses is just as helpless or *empty*, since, independent of sensibility, it can come to no objects, a point Kant makes in the Introduction to Transcendental Logic in his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Our knowledge springs from two basic sources of the mind, of which the first consists in receiving representations (receptivity for impressions) and the second is the capacity to cognise an object through these representations (spontaneity of concepts); through the first we are given an object, and through the second this object is brought through thought in relationship to those representations (as a mere determination by the mind). Perception and concepts form the elements of all our knowledge, so that neither concepts, without perception corresponding to them in some way, nor perception without concepts, can provide act of cognition. [6](#))

Perception, Kant declares further, (p.95) cannot be other than sense-based:

If we wish to use the term 'sensory perception' to denote the receptivity of the mind to receiving mental images, insofar as it has been affected in any way, the capacity on the other hand of producing mental images themselves, or the spontaneity of cognition, is reason (Verstand). Our nature is such that perception can never be other than sensory, that is, it only contains the manner in which we are affected by objects. On the other hand, the ability to think about the objects of sense-perception is reason. Neither of these properties is superior to the other. Without sense perception, there would be no objects for us, and without reason, no object would be thought about. Thoughts without content are empty; perceptions without concepts are blind. Therefore, it is just as necessary to relate one's concepts to sense peceptions (i.e. to add an object to them in the act of

perception) as to make one's perceptions understandable (i.e. to submit them to concepts). Neither of the two abilities, or capacities can exchange its function. Reason can perceive nothing, and the senses can think nothing. Only through their union can cognition arise.

For Kant, thinking was, as something merely discursive, completely bound to sense perceptions, and thus, independent of these, and without an object, empty thinking could come to no knowledge of the world.

Perception of the phenomena of the world was reserved for the senses alone, and reason was to order these perceptions and to form its thoughts within prescribed boundaries. What reason made out of these phenomena of the world had, according to Kant, nothing whatsoever to do with the actual being of the world. Reason's elucidations were of no real objective value for the world but were only of merely subjective value for the cognising subject. This was what Kant expressed in his introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason* with his famous remark about the shift to the Copernican view of the movement of celestial bodies, namely, that since the world withheld its being from Man, he would have to prescribe for it how it is, in accordance with the stipulations of his organs of cognition. Obviously, this was at the cost of putting in the place of the real, objective world one that was indeed now lawfully ordered, but yet merely subjective. *Subjective*, because for Kant, human cognitive conditions allowed for no other objective world: "Reason acts in a *legislative* manner. It sets up laws for the world of appearances, but laws which, according to Kant, provide *no adequate basis for cognising an object*, [...]they represent only a mere *subjective principle*." (Schieren p.78f)

Goethe indicates somewhat humorously in his essay *Anschauende Urteilskraft* [7](#) (Intuitive Judgment) that Kant had actually himself already pointed beyond the strict limits to knowledge that he had set. He thus postulates as a hypothetical possibility not only in his *Critique of Judgment* - to which Goethe refers - an intuitive understanding (*einen anschauenden Verstand*) that would be in the position to *intuit* the being of the world in a non-sensory manner. This would be equipped with a capacity for reception, analogous to the human senses, but in an active rather than a passive way. This was evidently a capacity for *supersensible*, rather than *sensory*, reception of the being of the world. Kant speaks about the specific characteristics of this understanding in § 77 of *The Critique of Judgment* [8](#) (p. 272 in my edition) in terms of the : "capacity of a complete spontaneity of intuition, a capacity of knowing that is differentiated from sensory perception and completely independent of it", that would be in a position to grasp the supersensible real basis of nature. The freedom from sensory perception of intuition - and this seems to me decisive for the estimation of Goethe's intuitive judgment - is for Kant, as it were, the demarcation line between the intuitive understanding that is directed at the supersensible, and the human, merely discursive understanding that is bound to the sense-perceptible world. This is why I said earlier that Goethe's intuitive judgment, provided that it holds itself here to Kant's conceptualisation, can never be located below sense-free thinking, because this results so conclusively from Kant's theoretical precepts. And *these* precepts as elaborated on by Kant and Schieren were as a background well known to Goethe.

When Goethe then in this context explicitly deals with § 77 of Kant's *The Critique of Judgment* in his essay *Intuitive Judgment*, he certainly has good grounds for doing so, for as already mentioned, Kant's text did not ascribe to the human being a hypothetical intuitive understanding directed towards the supersensible; rather, according to the conception of "the Old Man of Königsberg", only a supersensible divine being was capable of this.

Kant gives to this intuitive understanding very different names. In § 77 of *The Critique of Judgment* alone we find the terms *a beholding understanding*, *an intuitive understanding*, *an intellectual intuition*, *an intellectual archetype*, and *an archetypal understanding*. In other places he speaks directly of a *divine understanding* - to which Goethe rightly refers. This in itself also shows that for Goethe, Kant's work was no unknown quantity. Kant sometimes characterises this divine intellectual capacity of intuition in more detail and in different ways. But it appears repeatedly in his work, beginning with the *Dissertation*, where the capacity for intellectual intuition is expressly denied to the human being. Kant states there that the human cognitive capacity is never intellectual, but only symbolic, abstract and based on sense perception. Against this he sets divine intuition, of which he writes: *Divine intuition on the other hand, which is the foundation of objects, is nothing that is grounded on anything else, as it is independent, archetypal and therefore perfectly intellectual.* [9](#)) His constant refrain is the possibility of an application of reason directed to the being of the world, an intuition free of anything sensory, and which, as already mentioned, is not seen as a possibility for human beings but only for a higher, divine being. [10](#)) (On the concept of the intellectual or divine intuition, see the comprehensive online *Kant-Lexikon* by Rudolf Eisler (<http://www.textlog.de/31938.html>) Kant speaks of the power of judgment in his work, to which Goethe refers back, and specifically (§ 77, p.273) Kant also speaks of an *archetypal* understanding which is synonymous to the *intuitive* understanding or to the *intuitive judgement* respectively, which Goethe's title literally takes up. It is also suggestive that in the title of his essay Goethe alludes to a supersensibly intuitive judgment in Kant's sense because this is the main point of contention. And it is this divine or intuitive understanding, this non-sensory but *intellectual* intuition, which Goethe attributes to himself with a curiously careful reserve in summarising Kant in the well-known words:

Although the author [Kant - MM] seems to indicate a divine understanding only, the same thing might well apply in the intellectual realm; when we raise ourselves ethically to a higher region through belief in God, Virtue and Immortality and seek to approach primal Being, we might be worthy of a spiritual participation in the productions of nature through our intuitive beholding of her constant creativity. Since unconsciously at first, and driven by an impulse, I had been pushing forward restlessly towards that archetypal Typus, once I had succeeded in building up a natural representation, there was nothing that could have prevented me from bravely taking on the adventure of reason, as the Old Man of Königsberg himself calls it. [11](#))

It is the special attraction of this short essay that in it, as Schieren explicitly reveals in his book, Goethe, although closely connected intellectually in many

respects to the great Königsberg philosopher, on this point definitely distances himself from him and ascribes to himself a supersensible capacity for knowledge that Kant expressly seeks to withhold. Yet it also seems as though, despite all their divergences on this point, Kant had actually helped Goethe to an understanding of the matter. Goethe was certainly not lacking in experience of Kant's philosophy, even though, as he says in the Essay, he had never intended to penetrate it completely, he nevertheless wanted to make use of it. But as Schieren shows in many ways, Goethe was quite conscious of the implications of what he was here claiming for himself. That also explains perhaps why he does not rush into things in a bold and peremptory manner in his Essay but in a style suited to his scientifically circumspect and cautious disposition merely paints in subtle pastoral hues a modest picture of what he attributes to himself. I feel that Jost Schieren has very thoroughly demonstrated that with the concept of *intuitive judgment*, Goethe affirms a capacity for *intuitive* knowledge, an *intellectually intuitive, supersensible* judgment that essentially lies beyond all sensory perception in Kant's understanding of the term. And that corresponds, as I mentioned earlier, completely with the view of the matter held by Rudolf Steiner. (For further details, the reader is referred to Schieren's book, notably to Chapter 2, *Goethes Kant-Rezeption [Goethe's Understanding of Kant]*, pp. 29-80.

Intuitive Understanding and the Content of the World a and b

From this background which has just been outlined, a number of very noteworthy and illuminating lines of thought can be drawn to the philosophy of Rudolf Steiner, especially to what he himself calls *intellectual seeing* (intellektuelle Anschauung) in his *Truth and Science* and then *intuitive* thinking in the second edition of his *Philosophy of Freedom*.

It is well-known that Rudolf Steiner takes Goethe's worldview as his philosophical point of departure. He had had plenty of opportunity with which to occupy himself with these thoughts through his editorship of Goethe's natural scientific works in his younger years. He then published the philosophical results of this research in several books, notably, the *Einleitungen in Goethes naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (An Introduction to Goethe's Natural Scientific Writings) [12](#)), *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung* (A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception) [13](#)), and finally, the volume *Goethes Weltanschauung* (Goethe's Worldview). [14](#)) Both *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft* (Truth and Science) [15](#)) and *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity [16](#)) although part of this series of philosophically oriented early works, they appear rather independent insofar as Steiner on p. 14 of *Truth and Science* emphasizes the autonomous nature of the formation of his philosophical thoughts, "which do not need to be drawn from Goethe's worldview." In addition, he points explicitly, not only in the title of *Truth and Science*, but also in the content - e.g. on p. 14 - to *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* which was to follow. Thus in terms of their content, these two works stand in a particularly close relationship to each other.

It is characteristic of the manner in which Steiner goes about presenting the principles of Goethe's theory of knowledge that he puts forward a highly

concentrated and generalized collection of the results of his comprehensive studies of Goethe, and he both contrasts these results with the philosophical and epistemological thought-forms of his own time and justifies them against this background. That does not always make it easy for the reader to perceive the connection to Goethe. He often has to produce it for himself, as Christoph Gögelein once perceptively remarked [17](#)). In this sense, it is especially helpful to be able to refer back to a book such as that of Jost Schieren, which, through its multi-faceted presentation makes visible, at least indirectly, many of the direct lines of connection to Goethe that are lacking in Steiner. On the other hand, it would be very worthwhile precisely to explore Steiner's epistemological thought processes once again, directly in relation to these lines of connection but also in terms of how they differ from Goethe. In Schieren this is not considered an object of study, even if there do appear here and there in his book detailed references to Steiner's estimation of particular questions.

It is also characteristic of Steiner's Goethe-oriented epistemology that he emphasizes the principles of Goethe's way of understanding, as far as it revealed itself to him, in a philosophically pointed way, radicalizing it in a good sense, and thinks it through to the end, if one may put it thus. For example, that is particularly clear when, referring to the epistemologist Johannes Volkelt, he engages critically with the Positivism of his contemporaries and develops his concept of *pure experience*. This is an exploration, the task of which is to clarify what in the human act of cognition actually stems from the senses and what does not. To what then does the concept of the 'given' (in the sense of being accessible to the senses) actually correspond? Comprehensively in the chapter *Goethes Erkenntnistheorie* (Goethe's Theory of Knowledge) [18](#)) and also in considerable detail in *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung* (A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception) [19](#)), and finally in *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft* (Truth and Science) in the form of an introduction on p.15, one finds the indication that "Volkelt's work, with its thorough examination of the concept of "experience", provided a foundation without which my attempt to define the concept of the "given" would have been very much more difficult." Objectively considered, this examination of the concept of "experience" involves above all empirical scrutiny of Kant's idea that everything, without exception, which has to do with human understanding ultimately must stem from what is sensory if it does not wish to disappear into the void. For Steiner, that is absolutely not the case. This is above all decisive for Steiner's concept of the *supersensible*, which in a certain sense begins to become operative exactly where Kant wishes to *fix* it: in an application of reason that is free of the senses; in spontaneous reception; in intellectual seeing - provided one can judge the matter in this light and Goethe here follows Kant very closely: in Goethe's intuitive judgment. In Steiner's terminology: in pure or sense-free, that is, intuitive thinking.

We recall the above-mentioned doctrine of Kant on the two origins of knowledge: human understanding cannot perceive anything, and the senses cannot think anything. For Kant, human understanding therefore remains completely dependent on material points of departure that are bound to the senses and cannot free itself from these without falling into a void. It is characteristic of Steiner that he sees the very opposite in that capacity for

reception, for intellectual seeing that Kant wholly denies to the human understanding. Steiner sees in it something full of content, self-activating and independent of normal sense-perception, and like a red thread, he draws through all his early philosophical writings the conviction of the active, sense-free, perceptive capacity of human thinking. [20](#)) This culminates epistemologically in the explicit comparison of pure thinking with Kant's intellectual seeing in Steiner's *Truth and Science* (see below) and indeed, in such a radical manner, that for Steiner, without this sense-free capacity of perception, there can be no understanding at all. At the root of every act of knowledge, for Steiner there necessarily lies the perception of what is sense-free and supersensible, without which it would be no act of knowledge. That applies without exception to all the spheres in which objects can be perceived and to which the human capacity for knowing turns its attention. When Steiner then uses for this actively perceptive thinking the expressions *intuitive thinking* or *sense-free thinking* and on p. 60 of *Truth and Science* refers back emphatically, with reference to Kant, to the concept *intellectual seeing*, then those are conceptualisations which in comparable contexts can also be found in Kant, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes allusively. But, as indicated earlier, with the difference that Kant reserves the capacities involved in intellectual seeing to no human being but only to a divine being, while for Steiner, such capacities characterise the perfectly ordinary use of reason by the human being. This, in comparison to Kant's epoch-making revolution [Wende] in cognition in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, is a more recent revolution in thought on a similar scale of magnitude.

One of the most conspicuous examples of the transformation that Steiner accomplished, which brought Kant's sense-free, 'divine understanding' down to earth is a passage from *Truth and Science*, because it relates directly to Kant's concept of intellectual seeing and thereby makes visible the scale of the consequences of the transformation that Steiner wrought. Right from the outset, the clear aim of the book is a confrontation with Kant. On p. 9, the first of the preface, Steiner declares his intention to overcome "the unhealthy faith in Kant" to which his age subscribes. It is not by chance therefore that in this book, which he later described as *laying the groundwork* "for my entire worldview", Steiner takes aim, in relation to the supersensible, at a key Kantian concept which had already played such a significant role in Goethe's understanding of the world.

In an examination of the unconditional point of departure for cognition, Steiner evaluates what it really is that human thinking achieves in its definition of the given world. He looks into what stems from the senses and what stems from reason: whether reason really can only operate in accordance with what is presented to it by the objects of the senses, or whether it cannot rather bring forward an autonomously creative content that is free of the senses, without falling into a void, as Kant assumes. Steiner states (p.60) that the entirety of what is empirically given to the human being is given to him from the outside, without his own doing - with one exception: concepts and ideas do not appear without his own activity.

It is a characteristic feature of all the rest of our world-picture that it must be given if we are to experience it; the only case in which the opposite occurs is that of concepts and ideas: these we must produce if we are to experience them.

He refers here to his empirical experience in relation to the 'givenness' of the world, and this experience shows that concepts and ideas can only be experienced when they are produced actively by the cognising individual. Next (p.60) follows the decisive point in the demarcation of his thought from that of Kant, which at the same time represents the centre of his cognitive revolution against Kant: *Concepts and ideas alone are given to us in a form that could be called intellectual seeing*. Steiner goes on:

Kant and the later philosophers who follow on from him, completely deny this ability to man, because according to them, all thinking refers only to objects and does not itself produce anything at all. In intellectual seeing the content must be given along with the thought-form itself. But is this not precisely the case with pure concepts and ideas? [...] They must only be considered in the form that is still quite free of any empirical content. If, for example, one wishes to grasp the pure idea of causality, then one must not look to a particular instance of causality or to the sum total of all causality; it is essential to take hold of the pure concept, causality. Causes and effects must be sought in the world, whereas we ourselves must produce causality as a thought-form before we can discover causes and effects in the world.

If one clings to Kant's assertion that of themselves, concepts are empty, then it would be impossible to use concepts to determine anything about the given world. Suppose two elements of the world-content are given : a and b. If I am to find a relation between them, I must do so with the help of a principle which has a definite content; I can only produce this principle myself in the act of cognition. I cannot derive it from the objects, for the definition of the objects is only to be obtained by means of the principle. Thus a principle by means of which we define objects belongs entirely to the conceptual sphere alone.

I would like to draw special attention to one point here. Steiner has thus asserted that concepts do not originate in sense-experience and, in their genesis, are free of anything of a sensory nature. [21](#) Even when they refer to objects of sense perception, they are free of all sensory qualities in their own form and origin. They allow themselves to be applied to such objects, and where required, they are produced *at* the objects but not *out of* them. The concepts 'wolf', 'rose' or 'plastic bottle' are, accordingly, just as much pure, ideal entities as those of 'freedom' or 'goodness'. "The concept can not draw its content out of experience [that is, sense-experience, MM] for it does not include that which is precisely characteristic of experience i.e. particularity. Everything constructed according to particularity is foreign to the concept. It must therefore give itself its own content." Similar statements are found in other places in Steiner's work: (e.g. GA 01, p.154 in the chapter *Goethes Erkenntnistheorie* [Goethe's Theory of Knowledge]). In *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung* (A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception) we find the same train of thought on p. 61: *thinking is no mere vessel empty of content but rather, is entirely full of its own content and does not cover its content with another form of appearance*. And in chapter IV of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (The Philosophy

of Spiritual Activity) (p.58), he adds the succinct statement: *The concept cannot be gained from observation*. That is intended to be a comprehensively general statement. This means that intuitive, i.e. sense-free, thinking can be applied to plants, animals and plastic bottles and not only to analytical geometry and analytical mechanics - examples to which Steiner occasionally refers for the purposes of demonstration in his lectures - or to refined philosophical or spiritual scientific questions. (The precondition for this is that one actually applies an intuitive understanding or intuitive judgment to sense perceptible objects such as living beings and - see Goethe - develops a kind of type-concept. For the archetypes [*Urbilder*] of plants and animals are to be understood as the results of Goethe's natural scientific researches into sense perceptible examples and not as metaphysical speculation that is devoid of reality. Concepts in general are non-sensory entities and as such, not empty, but full of content. Causality as a pure thought-form cannot be read from sense experience. If this pure conceptuality which is not derived from sense experience had no content, i.e. was void, then, of course, it could not be applied to experience. Steiner here compares the pure concept with a rule or principle (*Regel*), which, as it happens, is a conception one frequently finds in *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*. In A 125 (p. 185 in my edition) Kant characterises reason as "the rule-making capacity". And in B 180/A 141 (p.200 in my edition) we read:

The concept of the dog signifies a rule, in accordance with which my power of imagination can generally describe the form of a four-legged animal without being restricted to any single particular form which experience may present to me, or even to any possible image that I can represent to myself in concreto.

In Steiner correspondingly, we read in parentheses on p. 61 of *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft* (Truth and Science): *By concept, I mean a principle according to which the disconnected elements of perception become joined into a unity*. As far as I can see, Steiner never again made use of this understanding of the concept as a principle, or rule. It denotes, so to speak, the deadest, most schematic aspect that can be gained from a concept, something that may be appropriate in epistemology. Later, - and this only in passing - Steiner speaks of concepts as beings, spiritual or etheric formative forces, which drive the world from within and which lie at its foundations.

The idea of a concept, full of content and sense-free, that is available for knowledge applies, according to Steiner - and this must again be emphasised - to every form of knowledge and not only to very specialised, scientific or other higher types of cognition. He says it already in the parenthesis on p.61 that what binds the disconnected elements of perception into a unity, into mutual relationship, is of a purely conceptual nature. In view of this general expression, we can proceed from the fact that for Steiner, the most elementary stage of conscious and active human orientation in the world of sense percepts is governed by rules [*regelgeleitet*] and is therefore dependent upon the presence of pure conceptualities. (Incidentally, particularly vivid examples of the striving for such an elementary rule-guided orientation in the world of *visual* sense percepts can be found in reports by Michael May, a blind man who underwent surgery, whose case I have already mentioned in [other places](#). See: *Der sehende Blinde* [The Blind Man Who Sees] in *Der Spiegel* No. 47, 18.11.2002 p.190ff. Reprinted under the title: *Wie ein*

Blinder versuchte, das Sehen zu lernen [How A Blind Man Tried To Learn To See], in SPIEGEL special issue 4/2003, p.140ff).

Steiner refers to this issue once again with an all-encompassing, general expression:

...Suppose there are two elements in the world content: a and b. If I am to find a relation between them, I must do so by means of a principle (rule - Regel) which has a definite content; I can only produce this principle myself in the act of cognition, for I cannot derive it from objects, because the definition of objects is only to be obtained by means of the principle. Thus such a principle for definition of what is real arises entirely within the purely conceptual sphere.

What Steiner says here is of fundamental importance. It goes beyond the limits of specific sciences and applies to every type of knowledge. The concept used here, that of *relation*, offers the widest possible room for any imaginable content. No boundaries whatsoever are set to the creative, cognising imagination. As in Steiner's example, it can be a relation between cause and effect. It can also be a relation between morphological relationships when plants or animals are studied for the purposes of definition. To name just a few other examples, it can also be a relation of empathy or antipathy between two people, of the roundness of different bellies, of the material differences between glass or plastic bottles, of the number of frequency vibrations of electromagnetic waves, of the relation of the I to its thinking activity, or of the relation between idea and reality. There is nothing in the whole world to which the concept of relation cannot be applied, because naturally everything can be placed in some kind of connection or relation to everything else. In order to discover such a relation, I require a rule or concept, which I must already have at my disposal *before* I can discover the relation which I am seeking for in the world. I must know *what* to look for; otherwise I shall find nothing. For this reason, the conceptuality which guides cognition cannot be drawn from the objects examined. I can only confirm the existence of empathy between two human beings if I have a concept of empathy, or else I simply will not see it. If I want to know if my neighbour is a blockhead, then I need the appropriate concept for that. The same applies to distinguishing two bottles according to roundness, colour, volume or material. Correspondingly, there is also a pure sense-free concept of morphological relationship, of blockheadedness, of the roundness of bellies, of volume or material or electromagnetic frequency.

This means that every element of content in the world whatsoever, even the most trivial, can, if I wish to know of it, only be known by means of a pure concept or rule, which I myself must produce in the act of cognition and which, for its part, cannot be drawn from the sensory content of the world. Only in this way is it possible to posit any relationship between two elements of that world content, of whatever kind. This principle that educes productive, pure concepts applies to every kind of knowledge and is in this context compared by Steiner to intellectual seeing, that is, to Kant's *capacity of super-sensible perception* [übersinnliches Wahrheitsvermögen]. As far as I can see, it is the only explicit indication in *Truth and Science* of the perceptive capacity of pure thinking, which one can find emphasized in his

other writings. For Steiner, the production of a pure concept is, ultimately, what Kant calls *intellectual intuition* [intellektuelle Anschauung] - non-sensory productive perception, an act of spontaneous creative receptivity which is directed to the super-sensible being of the world of appearances and which sees this world of appearances. This also corresponds to what Kant calls *intellectual understanding* and what Goethe in principle expresses with the concept of *intuitive judgement* [anschauende Urteilskraft]. Intellectual seeing, according to Steiner, is to be found in the experience of thinking, but only when pure concepts are produced in that experience. Again, this is the case with all acts of cognition without exception, because these can only take place where such concepts are applied. To put it another way: in every act of knowledge this intellectual intuition or super-sensible perception is present as the constitutive element. Without this there is no knowledge at all.

It seems to me that in the thought processes of Steiner referred to here, is the philosophical founding kernel of his conviction that pure thinking is already a form of super-sensible seeing consciousness. (See GA 35, Dornach 1984, p.320f:

"When in my spiritual scientific writings I present thought processes which lead through spiritual experience and observation to concepts about the spiritual world just as the senses and sense-bound reason do regarding the world of the senses and human life within that world, this can in my view only be justified scientifically if proof is provided that the process of pure thinking itself shows itself to be the first stage of those processes through which super-sensible knowledge can be gained. I consider that I have provided such proof in my earlier writings.[...] My earlier writings address pure thinking in such a way as to make it clear that I ascribe it entirely to the operations of a "seeing consciousness". I see in this pure thinking the first, still shadowy revelation of the stages of spiritual knowledge.")

With this in mind, it is not difficult to appreciate that, as mentioned earlier, Steiner regarded *Truth and Science* as *laying the groundwork* for his entire worldview. It belongs to the roots of the matter that this groundwork reveals itself to be linked to a concept of Kant's - intellectual intuition or intuitive understanding - which played such a great role for Goethe and which one finds again in Goethe's work in his concept of intuitive judgment. What Goethe had in mind with his concept of intuitive judgment, namely, reaching the *higher reality* of things in the act of knowing, is advanced by Steiner to an epistemologically expanded, grounded and secured understanding of pure thinking. This shows epistemologically that pure thinking itself already has the character of intuitive judgment and is to be included within the capacity for super-sensible perception. This accounts therefore - and I trust my more sensitive readers may excuse me for this - for my harsh criticism of such unqualified statements from the Dornach Executive Council [of the General Anthroposophical Society] as have recently appeared in Prokofieff's comments on Goethe's intuitive judgment. It simply cannot be accepted that today, about 80 years after Steiner's death, the anthroposophical movement, through its leading officials, persists in maintaining a standpoint that amounts to a sheer nullity in questions of fundamental philosophical and epistemological importance and leads its supporters into error by infecting them with pseudo-knowledge and naive epistemological mythologies, despite

the fact that for quite some time useful research on the theme has been done in anthroposophical circles - see Jost Schieren, and also the literature mentioned below. It is high time that the Executive Council in Dornach developed standards of quality for research relating to Steiner's work that were commensurate with the significance of that work.

In this philosophical context is also to be found the basis of my criticism of Marcelo da Veiga Greuel, which I have expressed elsewhere. The epistemological distinction between discursive intellect and intuitive intellect is a concept of Kant's, which can only be applied to Steiner in a very limited sense, because Steiner's estimation of the cognitive process differs fundamentally from that of Kant. For Steiner, there is no discursive intellect as there is for Kant, because Steiner regards the intuitive element as constitutive for *every* act of cognition. His well-known characterisation of knowing as the synthesis of concept and percept always signifies the sense-free concept and is to be taken in this sense when, in other places, he says that *every act of knowing is predicated on the lawfulness of pure thinking*. (in *Die Geisteswissenschaft als Anthroposophie und die zeitgenössische Erkenntnistheorie. Persönlich-Unpersönliches* [Spiritual Science as Anthroposophy, and Contemporary Epistemology. Personal and Non-personal], GA 35, Dornach 1984, p. 321). Where this sense-free instance is not found, then one cannot speak of an act of knowledge. With Kant, it is exactly the other way round: with him, there is no intuitive, supersensible element in human cognition; he expressly denies this to the human being.

Consequently, it is by no means accidental that in his *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity; see especially Ch. 5, p.73 Rudolf Steiner Press, 1979 ed.) Steiner uses the expression *intuition* for the productive perception of pure or sense-free thinking, and this *intuition* is nothing other than the intellectual seeing from *Truth and Science*. It is the *the revelation of a spiritual reality, as (sensory - MM) perception (is that of)a material reality*, as he puts it more precisely in the book *Von Seelenrätseln* (Riddles of the Soul) (GA 21, Dornach, 1976, p.61), and in the second edition of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* he also sometimes calls this thinking an *intuitive* thinking. In view both of the philosophical content and of the conceptual development, this is completely valid in relation to what he had previously presented in *Truth and Science*. I have already mentioned that the two books stand in a very close relationship to each other in terms of their content. When at the end of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* Steiner remarks on p. 255, almost in passing, one might say, that through intuitive thinking, *each act of perception is placed cognitively into reality*, this fully matches the function of intellectual seeing which he had described in *Truth and Science*. It corresponds exactly to the description on p. 60 of *Truth and Science* that only through the purely conceptual, sense-free element in thinking - through intellectual seeing - is a relationship produced between any two phenomena in the world and only through this same sense-free element in thinking can unrelated percepts be united. It is only by means of a thinking capable of intellectual seeing, i.e. intuition, that acts of knowledge are possible. Intuition or intellectual seeing are to be found in every act of knowledge.

That is not to say, however, how *completely* this actively conceived pure concept must be present in the thinking of the cognising individual at any one

time, i.e. whether the individual's concept of causality in a particular case is understood and philosophically clear to her in all its ramifications. That is not at issue here. There are naturally huge individual differences in the provision of content, but that is not in question here, and strictly speaking, cannot be in question, since the issue concerns a general concept of cognition about the essentials of knowing and not about the specific scientific question: how solid really is all that the individual has to offer to the world as pure concepts?

Notes: It may be noted that many fruitful ideas on this subject can be found in the writings of Herbert Witzmann, including his ideas on the concept of intuitive judgment, which Witzmann discusses wholly along the same lines as those of Steiner and Schieren.

See Herbert Witzmann, *Das Universalienproblem in linguistischer und strukturphänomenologischer Bedeutung*, in Herbert Witzmann, *Die Kategorienlehre Rudolf Steiners*, Krefeld, 1994, p. 111f.

See Herbert Witzmann, *Goethes Idee des Experiments und die moderne Naturwissenschaft*, in Herbert Witzmann, *Intuition und Beobachtung*, Vol. 1, Stuttgart, 1977, p.35f., n.b. p.56.

See Herbert Witzmann, *Vom dreifachen Ich und der vierfachen Wurzel der Freiheit*, in Herbert Witzmann, *Intuition und Beobachtung*, Vol. 2, Stuttgart, 1978, p.35f., n.b. p.72.

See also Marcelo da Veiga Greuel, *Wirklichkeit und Freiheit*, Dornach 1990. On the relationship between Goethe's intuitive judgment and intellectual seeing in Steiner, see p.10f; also, pp.55 and 58f.

See further on this theme Günter Röscher, *Anthroposophie als Aufklärung*, Munich, 1996, p. 36 f., where the author throws light on the connection between the concepts of *intuitive judgment* and *intellectual seeing* in Steiner's theory of knowledge. His overview of the subject is brief but accurate. The reference to Kant could be rather more thorough, however, because it is Kant to whom Steiner refers explicitly, just as Goethe does in his essay *Anschauende Urteilskraft* (Intuitive Judgement).

See also the overview by Dietrich Rapp, *Wegmarken: Die intellektuelle Anschauung als idealistischer Leitbegriff auf dem Wege der Erfahrung der Intuition*, in Karl Martin Dietz (ed.), *Rudolf Steiners Philosophie der Freiheit*, Stuttgart, 1994, p.241f.

What one misses in these authors are closer and more extensive detailed analyses based on the text of Steiner's *Truth and Science* in respect of the concept of intellectual seeing. At any rate, with regard to the arguments I myself have presented above, I must say that Kant's concept of intellectual intuition deserves a much more thorough study than I have been able to give it in this overview. It would also be a very fruitful and promising subject for an anthroposophically oriented dissertation. This would enable a solid bridge to be built from Schieren's work via Goethe to Rudolf Steiner.

One must take seriously here what, for Kant, is connected with the concept of intellectual intuition, in order to be able to appreciate the full range of consequences of what Steiner is stating here in the dry jargon of epistemology, which is nothing else than that this actively perceiving, super-sensible divine understanding, as Kant sees it, which is directed to the being, the spiritual foundation that underlies the world of appearances, and which Kant attributes to a world that is completely beyond all human possibilities, is for Steiner already present and active when a human being simply seeks to find a relationship between any two elements existing in the world. This is why I said earlier that Steiner pulls Kant's divine understanding down from heaven to earth, and does so in a much more fundamental and radical manner than did Goethe. Steiner goes so far as to assert that this divine element can be found in every simple human act of knowledge. This achievement of Steiner's can be termed an epistemological revolution of copernican dimensions.

It is helpful to recall such ideas when one comes across Steiner's programmatic statement in the preface to the 1918 edition of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (p.9). He says there that his aim in this book was to show

how an open-minded consideration of the two problems which I have indicated and which are fundamental for every kind of knowledge leads to the view that man lives in the midst of a genuine spiritual world.

One only needs to make clear to oneself the incredible degree to which the human being moves through daily life in thinking - even if not in a scientific manner - in order to make concrete for oneself the fact of this living within a "genuine spiritual world". [With this background in mind, one can also take note here of Steiner's statement in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* in the chapter The Consequences of Monism (p. 250):

The human being, in his thinking, therefore grasps the universal primordial Being which pervades all human beings. Living in a reality that is filled with the content of thought is at the same time living in God.

See also in the chapter *Goethes Erkenntnistheorie* (Goethe's Theory of Knowledge; GA 01, Dornach, 1972, p.162):

What the philosophers call the absolute, eternal being, the ground of the world, and what the religious call God, we call, on the basis of our epistemological arguments: the Idea.

Similarly, he describes in his *Theosophie* (Theosophy; GA 9, paperback edition, Dornach, 1978, p.21), also referring back to Goethe as it happens, the cognising human being as "a divine being, so to speak". Expressions of this kind are more than just illustrative, rhetorical devices.]

It seems to me important here, in regard to Goethe, to be aware of the fact that in his own philosophical development, Steiner does not hold particularly to Goethe's ideas. He is no naive follower of Goethe in epistemology. Rather, he is someone who does indeed begin with Goethe but who develops and

consolidates Goethe's epistemological principles in a very unique way in order to be able, as in *Truth and Science*, to stand completely on his own feet. He is not therefore a mere representative of a Goethean worldview, but someone who, allowing himself to be motivated and inspired by Goethe, develops further something very individual out of these motivations - something that is not necessarily in all details compatible with Goethe's way of knowing and understanding the world. (One can compare, for example, his sharp criticism of Goethe in his *Goethes Weltanschauung* (Goethe's Worldview; GA 06, paperback edition Dornach, 1979, in the chapter *Die Metamorphose der Weltererscheinungen* (The Metamorphosis of the World of Appearances), p. 90f and in other places in the same chapter.) Therefore, with Goethe's concepts, such as that of *intuitive judgment*, one does not come much further in questions of epistemological detail, if one applies them untested to Steiner's theory of knowledge or to that which in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* he calls *intuitive* thinking, which, as mentioned earlier, expresses basically the same thing as the intellectual seeing that is spoken of here. If one were to hold only to what this concept might signify for Goethe, it would possibly lead into serious error with regard to an understanding of Steiner's views. I have shown [elsewhere](#) that concepts anchored in the history of philosophy can be very helpful and indispensable for an understanding of Steiner. But one can find oneself all too easily on the wrong track if one carries these concepts over to Steiner without having first sufficiently considered how Steiner's own thinking developed. Whether the concepts of *intellectual intuition* or of *intuitive understanding* - as they were understood in that period - would, even for Goethe, have been generally applicable to cognition of any a and b element in the contents of the world as in the epistemological context discussed above, is very much in question. As Jost Schieren has demonstrated, Goethe associated with this concept a specially trained and schooled *higher* form of knowing. In the end, however, he was no epistemologist who pursued questions of knowledge to their very foundations. Steiner, however, as I have tried to show here, was precisely such a thinker. For him, the moment of super-sensible experience, for which Goethe struggled so hard and held to be *the* prerequisite of knowledge of organic nature, is already present in principal in every single act of knowledge and must necessarily be present to be able to speak about knowledge at all.

In this context one must also reflect that in the course of Rudolf Steiner's epistemological development, there were changes and certain breaks or precise fine adjustments in his judgment of specific epistemological issues. This at any rate shows the clear differences between those of his essays which are narrowly focused on Goethe and on elucidating Goethe, and those which he developed further, independently of Goethe. It would be interesting and worthwhile to pursue this topic further, but as there is no space here to do so, such an endeavour can only be encouraged. Lorenzo Ravagli has already made some observations in this direction in *Jahrbuch für anthroposophische Kritik 1997* (Yearbook of Anthroposophical Criticism; pp. 74-92). Against this background, it is interesting to see that, for example, in his *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung* (A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception), which still proceeds expressly from Goethean principles of knowledge, where he deals with the organic sciences, Steiner still reserves (p.111) the concept *intuition* for knowledge of living, organic nature. (See also chapter IV *Über das Wesen*

und die Bedeutung von Goethes Schriften über organische Bildung (On the Nature and Significance of Goethe's Writings on Organic Morphology) in GA 01, Dornach, 1973, p.82f., where, in connection with Goethe's organicism, Steiner still speaks of *intuitive concepts* and *intuitive knowledge*.) Then in his *Philosophie der Freiheit* (p. 95) he broadens the concept out fully to embrace all knowledge or ideal perception and no longer restricts it to consideration of the organic world. That can already be found in *Truth and Science*, with the single distinction, that there the *expression* intuition is still not introduced, but rather, Steiner uses *intellectual seeing*, which signifies a comparable concept. One must carefully take cognisance here of the fact that *Truth and Science* addresses itself especially to scientific knowledge (see the title and preliminary remarks), while *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* is not so self-limiting and directs its attention to the whole of everyday consciousness (see the 1918 preface and the end of chapter 2). It can thus be said that, by his declaration of independence from Goethe's thought forms in *Truth and Science* at the latest, Steiner accomplished a breakthrough in regard to the concept of knowledge in general, which was completed in *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*, and in fact was already there in essence in *Grundlinien... (A Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World Conception)* in his study of the concept of experience and was once again made explicit in the later notes to the new, 1924 edition of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (e.g. note 27).

These remarks are not, incidentally, directed at a subject which is raised again and again, for example, by Jost Schieren in relation to Goethe's intuitive judgment, namely, Goethe's view that bound up with intuitive judgment is an enhancement of human cognitive capacity - the much broader outlook which is opened up to the super-sensible, the archetypal and to that which relates to the world in its innermost depths. It goes without saying that this applies also to Steiner, who unmistakably indicates this point in the lecture cited above, *Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik* (Goethe as Father of a New Aesthetic). Naturally, Steiner also looks to a further development of human cognition; it is undisputed that one of the main points of his spiritual scientific work is that cognition can be developed to such a point that from it, something of a completely new quality emerges which is also capable of solid research into the super-sensible, spiritual aspect of the world, formulating questions hardly imaginable to a conventionally thinking mind. However, from a general epistemological point of view this super-sensible element is for Steiner not exclusively the result of an enhancement of cognitive life but is already present in our everyday use of reason, whether in the form of pure concepts and ideas or of a pure, sense-free capacity of thinking, which can and should be further developed. This point - that the super-sensible already basically shows itself epistemologically in the normal daily cognitive life of man and is not only the result of extensive efforts of schooling - makes it naturally much easier to authenticate this realm of the super-sensible scientifically and rationally [22](#)). It allows one to underpin one's capabilities for schooling epistemologically and didactically, so that one is able to deepen such a capability in practical life rather than to refer back and look to something, which is indeed theoretically conceivable, but which no-one really knows in terms of its content and phenomenological consciousness. So even a progressive spirit such as Goethe was constantly plagued by doubts whenever he examined his own intellectual capacity, so that he was never quite sure what to think of it

or how to classify all that he had found in his cognitive experience, something which, if one follows Schieren, appears to have been typical of the man.

It is a great help to everyone who sets out on a path of spiritual development if he can connect with something with which he already feels familiar. In this sense of practical assistance, one can look to Steiner's concluding statement of the addition to the revised (1918) edition of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (p. 256), where he says:

What comes to us as percept is something that, on the journey through life, we simply have to expect. The only question is, would it be right to expect, from the point of view that results from this purely intuitively experienced thinking, that man could perceive what is spiritual as well as what is sensory? It would be right to expect this. For although, on the one hand, intuitively experienced thinking is an active process taking place in the human spirit, on the other hand it is also a spiritual percept, mediated by no physical organ. It is a perception in which the perceiver is himself active, and a self-activity which is at the same time perceived. In intuitively experienced thinking man is placed in a spiritual world also as a perceiver. Within this world, whatever he encounters as percept in the same way as the spiritual world of his own thinking, he will recognise as a world of spiritual perception. Thinking would relate to this world of spiritual perception in the same way that, in the sensory dimension, it does to the world of sense perception. Once experienced, the world of spiritual perception cannot appear to man as something foreign to him, because in his intuitive thinking he already has an experience which is purely spiritual in character.

Whoever experiences and knows intuitive thinking has an exemplary experience of what Steiner calls the spirit and therefore the spiritual world cannot be alien to him. This is why so much depends on one being able to make for oneself a clear concept of what Steiner calls *intuitive* thinking. An obvious difficulty at this point is that due to the lack of such clarification, many readers of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*, as well as many authors, entertain completely exaggerated ideas about, and unrealistic expectations of, this *intuitive* or pure thinking. As a consequence, they do not suspect how close it has always been to them or that they already continuously practise it, because they are of the opinion that they have to look towards something which is far beyond their current possibilities and which - in whatever way - has to be striven for in a process of training. One can immediately think here of authors such as Prokofieff or Lowndes, but there are many others. (A recent example from the magazine *Die Drei* (Feb. 2008; n.b. p.56) can be found on the Internet at :

http://www.diedrei.org/Heft_2_08/09%20Forum%20Anthroposophie%20-08.pdf)

The lack of clarity in this case leads the authors, in order to be on the safe side, to attribute to this intuitive thinking explicitly or implicitly particularly elitist or culturally aristocratic characteristics, of which ordinary men or women would scarcely suspect themselves capable. When without further explanation, reference is made only to the spirituality or the sense-free nature of thinking, or for didactic reasons it is recommended to readers that they should study Hegel's *Logik* (Logic) in order to acquire pure thinking, that is certainly not an incorrect suggestion in itself, but ordinary mortals

may as well expel from their minds completely any thought of a corresponding individual ability in this direction since realistically, they will scarcely see themselves in a position to undertake such a study, as they do not have the educational and biographical prerequisites for it. It would certainly be more helpful if such an author could make conceptually clear to his readers how thinking about a fluttering partridge - see chapter 4 of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* - or about what happens on a billiard table - see chapter 3, or about the evolutionary biological relationship between a snail and a lion - see chapter 5, can be described by Steiner on p. 255 of the book as intuitive or pure thinking and the thinking *experienced* in this way as *spiritual experience*. One must therefore ask oneself: if Steiner holds all concepts without exception originally to be sense-free, what then does he actually consider to be pure thinking?

Finally, in my view, the rhetorical presumption and elevation of intuitive thinking is in large measure but a disguise for a lack of clear thinking, and if the whole issue is not further illuminated, it leads to the disappearance of intuitive thinking from the horizon of visibility. Somehow, one is strangely reminded of the way Kant proceeded when he presented to his readers a divine understanding directed towards the nature of the world of appearances, only to frustrate them again by stating that this divine understanding unfortunately lay beyond their capacities. I would therefore like once again to recommend especially the most recent work by Renatus Ziegler, *Intuition und Ich-Erfahrung* (Intuition and the Experience of the I) (Stuttgart, 2006). This work provides the reader with very concrete suggestions as to how to experience and live into what Steiner is speaking of here.

Notes

[1](#) Jost Schieren, *Anschauende Urteilskraft. Methodische und philosophische Grundlagen von Goethes naturwissenschaftlichem Erkennen*. Parerga Verlag, Düsseldorf and Bonn 1998, ISBN 3-930450-27-5

[2](#) See also Jakob Barion, Die intellektuelle Anschauung bei J.G.Fichte und Schelling und ihre religionsphilosophische Bedeutung, in *Abhandlungen zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Religion*, published by Georg Wunderle DD, No. 22, Würzburg 1929, p. 41f.

[3](#) Sergei O. Prokofieff, *Anthroposophie und "Die Philosophie der Freiheit"*, Dornach 2006.

[4](#) Rudolf Steiner, *Goethe als Vater einer neuen Ästhetik*, in GA 30, Dornach 1989, p.30f.

[5](#) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Bedeutende Fördernis durch ein einziges geistreiches Wort*, Hamburg edition in 14 volumes, Vol. 13, Munich 1975, p. 37.

[6](#) Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, new edition by Raymund Schmidt, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1976, p. 94.

[7](#) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Anschauende Urteilskraft*, Hamburg edition in 14 volumes, Vol. 13, Munich 1975, p. 30f.

[8](#) Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, new edition by Raymund Schmidt, Felix Meiner Verlag, Hamburg 1976, p. 94.

[9](#) See § 10 in Kant's Dissertation: Von der Form der Sinnen- und Verstandeswelt und ihren Gründen, in Wilhelm Weischedel (ed.), *Immanuel Kant Werkausgabe V, Schriften zur Metaphysik und Logik 1*, p.41f.

[10](#) See also the overview, still very worthwhile reading, by Jakob Barion, Die intellektuelle Anschauung bei J.G. Fichte und Schelling und ihre religionsphilosophische Bedeutung in *Abhandlungen zur Philosophie und Psychologie der Religion* (publ. D. Dr. Georg Wunderle) Vol. 22, Würzburg 1929. Re. Kant, see especially p. 17f.

[11](#) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Anschauende Urteilskraft*, Hamburg edition in 14 volumes, Vol. 13, Munich 1975, p. 30f.

[12](#) Rudolf Steiner, *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, GA 01, Dornach 1973.

[13](#) Rudolf Steiner, *Grundlinien einer Erkenntnistheorie der Goetheschen Weltanschauung*, GA 02, Dornach 1979.

[14](#) Rudolf Steiner, *Goethes Weltanschauung*, GA 06, Dornach 1979

[15](#) Rudolf Steiner, *Wahrheit und Wissenschaft, Vorspiel einer "Philosophie der Freiheit"*, 1st ed., 1892, GA 03, Dornach 1980.

[16](#) Rudolf Steiner, *Die Philosophie der Freiheit, Grundzüge einer modernen Weltanschauung*. 1st ed., Berlin 1894, GA 04, Dornach 1978.

[17](#) Christoph Gögelein, *Zu Goethes Begriff von Wissenschaft*, 1972, p. 192f.

[18](#) *Goethes Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften* (GA 01), Dornach 1973, p.146f.

[19](#) GA 02, Dornach 1979, n.b. p.33f

[20](#) Thus for example in the introductions to Goethe's natural scientific writings, GA 01, Dornach 1973, p.125f: *Whoever acknowledges the ability of thinking to perceive beyond the grasp of the senses must necessarily acknowledge that it also has objects that lie beyond merely sense-perceptible reality. The objects of thinking, however, are ideas. Inasmuch as thinking takes hold of the idea, it merges with the primal ground of world existence; what is at work outside enters into the spirit of man: he becomes one with the objective reality in its highest potency. Becoming aware of the idea within reality is the true communion of man. Thinking has the same significance with respect to ideas as the eye has with respect to light, the ear to sound. It is an organ of apprehension.*

Op. cit. p.126: *That which is objectively given by no means coincides with what is given sense-perceptibly, as the mechanistic worldview would have it. What is given sense-perceptibly constitutes only half of what is given. The other of the given is ideas, which are just as much objects of experience - of a higher experience, to be sure, and the organ for which is thinking.*

Op. cit. p.164: *The ideal content of the world is founded upon itself, is complete within itself. Thinking does not create it but rather, only perceives it. Thinking is not a producer, but rather an organ of apprehension.*

Also, in GA 02, Dornach 1979, p. 78: *The spirit therefore perceives the thought content of the world, like an organ of apprehension. There is only one thought content of the world. Our consciousness does not have the capability to create and store thoughts, as is so often maintained, but rather to perceive thoughts (ideas).*

In *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* this capacity for perception appears on the one hand in the concept of intuition, which in the book *Von Seelenrätseln* [Riddles of the Soul] (GA 21, Dornach 1976, p. 61) is summarised as *the revelation of a spirit-reality as perception is the revelation of the material reality*. Further, on p. 132 of *Die Philosophie der Freiheit*, it is noted that ordinary sense perception is in fact only a particular type of perception.

[21](#) I must here draw attention to the fact that in this discussion I have not at the same time concerned myself with an analysis of Kant's theory of knowledge but I have been portraying, in the form of an overview, what Steiner considers to be the concept of intuitive thinking. A thorough comparison of Steiner and Kant would naturally have to be carried out with much more care than has been possible here.

[22](#) Against this background I must once again refer to Steiner's indication in *Von Seelenrätseln* (GA 21, Dornach 1976, p.170f) where he attributes such an important role to research into pure thinking (he speaks here of the capacity for seeing) in a psychological laboratory. One cannot underline this enough, for the concept of pure thinking seems to me to be one of the most unclear concepts in the anthroposophical movement. In terms of the phenomenology of consciousness, the concept can only be clarified and made transparent on the basis of a psychological study of thinking, but such studies are almost entirely lacking in the works of Rudolf Steiner.