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David Seamon, Arthur Zajonc, eds.. *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998. xii + 324 pp. $30.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7914-3682-0.

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Goethe once described all of his writings as "fragments of a great confession." Unlike the characters of Shakespeare, figures in the work of Goethe--for example, Faust--almost never seem to take on a life of their own but remain projections of the author's personality. Goethe, however, seems aloof and mysterious in spite of massive scholarship. The result is that the poetic work of Goethe, while beautiful, appears strangely isolated from both literary tradition and quotidian experience. This peculiar status is even more pronounced with the science of Goethe, often admired yet poorly integrated into the mainstream of scientific tradition.

Goethe worried that science, which had begun with observation of the natural world, was taking people away from sensory experience. He aspired to a discipline that would remain based on observation rather than on abstraction or quantitative measurement. A practitioner of this science would not isolate a object of study by setting up experiments but, rather, observe the subject as it occurs naturally. Through systematic observation of an phenomenon such as light or vegetation, one would gradually refine one's intuition until at last one could penetrate beyond the phenomenon to an underlying archetype. In the name of fidelity to the senses, Goethe rejected instruments such as microscopes and telescopes which intervene between the observer and the object of study.

The first part of *Goethe's Way of Science* consists of essays that explicate the methodology of Goethe in relatively abstract terms. The second consists of intriguing attempts to apply this methodology in fields such as botany and zoology, while third future deals with its possible future. My favorite contribution is "Horns, Hooves, Spots and Stripes," in which Mark Riegner attempts to explain why animals distantly related often show remarkable resemblances: the spotted patterns, for example, on the fur of cats, pacas, boars and fawns. Using the methods of Goethe, he divides mammals into categories on the basis of morphology rather than evolutionary descent, and concludes that these similarities may be due to common formative principles. Other contributions provide a Goethean perspective on such phenom-

ena as the shapes of leaves, the patterns of flowing water and the colors of shadow.

The science of Goethe has never been so neglected as most of the authors in this volume imagine. To fully appreciate the potential and limits of this science, it will be necessary to discuss it not only as practiced by Goethe but also a wide range of subsequent interpreters, for example Ernst Haeckel, Jacob von Uexküll and Carl Jung. The learned authors in Goethe's Way of Science never mention these figures. I sometimes suspect a desire to preserve the purity of Goethe's work by keeping it in suspended animation. Integration into scientific traditions might indeed strip Goethean science of a certain glamour, yet is that not often a cost of remaining faithful to the sensuous world?