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**PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS OF JOHANN WOLFGANG VON
GOETHE AND IT'S MEANING FOR MODERN SOCIETY**

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PREAMBLE

1. Reason for choosing the topic

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832) was a German intellectual and cultural icon, one of the few individuals whose name represents the academic and cultural heritage of Germany when it comes to international exchanges. To this day, numerous Goethe Institutes have been established worldwide. As a scientist, almost every creative endeavor by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe left a profound humanistic imprint. His remarkable career and extensive achievements have provided numerous lessons on humanism throughout the past two centuries. In his various fields of engagement, Goethe consistently discussed the existence of individuals within complex relationships to maintain a balanced, free, harmonious, and non-violent sense of self. He firmly believed that human existence should be the central focus, the driving force behind exploring the universe without relying on divine authority, and discovering the self through the lens of ideation (though tinged with a sense of mystery), while acknowledging personal rights and responsibilities in creative activities. In today's world, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged with the hope of solving everything, yet climate crises and conflicts of interest have become more severe. In such a context, the figure of Goethe emerges as a reflection: stopping the destruction of nature to preserve human dignity, exposing the violence lurking behind any form of defense, and acknowledging personal responsibility.

Studying his philosophy, which has been used to define an era called the Goethean Era, is of contemporary significance, particularly in Vietnam today. It is not a coincidence that in the 1980s, two publishers in the United States and Germany, Princeton University Press and Suhrkamp Verlag, respectively, released a collection of 12 volumes on Goethe in the United States. Over 20 years later, another comprehensive collection was published in the United States. According to Matthew Bell, editor of "The Essential Goethe," a collection of his essential works spanning over 1000 pages published in 2016, the need to decipher Goethe's ideas continues to "attract the attention of many renowned translators."

The reference materials we consulted touched on Goethe's ideas but did not clarify his unwavering commitment to "philosophical concerns in the broad sense, without getting caught up in academic debates about epistemology or moral philosophy that dominated the early years of post-Kantian idealism." Few resources indicate how he used non-philosophical means to elucidate his philosophical beliefs. Notable among them is "Faust," a poetic drama consisting of 12,111 lines and a grand magnum opus of German cultural history. Faust, embodying an intermediate philosophical theory that has inspired for centuries, demonstrates that "in many cases, it is the source of our emotions," while philosophy, as the "spiritual history of an era" or "an era expressed in ideas," is epitomized in Faust.

The existing resources also fail to demonstrate how Goethe's non-dogmatic philosophical stance infiltrated various fields. His worldview, which is composed of

objects, ideas, and human existence, not only made him more objective but also helped him explore new problems that purely rational minds or empirical worship overlooked. Notable subjective discoveries include the theory of color, which differs from Isaac Newton's classical theory of light (1643-1727); the theory of plant morphology called "urpflanze" (primordial plant); the discovery of the connection between animals and humans through the jawbone, which served as initial evidence of evolution, surpassing the prevailing view of the immutable species that dominated the contemporary worldview.

Goethe's scientific worldview, combined with the destiny of individuals, strengthened his belief that the perceived world must encompass human existence. From this foundation, he laid the groundwork for new directions such as pre-phenomenology, a branch of modern philosophy; the concept of the completeness of knowledge, studying the essence of objects without breaking them; the idea of indivisible freedom that is intertwined with profound individual knowledge in relation to human existence; the concept of respecting conflicting interests; and the concept of the Human Development Index (HDI), which the United Nations and Vietnam have been using since the late 1990s.

In Vietnam, Goethe is mainly understood as a cultural figure and politician. Few resources discuss him as a philosopher, although it is acknowledged that "philosophy is the art of living" and that a philosopher is "a disguised master." In some philosophical works, his philosophy is only sketched. Considering the above reasons, we have chosen "The Philosophical Ideas of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Their Significance for Modern Society" as the research topic.

2. Purpose and tasks of research

2.1. Research purposes

The purpose is to understand the philosophical ideas of Goethe and their influence on his era, the process of transformation and social liberation. The aim is to identify their relevance in the process of liberating thinking, fostering innovation and creativity, industrialization, modernization, and the development of knowledge-based economy in Vietnam today.

2.2. Research mission

Based on the research purpose, the thesis carries out four tasks:

- (i) Review and evaluate relevant research on the thesis topic.
- (ii) Analyze the foundation and development of Goethe's philosophy.
- (iii) Analyze the basic content of Goethe's philosophy;
- (iv) Analyze the referential significance of Goethe's philosophy in contemporary society, including Vietnam.

3. Object and scope of research

3.1. Research subjects

The thesis explores the philosophical ideas of Goethe and their significance for modern society.

3.2. *Research scope*

- The thesis studies Goethe's philosophical ideas in selected representative works in the fields of poetry, literature, art, and natural science (see the Overview chapter for a list of works; for abstracts, refer to the Appendix).
- The research focuses on the significance of Goethe's philosophical ideas limited to (i) German society during Goethe's time and the present day, and (ii) contemporary Vietnamese society.

4. *New scientific contributions of the dissertation*

In the context of science increasingly encountering forms of existence that cannot be immediately tested through experimentation, empirical evidence, or intuitive natural laws or social norms, Goethe's philosophy suggests: (i) the ability to combine morphology with science and philosophy, as morphology can deepen and extend thinking beyond mere evidence; (ii) the observation of the external world is insufficient if viewed only from an aesthetic perspective, as aesthetics require researchers to transcend sensory existence to reflect the general existence that is only manifested in morphology; (iii) sensory existence can be seen, read, and touched, but morphology and art reveal a higher form of existence, and the "Urpflanze" (primal plant) is a vivid embodiment of Goethe's daring ideas.

5. *The meaning of the dissertation*

5.1. *Theoretical meaning*

Goethe's ideas emphasize the ultimate role of materialism, which is inherently linked to and synonymous with the selfless and altruistic value. Liberating individual potential, freedom, and equality are the primary and ultimate measures of the dialectical materialist perspective. Any intention to control material forces through willpower is a distortion of the dialectical materialist flow, as Marx's materialism explains.

5.2. *Practical meaning*

The thesis is expected to serve as a reference for Western and German cultural and philosophical researchers, as well as for teaching philosophy and Western philosophy. It also serves as a reference for research on Goethe's philosophy and humanistic philosophy in general.

6. *Research Methods*

6.1. *Theoretical Framework*

The thesis is based on the theoretical framework of Marxism-Leninism, the ideas of Ho Chi Minh, specifically the relationship between social existence and social consciousness, the relative independence of social consciousness, especially the reciprocal influence between different forms of social consciousness, and related studies on the history of philosophy.

6.2. *Research Methodology*

Based on the dialectical materialist and historical materialist methodology, the thesis applies and combines historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, comparative, systematization, abstraction-concretization, textual analysis, and hermeneutics methods, etc.

7. Dissertation structure

In addition to the Introduction, Overview, Conclusion, List of Published Papers, and References, the thesis is divided into four chapters and eleven sections.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH RELATED TO THE DISSERTATIONAL THEME

The overview of research, as mentioned, will be based on the classification of Goethe's works in various fields: (i) poetry-dramatic poetry, (ii) literature-art, and (iii) natural science-philosophy of nature. Selected works will be examined based on typical criteria. For example, the poem "Rosebud in the Heather" conveys the perspective of "artistic character" and deep psychological exploration [75, p. XII]; it also reflects the belief in the "urphänomen" (primal phenomenon) existing everywhere there are beings, and it made Goethe "one of the leading figures of the Storm and Stress movement" [59, p. 484]. The poem also indicates the influence of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), a theorist of the Sturm und Drang (Storm and Stress) movement, on Goethe's romantic thoughts that emphasize individualism and reject the rational aspect [67, p. 8]. Similarly, "The Sorrows of Young Werther," a paradigmatic novel of the Storm and Stress movement, marks Goethe's detachment from the movement [67, p. 20], etc.

Specifically, the thesis will focus on the research of 22 representative works: (i) poetry and drama including "Rosebud in the Heather" (1771), "Götz von Berlichingen of Iron Hand" (1773), "Iphigenia in Tauris" (1787), "Egmont: A Tragedy" (1788), "Torquato Tasso" (1790), and "Faust: A Tragedy" (1808-1832); (ii) literature and art including "On German Architecture" (1770-1772), "Shakespear: A Tribute" (1771), "The Sorrows of Young Werther" (1774), "Italian Journey: Part One" (1786-188), "Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship" (1795-1796), "Winckelmann and His Age" (1805), "On World Literature" (1831); (iii) natural science and philosophy of nature including "On Granite" (1784), "A Study Based on Spinoza" (1784), "The Metamorphosis of Plants" (1790), "Toward a General Comparative Theory" (1790-1794), "The Theory of Color" (1791-1807), "The Experiment as Mediator between Subject and Object" (1792), "Polarity" (1799), "From On Morphology" (1807-1817), "The Influence of Modern Philosophy" (1817), and "Problems" (1823). For summaries or the original texts of these works, refer to the Appendix.

1.1. Overview of Research on Selected Works of Goethe in Poetry and Dramatic Poetry

1.2. Overview of Research on Selected Works of Goethe in Literature and Art

1.3. Overview of Research on Selected Works of Goethe in Natural Science and Philosophy

1.4. Analysis of Research on Goethe's Works and Proposal for Development

1.4.1. Analysis of Research on Goethe's Works

1.4.1.1. Analysis of the Issues Addressed in the Research

In terms of form, many studies appreciate Goethe's exploration of folk art with simple rhythms and structures, emphasizing the "artistic character" that highlights individualism and constructs transformed characters based on real individuals in history.

In terms of content, the studies extensively discuss the issues present in Goethe's works, such as deep psychological exploration, the ability to reveal the inner self through nature, the dual nature of the individual, individual freedom, personal development linked to action, the individual's orientation towards a transcultural civilization, the intermediate connection between natural phenomena, and the issue of the primal plant, etc.

Regarding philosophy, Bell's analyses reveal that many characters in Goethe's literary works bear the influence of Spinoza, such as Egmont with his belief in the uncompromising freedom of will even at the cost of life, Iphigenia with her belief in the impossibility of invoking personal value to trample upon value, and the divine being perceived as an imaginative reflection in the human mind. Some essays view these works as Goethe's critical response to Kant's philosophy regarding the role of science in the world of phenomena and the relationship between ethics and art, etc.

1.4.1.2. Analysis of the Issues Needing Further Research

The studies we examined have not clearly demonstrated the following fundamental issues:

First, they have not shown how Goethe's works in different fields are based on a consistent philosophical concept in two aspects:

First, the unity between spirit and matter: "I have never separated the two domains, and when I philosophize about the universe, I do so unconsciously and naively" [75, p. 984].

Second, Goethe's view of morphology and natural philosophy, as well as the relationship between them.

Second, the materials we referred to have not clarified how Goethe transformed the contrasting methods of empirical science and dialectical reasoning, thereby establishing a new method that penetrates the world of phenomena, understands the essence of nature, and investigates the primal source of existence and the study of the existence of entities as organic entities.

Third, some studies do not recognize Goethe's "general attitude in society." For example, they state, "Goethe's worldview is a materialist worldview. But Goethe's materialism does not stop there."

Fourth, the Vietnamese literature we consulted has not specifically discussed the consistency and steadfastness of Goethe's gentle and inclusive ideas, which ensure the free development for all. Besides, no literature in our reference list discusses the application and inheritance of some of Goethe's ideas in the context of Vietnam today.

1.4.2. Proposed Directions for Development

First, through Goethe's works, the thesis will demonstrate his philosophical intentions through two approaches: (i) the integration of the spiritual and material realms, the inseparability of nature, society, and thought; (ii) the application of morphology to natural philosophy and the relationship between them.

Second, clarify how Goethe aimed to grasp the essence of organic entities by uniting the dialectical materialist methods of natural science's experience and the morphological methods of reasoning. This was a rare endeavor among thinkers at that time. The thesis will investigate how Goethe engaged in contrasting-synthesizing and absorbing processes, along with analysis and interpretation, as he declared: "Throughout my life, whether in poetry or research, I have alternately employed synthesis and analysis, intertwining them as the inhalation and exhalation of the human mind, like a second heartbeat, never separated, constantly oscillating."

Third, illustrate Goethe's "general attitude in society" to demonstrate that he meets the necessary criteria to be called a philosopher in the truest sense.

Fourth, clarify the value of Goethe's gentle and inclusive ideas, not limited to his personal desires and actions, but reflecting the trend with inherent laws in German history. These trends may suggest the possibility of applying and inheriting some of Goethe's ideas in Vietnamese society and contemporary spiritual life, especially the ideas of harmonious and flexible development, social conflict limitation, and environmental preservation.

Finally, develop these directions to demonstrate that Goethe's humanistic ideology, the core of Goethe's philosophy, is a theory similar to characterology. In Goethe's character philosophy, the individual is full of internal emotions, freedom, and resilience. It calls for action, "action is initiation." However, "action" is composed of both good and evil, benevolence and malevolence, rather than being solely "good action" without evil.

CHAPTER 2

CONDITIONS AND DEVELOPMENT OF GOETHE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

2.1. Historical Context, Economic Conditions, and Society in Europe and Germany

2.1.1. Historical Context of Europe and Germany during the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement that encompassed Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries, with global impact. It included a series of rational ideas aimed at happiness, rational sovereignty, sensory evidence as the fundamental source of knowledge, ideal concepts of freedom, progress, tolerance, brotherhood, constitutional government, and the separation of church and state. Emerging from the Renaissance, it resembled an upgraded version that could not completely detach from reality, although it always upheld the banner of reality.

2.1.1.1. Historical Context of Europe during the Enlightenment

The Enlightenment was a dominant intellectual and philosophical movement that influenced Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. It included a range of

rational ideas aimed at happiness, rational sovereignty, sensory evidence as the fundamental source of knowledge, ideal concepts of freedom, progress, tolerance, and brotherhood. It also emphasized constitutional government and the separation of church and state. Evolving from the Humanism of the Renaissance, it appeared as an upgraded version that could not completely detach from reality, despite constantly upholding the banner of reality.

2.1.1.2. Historical Context of Germany during the Enlightenment

Within this general flow, the enlightened absolutist regime of Emperor Joseph II (1741-1790) of the Holy Roman Empire and the German Empire, summarized in the motto "Everything for the people, nothing by the people" [135 2015], committed to the secularization, freedom, and modernization of the monarchy according to the spirit of the Enlightenment. However, the historical records show that all of these endeavors failed. Nevertheless, the failure in Germany did not lead to a bloody revolution like the French Revolution because it managed to learn from the experience: the rejection of violence. Germany absorbed the Enlightenment in terms of social reform and intellectual reform in a peaceful manner. With two distinctive features - rejection of political violence and promoting social change in a flexible manner - the Enlightenment Absolutism in Germany emerged. Historians chose Frederick the Great's essay titled "On the General Principles of Human Relations" (1712-1786), who ruled Prussia from 1740 to 1786, as a milestone of this new trend. It is said that the essay is related to the Enlightenment philosopher Voltaire (1694-1778). When no longer favored in his homeland, Voltaire, who was imprisoned and mistreated by the French court, eagerly accepted Frederick's invitation to the palace. Influenced by Voltaire's Enlightenment ideas, Frederick believed that enlightened absolutism was the only path for societal progress. According to him: "Our main occupation is to combat stupidity and prejudice ... to enlighten the mind, cultivate morals, and make people happy according to what is in their nature and within the means allowed to us" [130, tr.341]. With a passion for the Enlightenment, with ideals derived from Humanism (which seemed somewhat exaggerated), he went as far as satirizing German culture and paying no attention to the progress that the country was undergoing.

2.1.2. Economic and Social Conditions in Germany

2.1.2.1. Economic Conditions

By 1800, Germany had hardly anything suitable for any scale of industrial development. The deep-rooted reasons lie in the progress of political reform and cultural characteristics and religious factors in Germany. Under the significant influence of French modernization after the French Revolution, and more broadly, Enlightenment ideas in politics, from 1790 to 1815, Germany also underwent reforms, including constitutional reforms, in a progressive and regressive manner. According to the ideals of the Enlightenment, the constitution limited feudal power. For example, the constitution controlled the feudal lord's authority over land transactions. On the other hand, even the most progressive enlightened absolutists did not dare to loosen democratic freedoms for the common people. As a result, the constitution did not

forget to include provisions that restricted the communal rights of craftsmen and merchants in cities, the powerful force of the bourgeois class. This vision relates to reducing opportunities for Germany to accelerate the process of industrialization.

However, the limitations of both economic forces, feudal landlords, and emerging businessmen seem reasonable. The lessons of radical Enlightenment reforms in Spain, Portugal, and, especially, Denmark show that haste and utopianism are not possible: reformist forces can be overthrown because the old forces are still too strong, and the material conditions are still fragile. Not to mention that progressive reforms in accordance with the Enlightenment can give birth to a more brutal form of tyranny than medieval feudalism: the first government of the French Revolution is an example. Germany was keen to avoid extremism, to avoid utopia. The constitutional reforms helped the country better control the risks of disruption and monopolies in trade. Consequently, the government enacted new laws, promoted free and fair trade.

In general, by avoiding progressivism and turning economic disadvantages into strong points of reality, in the last years of his life, Goethe witnessed his homeland implementing agricultural reforms, which were disregarded by enthusiastic Enlightenment countries. Prussia, Saxony, and many other states organized the production of sugar beets, turnips, and potatoes, which were highly demanded by neighboring bourgeois countries. This was also a preparatory step for gradually shifting the labor force from rural areas to cities, developing a systematic and cautious industrialization that was more realistic and practical [160, tr.401-427].

In conclusion, Germany advanced faster than the progressive Enlightenment countries in less than a century after the French Revolution. Rejecting violence, they did not belong to the group of colonial pioneers like France, England, the Netherlands, Spain, or Portugal, which caused brutal colonial regimes. By the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, they were on par with England and the United States. Currently, Germany is the fifth-largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) [169], the fourth-largest in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) [73], and the largest among the 27 member states of the European Union [46].

2.1.2.2. Social Conditions

Germany's economic transformation was gradual and solid, largely due to the more stable and open social structure compared to many progressive Enlightenment countries of the same period. As mentioned above, German society in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was primarily based on agriculture, with a majority of the population being farmers. However, the central government gradually abandoned the notion of the king as a divine ruler. This trend allowed a certain degree of freedom to spread to different segments of society involved in production. In rural areas, farmers organized their own associations. They were members of cooperative models that helped manage resources and monitor community life. The right to freedom, of course, was not the same everywhere and at all times. Throughout the territory, especially in the east, farmers still depended on the land. They lived and existed under a form of serfdom where life was permanently tied to a specific piece of land [170].

Another characteristic, which perhaps differentiated Germany from carrying out a revolution similar to that of France, was the extensive network of churches. Besides the landed gentry, there were powerful monastic forces. In Bavaria, the monasteries controlled 56% of the land, and only in 1803 were they forcibly sold to the monarchy according to the ideals of the Enlightenment [137, tr.59]. Most community activities in villages revolved around religion. Regular religious services somewhat mitigated the impact of cold and even cruel rationalist trends on the German people. Religion also contributed to the fact that the country had not yet become a vast material production force, not choked by Enlightenment rationalism, but rather a place that nurtured artistic, philosophical, and humanities ideas, including Goethe's, which flourished and surpassed many contemporary bourgeois countries.

Also, due to the restraining power of religion on production, the positive side of it was the development of Protestant ethics, originating from Germany. The liberation of serfs did not happen too hastily, which meant a reduction in bloodshed.

In summary, the dialectic of German history is progressive, simultaneous, non-reversing, and not hasty. After 1815, many German states imitated the reforms of Prussia, which prevented excessive labor differentiation and, to some extent, avoided deep class conflicts like in France. In contrast to violence, which has deep roots in utopia, Germany during Goethe's time peacefully resolved social conflicts. Although more evidence and deeper evaluations are needed, it can be provisionally concluded that the German bourgeoisie, in their weakness, did not dare to carry out a thorough revolution like the French Revolution. The economic and social characteristics defined German culture and the gentle thinking prevailing in German society during Goethe's time, including Goethe himself.

2.1.3. Influence of Historical, Economic, and Social Conditions on Goethe's Philosophical Thoughts

As mentioned above, the prominent feature throughout the social landscape of Germany, in the context of the European Enlightenment, is perhaps the gentle and harmonious mindset that emphasizes governance, freedom for all, and, above all, tolerance and avoidance of violence. This dominant current had a significant impact on Goethe. The influence of historical, economic, and social conditions on Goethe can be seen in the following aspects:

2.1.3.1. Influence on Gentle and Free Thinking in Practical Activities

2.1.3.2. Influence on Gentle and Free Thinking in Literary Creation

2.2. The Predecessor of Scientific and Philosophical Thoughts

2.2.1. Predecessor of Scientific Thoughts

2.2.1.1. Characteristics of Scientific Thoughts in Goethe's Time

By the time of Goethe, there was an increasing number of professional scientists, which coincided with the rise of empirical science and the essential role of individual researchers. His era heralded the decline of the golden age, the era of encyclopedists, who considered experientialism as the main method of understanding nature. The rise of experimentation led to the division of natural science into two

opposing branches: naturlehre (natural science) and naturgeschichte (natural history). The competition between these two branches was essentially a competition of methodologies, which the golden age had forgotten due to its preoccupation with discovering certain laws while neglecting self-discovery.

2.2.1.2. Characteristics of Scientists Who Influenced Goethe

Goethe emerged as a bright figure in a new context, amidst intense debates between two schools of thought: Linnaeus and Darwin. He was particularly attracted to "Rousseau's approach to nature" [101, tr.31]. He also paid attention to those who fought for scientific individuality, including Buffon and Diderot.

2.2.1.3. Influence of Scientific Thoughts on Goethe's Thinking

The world Goethe entered was a world marked by individuality rather than being enslaved to rationality. Few scientists of the golden age had as broad relationships as he did: "being friends with miners, hunters, foresters, nobles, poets, and intellectuals" [101, tr.31]. They were the people who helped him see that "taste, knowledge, science, and poetry are united in social terms in a cheerful and comfortable way" [101, tr.31]. His path was greatly influenced by three French scientists: Buffon, Rousseau, and Diderot.

Although working in the fields of geology and biology, the two most important sciences that had not yet appeared in the first half of the 19th century, Buffon still influenced Goethe, mainly in terms of using literary and artistic language to convey scientific ideas. In a letter to the literary critic and amateur scientist Johann Merck (1741-1791), Goethe admitted that he learned a lot from Buffon's "Epochs of Nature." He said it was "completely impressive" and "I cannot bear it" when someone called Buffon's book a novel instead of a scientific work. "No one can speak ill of him specifically to me, except him, who can create something greater and more perfect" [126, tr.67].

Goethe was also influenced by Rousseau, who died 11 years before the French Revolution of 1784-1794 erupted in his homeland. In his two Discourses, Rousseau condemned the degenerate society with scientific and artistic progress attributed to human beings. He drew an irreconcilable line between science and humanities. The Enlightenment used Rousseau's ideas to attack the Middle Ages, but they also disliked Rousseau when he criticized the hypocritical moralism called civilization, which was understood as the offspring of the golden age.

2.2.2. Predecessor of Philosophical Thoughts

2.2.2.1. From Ancient Greek Times to Pre-Enlightenment Era

The remarkable progress of natural science and the study of natural history solidified the dominance of rationality and abstraction during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. However, during the golden age, "the perception of creative vitality in nature did not mature." The worship of godless reason, according to Rudolf Steiner, originated from nowhere else but ancient Greece when thinkers of the golden age tried to negate the Middle Ages.

2.2.2.2. *The Enlightenment Period*

The Enlightenment period closely followed the Renaissance, although it was defined as a movement of knowledge and philosophical dominance in the intellectual world of Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries [119]. Despite the progress made during the Golden Age, fundamental questions persisted: whether only individual objects in space and time are the subjects of philosophy, whether new sensations are the only true existence, whether pain arises solely from ideas originating from sensations, and whether these ideas always generate desires and passions, turning people into slaves [163, tr. 28-29].

In Germany, in particular, the intellectual climate during the Golden Age was deeply intertwined with the social contradictions arising from the 30 Years' War [28, tr. 247-255]. However, the economic and social conditions in Germany, distinct from the rest of Europe, determined a different intellectual process in this country. Throughout the slow and contradictory process of recovering from the devastating consequences of the war, the German Enlightenment found a relatively unified voice among the intellectual elite. On one hand, German thinkers agreed with the secular trend and outstanding achievements of the Golden Age. They constructed specific concepts that were systematic and logical in all areas of reality, avoiding ecclesiastical influences. They supported Rationalism, the reformist trend of the Church's moral ethics, and emphasized individual conscience. On the other hand, they almost unanimously avoided the violent measures prevalent during the Renaissance or the overthrowing of social classes as seen in the French Enlightenment. This consistent inclination had a profound impact on Goethe. Despite praising the ideas of the Enlightenment, he criticized the violent tendencies it encouraged in society.

Furthermore, in the German Enlightenment, intellectuals increasingly doubted religion and advocated a materialistic spirit while remaining firmly committed to non-violence. This can be exemplified by the event of Christian Thomasius (1655-1728), a lawyer and philosopher who initiated philosophical reforms and advocated the use of German language instead of Latin in essays. To materialize his ideas, he wrote books on the laws of nature and published a monthly journal praising the Pietistic Lutheran Movement. He mocked the superficial habits of the educated, as reflected in his series of articles in the journal. The Enlightenment even elevated the significance of reason in Germany. Christian Wolff (1679-1754) considered rationality as the fundamental means of evolution, and Gotthold Lessing (1729-1781) believed that philosophy and poetry were irreconcilable, and so on. Despite being carried away by the rational trend, none of them glorified violence, as shown in the following three influential figures that deeply impacted Goethe.

First, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

Second, Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805).

Third, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831).

2.2.2.3. *Influence of Philosophical Thought on Goethe's Ideas*

First, the period from ancient Greece to pre-Enlightenment.

Ancient Greek philosophers laid the foundation for highly abstract concepts, which are the foremost characteristics of philosophy, such as existence, idea, reason, and sentient objects. Goethe is considered a philosopher to some extent because he was interested in the deeply ingrained concepts of ancient Greece. To understand Goethe's philosophy, it is necessary to return to the roots of ancient Greece, starting with Parmenides, who first questioned the relationship between two types of knowledge: pure reason and direct sensory perception. Parmenides' emphasis on rationality, although exaggerated, fascinated many generations, including Goethe, who revered science and used empirical evidence as a measure. Parmenides awakened not only Goethe but also others to the fact that humans differ fundamentally from all other living beings in terms of reasoning, rather than observation, although the latter cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is impossible to understand why Goethe was drawn into the game of reason through exploring the existence of humanity without returning to the roots of ancient Greece, without recognizing Plato's metaphysics that shaped European culture.

Thanks to Plato's conceptual thinking, many philosophers, including Goethe, discovered new laws. For example, in his search for the polar nature of the world, Goethe observed phenomena characterized by "restful" properties – essentially immutable principles and pure products of nature – such as attraction and repulsion, expansion and contraction. Studying the growth laws of all things, Plato's metaphysics helped him transcend the transient expressions of sensations to perceive the balanced state between the highest and lowest aspects of granite, as well as the evolutionary tendency of plants from seeds to flowers, reaching towards the sun.

Second, the Enlightenment period.

We tentatively consider the Enlightenment period as encompassing the entire Humanistic Renaissance period to clarify Goethe's intellectual development rather than intending to divide history. With this understanding, as mentioned earlier, the Enlightenment is understood to include a series of ideas pursuing happiness, the sovereignty of reason, the evidence of the senses as a fundamental source of knowledge, and advanced ideals such as freedom, progress, tolerance, brotherhood, constitutional government, and the separation of Church and state. The first figure that cannot be overlooked at the dawn of the Enlightenment is the materialist philosopher Francis Bacon (he belongs to the Renaissance era according to traditional classification). Bacon's awareness and understanding of the particular in nature deeply troubled Goethe, according to Steiner. While ancient Greek philosopher Plato disregarded the appearance of objects, Bacon in the modern era emphasized and considered them as sources of truth. However, Bacon's method of collecting and selecting particulars and then generalizing them to the entire universe did not convince Goethe.

Third, the German Enlightenment period.

The analysis of Goethe's philosophical ideas and their influence, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters, will further address the impact of philosophical trends on him. In this short section, we will only touch upon the influence of three philosophers

from the same homeland and era as Goethe, as outlined in the previous section: Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. They influenced Goethe in different ways, and he absorbed much from them. For instance, with Kant's Enlightenment spirit, Goethe almost approached the ideal of individual liberation, differing only in methodology. With Schiller, he contemplated the fate of the suffering individuals in the realm of antinomies concerning human existence when Schiller developed ethical idealism. With Hegel, he supported dialectical thinking and synthesized contradictions, but he opposed Hegel's systematization of dialectical concepts, turning dialectics into sophistry.

2.3. The Development of Goethe's Philosophical Ideas

The development of Goethe's philosophy is not clear because almost all of his ideas are hidden within the flow of his literature. It was only in the final years of his life that he wrote a few essays on philosophy, which are considered a culmination of his entire intellectual process. It can be said that wherever Goethe's literature developed, his philosophy flourished. In this approach, we boldly state that Goethe's philosophy took shape from his early poems influenced by Herder, as discussed in the Overview. Therefore, his ideas were formed early on, as partly reflected in his biography (see Appendix). These ideas underwent little change throughout his life, if we disregard the forms and expressions of his works. They are manifested through two main aspects:

2.3.1. The Development of Goethe's Philosophical Worldview

2.3.2. The Development of Goethe's Philosophical Anthropology

Chapter 2 Conclusion

The historical context determined the specific nature of European, German, and subsequently, their impact on Goethe's scientific and philosophical endeavors. In his era, he witnessed many professional scientists who were averse to the rational trend, which aimed to conquer nature through pure reason and omniscience. Experimental science rose to prominence, replacing empirical knowledge as the primary method of understanding nature, leading to the rise of individual experimenters. The problem lies in the fact that the individual psyche not only dominated natural science through its experiential position but also influenced natural history. Prominent in this new trend were figures such as Buffon and Rousseau, who influenced Goethe in terms of the personalization of scientific language, the individualization of knowledge, and, most importantly, vigilance against cold rationality.

Overall, Europe during the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods was heavily influenced by the dominance of rational philosophy rooted in ancient Greece, especially Plato's theory of ideas, reaching its culmination in the idealism of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. The Renaissance and Enlightenment were not exempt from the overwhelming influence of rationality, which deepened the polarization between the processes of rational and empirical thinking. The extreme tendencies prevailing during this period caused Goethe to question and provide answers for the new age based on the suggestions of Diderot, Rousseau, Kant, and Schiller. The age that placed the individual at its center had also emerged. History is always a stream for

individual creativity after hundreds of years of confident exaggeration, breaking free from the shackles of the Middle Ages, propelling science and production like a storm, but forgetting the ultimate goal: production for whom, science for what. History itself eliminates repetition and imitation. Goethe was among the few who matured through a rigorous selection process but remained full of humanity.

CHAPTER 3

KEY CONTENT OF GOETHE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS

3.1. The Nature, Object, Task, and Characteristics of Goethe's Philosophy

3.1.1. The Nature of Goethe's Philosophy

The nature of philosophy, in the broad sense according to Goethe's perspective, can be understood as the overall knowledge encompassing various fields. In the narrow sense, it is the morphology as the foundation of his worldview. Considering Goethe's philosophy as morphology is because he does not hide his ambition to explore issues related to existence in general, the main object of study in morphology, in every field of interest. He seeks the meaning of existence, examines the existential issues present in the world, and then tries to grasp the unity of objects. Instead of relying solely on pure observation, Goethe seeks and processes morphology through dialectics. The famous concept of *Urpflanze* (primordial plant) is a morphological creation that, in the 21st century, molecular biology has empirically proven and applied to find general models beyond the scope of biology. Therefore, Goethe's concept of the nature of philosophy seems to continue the widespread trend in the history of philosophy since ancient Greece, which considered philosophy as the overall knowledge of the divine, nature, and human.

3.1.2. The Object of Goethe's Philosophy

If the nature of Goethe's philosophy in the broad sense is the overall knowledge, then his philosophical object probably does not deviate from the prevailing trend of that time: morphology, a field that was absolutely excluded during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. Moreover, his philosophical object still does not escape the traditional trinity of the divine, nature, and human. These three elements also constitute the narrow sense of Goethe's philosophy as mentioned above.

3.1.3. The Task of Goethe's Philosophy

Based on the understanding of the nature and object of philosophy, Goethe seems to view the task of philosophy as a grand adjustment of how one perceives and interacts with the world, so as to escape contemporary trends and extremist worship. In this direction, the overall task includes (i) reconstructing methodological principles based on combining experience with dialectics, (ii) elevating the position of the individual to live in harmony with nature, and (iii) placing the free and non-violent individual at the center of the perceived world.

3.1.4. The Characteristics of Goethe's Philosophy

Although there may be similarities with many philosophers in terms of the nature (the comprehensive knowledge of all sciences, morphology) and the object (divine,

nature, and human), Goethe's philosophy still has distinct characteristics, manifested in three aspects: (i) philosophical ideas arise from fields outside of philosophy, often preceding mainstream thoughts, (ii) the completion of philosophical concepts based on experiences from fields outside of philosophy, and (iii) the convergence of diverse knowledge ultimately towards one point: humanity - the worldview foundation for each individual to find freedom in harmonious relationships.

3.1.4.1. Philosophy and Experiences Outside of Philosophy

3.1.4.2. Knowledge and Humanity

3.2. The Ontology of Goethe's Philosophy

3.2.1. Concept of the Divine

Goethe agrees with Spinoza's concept of the divine and sees him as an atheist. In a conversation with Jacobi, he writes: "I am closely associated with the reverence for the God of the atheists (Spinoza)." He considers the divine as nature and nature as the embodiment of the divine; the divine as the different expression of the infinite. However, his exploration of the infinite differs from Spinoza. According to Goethe, the infinite is the process of infinite consciousness of existence and the entirety, with both entities being the same in terms of ontology: "The concept of existence and the entirety is one and the same; when pursuing the concept in great detail, we say that we are conceiving the infinite."

3.2.2. Concept of Nature

3.2.2.1. Existence of Objects

According to Goethe, nature is the embodiment of the finite. Consistent with Spinoza's perspective, Goethe sees the finite within the infinite. However, as mentioned above, the finite does not participate in constituting the infinite. Furthermore, he does not view the infinite (*natura naturans*) as pre-existing and determining the finite (*natura naturata*) as subsequent existence. The infinite and finite coexist. Nature includes both.

Objects in nature can only exist based on the existence of other objects, and vice versa. The existence of objects is interconnected because, by nature, they all participate in the infinite: "Thus, it seems that objects are created by other objects."

3.2.2.2. Interaction of Objects and Motion

Do objects remain stationary or in motion? If in motion, how do they move without the intervention of the divine? According to Goethe, objects are always in motion, and the origin of motion lies in the interaction, the mutual influence between objects. Interaction is necessary because all finite entities participate in the infinite, making no finite entity isolated from the remaining finite entities. Through interaction, motion causes objects to develop, transforming from one form to another. This mechanism also explains how motion is an inherent attribute. The process is infinite, with no starting or ending points. Motion creates the impression that one object can generate another object and vice versa. It appears as both the cause of something different and the cause of itself, making it something different: "... but it is not so - instead, existing life creates another cause to exist and makes it present in a certain state."

3.2.3. Concept of Human from an Ontological Perspective

Goethe believes that each person possesses both spiritual and material attributes. They

are not separate but do not merge into each other. The synthesis of these two organic components manifests when a conscious individual exists in the world. According to Goethe, knowledge cannot arise without simultaneously awakening the two attributes of the subject. The result of this process is the presence of objects within the subject, entities that possess both attributes: "Only when their spiritual and material bodies place themselves before the phenomena, then they manifest their inner existence." This viewpoint is closely related to dialectical materialism, which "emphasizes the close bond between humans and the natural world." Notably, humans are not passive individuals in relation to the divine and nature, as will be further evident in the following subsection. Instead, they are specific entities capable of determining their own destinies. Goethe's ontological perspective on human beings lacks absolute freedom. Human existence is dependent on other existences.

3.3. Epistemology of Goethe's Philosophy

Goethe begins the theory of knowledge from natural observation, in line with the prevailing view of the Golden Age. However, it is not limited to that. In "On Granite" (1784), he "departed from the ordinary field of observation" driven by the captivating mysteries of nature. Confronted with "the majestic silence surrounding us when we stand alone and still in nature, vast and solemn with its subtle sounds," he declares, "I have endured and continued to endure much pain due to the inconsistency in people's viewpoints, due to sudden changes in myself and others." This is essentially the declaration of the individual self against the inevitable, distinct from the thoughts of the Golden Age. It establishes the position of the individual, pervading the theory of natural cognition and the theory of the individual's cognition of nature through existence.

3.3.1. Naturalism in Epistemology

3.3.1.1. The Concept of Nature from the Perspective of Cognition

Naturalism, in this dissertation, is understood as natural philosophy. It will analyze Goethe's reasoning on the existential issues of nature associated with ideas and human existence. He studies the essence of nature with three components within the framework of nature, from which he presents a general concept of nature and the relationship between humans and nature. This concept seems to be absent in any other thinkers of the Golden Age.

3.3.1.2. Characteristics of Natural Cognition

According to Goethe's perspective, knowledge of the natural world is the result of cognitive processes as morphology, rather than a systematic approach. It is knowledge of the infinite achieved through exploring the infinite states of the finite in nature.

In summary, while naturalism advocates for discrete parts and instrumental measurements, Goethe perceives the movements of objects - their formation, development, and decay - as nonlinear and bidirectional. Motion is the movement of

the infinite, and the mind can grasp it through the finite manifestations. Growth in motion is captured by the mind through ideas and objects. The movements of these primordial elements occur only in the presence of human existence, the intervention of the subjective. Therefore, Goethe's epistemology bears the mark of subjective idealism but differs from George Berkeley (1685-1753) or David Hume (1711-1776).

3.3.2. Individualism in Epistemology

Connected with naturalism is individualism. We consider it as a constitutive part of the issue of cognition in Goethe's philosophy because his fundamental arguments in natural cognition, essentially, hold true when he discusses the individual. Based on his ontological perspective, individual cognition is the cognition of nature through the existence of the individual and vice versa. Therefore, in addition to adhering to the widely recognized content of individualism (ethical stance, political philosophy, ideological system, and social perspective emphasizing the intrinsic value of the individual [168, p.6]), this subsection will expand its content. That is, based on Goethe's understanding of the individual issue, we will analyze his concept of the individual in the relationship between human existence and nature, constituted by sentient objects, ideas, and human existence. With that in mind, the first subsection will discuss "subjective idealism" as further evidence of its difference from the thoughts of the Golden Age.

3.3.2.1. Subjective Idealism in Epistemology

3.3.2.2. Freedom in Epistemology

3.4. Structure of Goethe's Philosophical Thought

This dissertation analyzes the structure of Goethe's philosophy into two major areas: 1) natural philosophy and 2) morphology and aesthetic philosophy.

3.4.1. Natural Philosophy

3.4.2. Morphology and Aesthetic Philosophy

3.4.2.1. Morphology

3.4.2.2. Aesthetics

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 2 borrows the concept of general attitude in society from Wilhelm Dilthey to develop the philosophical study of Goethe. In this chapter, the general attitude is understood in a broad sense as the overall attitude of harmony in creation, research, and practical activities. In a narrow sense, it reflects Goethe's attitude towards human existence in relation to nature and society, where individuals are guaranteed basic rights of freedom, harmony with all existing entities, and are not subjected to violence. In order to reveal Goethe's general attitude in the context of the general attitude of the history of philosophy, the content of Goethe's philosophy has been presented systematically in a conventional understanding. Although Goethe did not explicitly develop it, an attempt has been made to depict his philosophical ideas in traditional sequences, from essence, object, task, characteristics, to issues of ontology and epistemology, and even the structure of philosophy. The entire general attitude is based on Goethe's materials. Furthermore, it can only be proven that he is a

philosopher to the extent that his ideas contain all the fundamental elements of theory and the history of philosophy.

Chapter 2 also develops the structure of Goethe's philosophy, emphasizing its systematic nature, even though he never explicitly discussed the system. The structure consists of the philosophy of nature (theories of polarity, morphology, and color) and the concept of the humanistic duality of human existence in relation to nature and society, including aesthetics.

CHAPTER 4

THE MEANING OF GOETHE'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS

4.1. The significance of Goethe's philosophical ideas in the history of philosophy

Goethe's 22 works, which were directly studied in the thesis, are full of progressive philosophical ideas not only in his time. His contributions to the history of philosophy are reflected in four fundamental aspects: (i) the anti-theological ideas against Dogmatic Christianity, against feudalism, against dogmatic education, and against national divisions; (ii) the materialistic ideas about the origin of the world and dialectics of development and action; (iii) the ideas about the capacity of understanding the world; (iv) and the realistic ideas about aesthetics. Specifically:

4.1.1. Anti-theological ideas against Christian theology -feudalism, and anti-dogmatic ideology

4.1.1.1. Anti-theological ideas against Dogmatic Christianity

Prominent significance in Goethe's philosophy is found in his anti-theological ideas against Dogmatic Christianity, against feudalism, and against dogmatic education. However, it may be forced to claim that he opposed feudalism as the approach of some scholars. Goethe opposed the concept of divine providence, denying God as an all-powerful creator and instead questioning religious beliefs based on calling for a flexible materialistic spirit. However, there is no evidence to suggest that he rejected the dialectical ideas of theological feudalism. Of course, when denying Dogmatic Christianity, feudalism, and dogmatic education, it is difficult to avoid criticism.

4.1.1.2. Anti-feudalism ideas

Goethe opposed feudalism moderately rather than fiercely, as some references have mentioned, which is also the approach of the German state. During the Enlightenment era, the prevailing feudalism was limited by enacting constitutional reforms that restricted feudal powers, such as controlling lords when buying and selling public lands, and that was it. Goethe also referred to the old regime model of feudalism in France when applying the strict model of the Enlightenment to the governance of the Weimar court.

4.1.1.3. Anti-dogmatic education ideas

Goethe moderately opposed dogmatic education but was enthusiastic about rejecting unproven arguments that were considered absolute truths. He opposed accepting any blind arguments, similar to how believers absorb absolute doctrines. In carrying out this task, he did something extraordinary: he elevated human existence and placed it at the center of the ontological discourse on the constituent parts of the world as well as the process of understanding the world. Human existence, in that position, rejects all arguments without criticism, without considering the conditions of application, and without leaving room for doubt.

4.1.2. Materialistic ideas about the origin of the world and dialectics of action

4.1.2.1. Materialistic ideas about the origin of the world

In Chapter 2, the ontological section analyzed Goethe's concept that the world is composed of three origins: matter, idea, and human existence, and this concept has a materialistic tendency. With the infinite world that limited intellect cannot comprehend, he firmly believed that it is a world of matter not created by anyone. With the finite world, its boundaries are expanded by the infinite depth of thought into the limited world, which is the manifestation of the infinite natural world. However, to elevate the role of the individual, he placed human existence in the central position of the process of understanding. This does not mean that he denies the decisive role of matter, although the three terms, God-nature-human, are formed from a metaphysical standpoint. They are the true and immutable triad, one does not dissolve the other. The metaphysical God seems to help clarify the role of the subject. Therefore, the argument about God is an argument about the interaction between reflection and being reflected.

4.1.2.2. Dialectical ideas about action

The concept of action as the cause and result of development becomes a recurring theme in Goethe's philosophy, not only in nature but also in society. In terms of society, Goethe's play "Goetz von Berlichingen with the Iron Hand" (1779) is seen as a typical representation of historical movement, as it serves as both the cause and result of the transition from the old society to the new society. As demonstrated in previous chapters, the play is based on the real events of Emperor Maximilian I (1459-1519) during the transitional period from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. During this transitional period, the first difference is that he was not anointed king by the Pope, as he was besieged by the people of Venice and prevented from reaching Rome, the capital of the Catholic Church. He performed an action that marked the emergence of a new era. Breaking the chains, he proclaimed himself emperor and secured (the court) his rule. The thousand-year tradition of coronation under the auspices of the Pope was shattered. Historians view him as both the "Last Knight" of the Middle Ages and as a representative of the new, dialectical era that transcended the linear trajectory of the old under the Renaissance. The reality of the golden age may become more apparent when examining him as a typical figure of that time.

4.1.3. Ideas about the capacity of understanding the world

From Chapter 2, below, we present the significance of Goethe's philosophy in fostering the perception of the capacity to understand the world through two approaches: (i) considering the subject as human existence, the center of the perceived constituent parts of the world, and (ii) considering the finite nature as expanded infinitely by the infinite depth of thought into the limited world, which is the perceived manifestation of the infinite natural world.

4.1.3.1. Ideas about the capacity of understanding the world through the concept of human existence

4.1.3.2. Ideas about the capacity of understanding the world through the concept of nature

4.1.4. Realistic ideas about aesthetics

Marxist-Leninist aesthetics study the aesthetic relationship between humans and reality, viewing "beauty as the center, and art as the pinnacle of that relationship." According to Baumgarten, who proposed a revolutionary approach to aesthetics that was more radical than Goethe at the age of 35, aesthetics or the science of aesthetics is the process of deducing the laws or rules of natural beauty or artistic beauty from individual tastes, based on feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, rather than based on pure knowledge. On the other hand, Goethe emphasized the realism in deducing natural beauty or artistic beauty from individual tastes, including both the aspects of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. This is his outstanding contribution to aesthetics.

4.1.4.1. Art as the pinnacle of the worldview

4.1.4.2. Art as the highest expression of the subject-object relationship

4.2. The significance of Goethe's philosophical ideas for modern society

4.2.1. The significance of Goethe's philosophical ideas in contemporary society in general

Marcel Proust (1871–1922) chose Goethe as "the greatest intelligence that ever existed"; his achievements led philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) to call him the "entire cultural foundation." Even conservative critics acknowledge Goethe's spirit of individual freedom, despite criticizing his expressive forms as "shabby acting." King Frederick II of Prussia criticized the play "Goetz von Berlichingen" as "imitating the terrible plays of the English," but he did not question Goethe's call for liberating individuals from the prevailing constraints, the prevailing stagnation during the Golden Age.

The latest studies also recognize his influence on German society. According to Jeremy Adler in his work "Goethe" published in 2020, even "German politics looks to Goethe." The first successful democratic republic in Germany, the Weimar Republic, emerged in Weimar after World War I on August 11, 1919. The city was chosen mainly due to political considerations, but also perhaps to honor Goethe and Schiller, knowing that Goethe was closely associated with the ideas of the republic. Renowned intellectuals such as Wolfgang Frommel (1902–1986), Ernst Robert Curtius (1886–1956), and Thomas Mann (1875–1955) all referenced him in the struggle against Fascism.

Many acknowledge that he helped the Weimar court implement some reforms, including the transition from feudal to bourgeois governance without social upheaval. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Weimar Constitution on August 11, 1932 (before the 100th anniversary of Goethe's death), journalist Werner Thormann (1894–1947) recalled Goethe's ideas that inspired the drafting of the Weimar Constitution. While it was believed that Nazi Germany made little use of Goethe, the Third Reich attempted to distort his perspectives on a large scale. After World War II, leading intellectuals such as philosopher Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), classicist Wolfgang Schadewaldt (1900–1974), and politician Carlo Schmid (1896–1974) rejected this distortion. They sought to implement his beliefs – freedom and self-education, tolerance, and sociality. Jeremy Adler even sees Goethe's humanistic ideas as a religion, calling it "humanistic religion" in an article on the significance of Goethe's concept of humanism with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Basic Law of Germany: "His humanistic religion has contributed to shaping a positive direction for Germany's new entity, especially by helping to establish the Basic Law of Germany."

4.2.2. The significance of Goethe's philosophical ideas in contemporary Vietnamese society

According to the Political Report at the 13th National Party Congress (January 26 - February 2, 2021), the world is undergoing significant, fast-paced, complex, and unpredictable changes: "Developing countries, especially small countries, face many new difficulties and challenges." In Vietnam, after 35 years of renewal, "many theoretical and practical issues need to be focused on." The economy stands out among them, with "sustainable development, many limitations, and weaknesses."

Applying Goethe's ideas to the current social situation in Vietnam is necessary, especially as we "still have limited access to the world's cultural essence" and urgently need to "perceive and address major relationships, reflect dialectical laws." This cannot be satisfied with the existing knowledge as our country deepens its integration. In the next five years, "Vietnam's international integration will deepen and expand, and we must fully and effectively implement commitments when participating in new-generation free trade agreements." In a time when hardly anyone "can doubt the contribution of Goethe's humanistic ideas to contemporary free societies," referencing Goethe's ideas becomes even more meaningful, considering that most of the trade agreements Vietnam participates in take place in the geopolitical environment of Europe and America, where he is among the brightest cultural stars.

So, which ideas of Goethe can be referenced and applied?

First, the ideas of freedom, harmony, and flexibility: freedom to unleash the individual capabilities of each person to explore nature in a harmonious mindset, intentionally limiting damage to nature, and being economically and politically neutral.

Second, trust in the power of culture and art, which is another expression of material power, boldly using them to address socioeconomic issues rather than confining them to purely spiritual realms. The material value of art in Goethe's view

is not only about theoretical aspects. Goethe's philosophy, ultimately, is a philosophy of art, a cognitive art. The intellectual value of Goethe's philosophy from an artistic perspective, from a moral perspective on the material world, does not just comply with laws but is also connected to humanity, humaneness. The material value of art in Goethe's view also takes tangible form: contributing to the formation of individuals who have worth for themselves and others. If we acknowledge that "the talent, intelligence, and qualities of the Vietnamese people are the most important center, goal, and motivation for the country's development," and emphasize "investment in cultural development" and urgently implement development with a focus on "cultural industry and cultural service sector" [10, p. 145], it seems insufficient if we do not want to trivialize culture. The economicization of culture must necessarily go hand in hand, even prioritizing the strategic absorption of non-material human excellence, the spiritual expression of materiality, which Goethe's ideas exemplify.

The general title of the Political Report for the first time includes the phrase "arousing the aspirations for national development." The report states that "the comprehensive development of the Vietnamese people is gradually becoming the center of the country's economic-social development strategy" [10, p. 57], in a context where "fundamental changes in the growth model have not been achieved; productivity, quality, efficiency, and competitiveness of the economy are not yet high" [10, p. 80], a context that draws lessons from "people as the center" [10, p. 96], and for the first time adds the phrase "human development" [10, p. 136] to the title discussing education, training, and improving the quality of human resources. To realize the above direction, it would be beneficial to encourage individuals to take a little time to explore Goethe's ideas of freedom, harmony, and flexibility, to understand why Goethe's views were honored twice in German political history in the first half of the 20th century: first, "Goethe's name was cited in 1919 when the Weimar Republic Constitution was approved, and the first president was elected"; second, his name "was mentioned again in 1949 when both East and West Germany were established during the Cold War and both showed his heritage on their side of the Iron Curtain" [74, p. 131]. In a context of "globalization and the transformation of global culture, isolationism has become a thing of the past... nations are aware of this reality and are actively integrating into the common flow of history like humanity," where "Vietnam is no exception" [24, p. 57]. This can be said when considering the acceptance and transformation of Goethe's ideas.

Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter mainly clarifies the significance of Goethe's philosophical ideas in the history of philosophy, alongside pointing out their significance in contemporary society. In terms of the history of philosophy, we analyze Goethe's contributions from four fundamental aspects: (i) his anti-idealist, anti-feudal, anti-dogmatic, and anti-nationalistic ideas; (ii) his materialist ideas about the origin of the world and the

dialectics of development and action; (iii) his ideas about the ability to perceive the world; and (iv) his realistic ideas about aesthetics.

In the context of contemporary society, including Vietnam, Goethe's ideas of freedom, harmony, and flexibility, as well as his belief in the power of cultural art, have greater relevance than ever before.

CONCLUSION

From the research on Goethe's 22 works, this thesis has explored his philosophical intentions through two approaches: (i) the integration of spiritual and material entities when considering nature, society, and thought, and (ii) the application of morphology and natural philosophy to establish relationships between them. The thesis initially demonstrates how Goethe aimed to grasp the essence of things as a system, based on the unified concept of two methods: the experience of science and the morphology of reasoning, which were rarely pursued by contemporary thinkers. From there, the thesis examines how Goethe developed processes of contradiction and synthesis, analysis and interpretation, etc., by combining morphology with natural science. The notable products he created include the *urphänomen* (primal phenomenon) or *urpflanze* (primal plant). These concepts are present everywhere, in works on botany, light, poetry, literature, and art. The entire process is illuminated by his "general attitude in society." This attitude leads to and results from his gentle and free-thinking, which embraces the desires and actions of individuals. This attitude is not contradictory to the laws of German history and suggests the potential for application and inheritance in contemporary social and spiritual contexts. In Vietnam, his ideas of harmony, flexibility, social conflict resolution, and the preservation of nature are truly worth considering. To accomplish all of these contents, we have:

First, analyzed the conditions for the emergence and development of Goethe's philosophical ideas. The 17th and 18th centuries in Europe and Germany were the era of the dominant historical stream, the Age of Enlightenment. The positive aspects of the Enlightenment were reflected in a series of ideas pursuing happiness, rational sovereignty, sensory evidence as the fundamental source of knowledge, ideals of freedom, progress, tolerance, and brotherhood, constitutional government, and the separation of church and state. The Enlightenment inspired the French Revolution but left significant consequences in the final years of the first bourgeois republic. In Germany, the Enlightenment was allergic to violence and was applied in a series of peaceful reformations in thought and society. The tendency to avoid violence is evident in Kant's essay when it directly confronts the Enlightenment. The essay made a national impact and, of course, had a strong influence on Goethe. By 1800, German society had little suitable for any scale of industrial development. Nevertheless, the limitations of both economic forces, feudal landlords, and emerging businessmen seemed reasonable, stemming from the lessons of radical reform in neighboring

countries under the Enlightenment. Transforming the disadvantages of feudal economy into strengths, in the final years of Goethe's life, his homeland witnessed agricultural reforms, which were underestimated by the industrialized countries that went before. Germany advanced faster than any other European country in less than a century after the French Revolution. Furthermore, the German economy had a solid breakthrough, largely due to its relatively stable and open social structure compared to many earlier capitalist countries, etc. Overall, the European and German Enlightenment laid the foundation for Goethe's ideas of gentleness, respect for individuality, and, most importantly, tolerance, avoiding violence. His ideas were so timely that German political history never forgets him (and Schiller) when reviewing the history of the Weimar Republic, the first democratic regime in Germany.

Second, based on the above premises, the thesis has developed Goethe's general attitude in society, relying on the available materials of his own but still containing essential elements of philosophical thinking or theories. Through various statements in different ways, or more accurately, in his own way, he seems to conceive the essence of philosophy as the totality of knowledge (in the broadest sense), the fields of spiritual life and material activities, or morphology (in the narrower sense). Morphology is also the object of his philosophical thinking. The typical product of morphology, the *urpflanze* (primal plant), is deployed by him in every scientific, artistic, and philosophical research. From the concept of the essence and object of philosophy, he proceeds to construct the essential concept of a world that is perceived and constituted by three elements: God, the natural realm, and human existence.

Recent studies in Vietnam not only acknowledge that "Goethe holds an important position in the history of German philosophy and culture" [8, p. 365], but also consider him "one of the spiritual masters of humanity" [12, p. 123]. Therefore, we boldly propose to select three pioneering thinkers who promote Western conceptual thinking in chronological order: Plato, Kant, and Goethe. They seem to form a complete triad: Plato raises the main proposition through the idea of the form to answer the question of what true knowledge is and how knowledge becomes valuable to the subject; Kant raises the counter-proposition by questioning what conditions can determine an idea as true knowledge for the subject; and Goethe achieves the synthesis by proposing the role of human existence in the world of ideas, which originates from nature, as the basis for seeking true knowledge.

LIST OF THE PUBLISHED SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES BY DISSERTATION'S AUTHOR RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION'S TOPIC

1. Dang Thi Mai (2021), "The Abyss between Goethe's Philosophical Thought and the Cult-of-Spirit and the Cult-of-Evidence", *Journal of Political Theory and Communication*, Thematic Issue, No. 3-2021, pp. 33-36.
2. Dang Thi Mai (2021), "Goethe's Philosophical Thought on the Primordial Plant", *Journal of Political Theory and Communication*, Thematic Issue, No. 4-2021, pp. 98-101.
3. Dang Thi Mai (2022), "Enlightenment Authoritarianism in Europe in the 17th-18th Century", *Journal of Political Theory and Communication*, Thematic Issue, No. 1-2022, pp. 114-117.
4. Dang Thi Mai (2022), "Basic Features of Goethe's Philosophy", *Journal of Political Theory and Communication*, Thematic Issue, No. 2 (10-2022), pp. 81-84
5. Dang Thi Mai (2022), "Johann Wolfgang Goethe's Politico-Social View", *Philosophy magazine*, Volume 11(378), November 2022, p 91-99