

COSMOS

A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe



**By Alexander
Von Humboldt**

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A Sketch of a Physical Description of the Universe, Vol. 1

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October 30, 2024



THE colors are now: light blue above (where is my cyanometer? Sausure invented one, and Humboldt used it in his travels); landscape russet and greenish, spotted with fawn-colored plowed lands, with green pine and gray or reddish oak woods intermixed, and dark-blue or slate-colored water here and there. It is greenest in the meadows and where water has lately stood, and a strong, invigorating scent comes up from the fresh meadows. It is like the greenness of an apple faintly or dimly appearing through the russet.

— Henry David Thoreau in his *Journal*, May 1, 1853

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Reflections on the different degrees of enjoyment presented to us by the aspect of nature and the study of her laws.



IN attempting, after a long absence from my native country, to develop the physical phenomena of the globe, and the simultaneous action of the forces that pervade the regions of space, I experience a twofold cause of anxiety. The subject before me is so inexhaustible and so varied, that I fear either to fall into the superficiality of the encyclopedist, or to weary the mind of my reader by aphorisms consisting of mere generalities clothed in dry and dogmatical forms. Undue conciseness often checks the flow of expression, while