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The Cardinal Importance of Names

Aleister Crowley and the Creation of a Tarot for the New Aeon

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Abstract

Aleister Crowley's *The Book of Thoth* makes four substantive changes to the traditional titles of the tarot trumps. Three of these relate to the cardinal virtues which had remained in the deck despite the almost complete esoteric revisioning of the tarot that had taken place over the preceding two centuries; the fourth is an integral part of the same topic. This article focuses on why Crowley felt impelled to make these changes as well as the significance of the new names (and associated iconography). The discussion centres around Crowley's rejection of the cardinal virtues that underly Christian ethics in favour of the new system of morality laid out in *The Book of the Law* and subsequently encapsulated in Thelema. Consequently, the article first examines the development of the cardinal virtues in patristic and medieval theology and then shows how Crowley sought to overturn these values in his agenda of cultural reprogramming of which *The Book of Thoth* arguably constitutes the high-water mark.

Keywords

Aleister Crowley – Thelema – *The Book of Thoth* – New Aeon – tarot – cardinal virtues

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I do not find the names of the Cards in the Index you have sent at all illuminating in fact it took me hours to sort which was which. They are much too flamboyant, & I prefer the old names don't you [?].

FRIEDA HARRIS to Aleister Crowley, letter dated Monday, Sep 18th [1939].¹

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1 What's in a Name?

Aleister Crowley's *The Book of Thoth* makes a number of significant changes to the traditional titles of the tarot trumps.² In this article I focus on why Crowley felt impelled to make these changes as well as the significance of the new names he gave to those cards. I also briefly touch on the iconographical treatment of the cards in question, showing how this constitutes a change equally as radical as those made to the nomenclature.³

A simple comparison of the titles of the trumps as they appear in previous tarot decks—both esoteric and non-esoteric—with those which appear in *The Book of Thoth* reveals that where Crowley differs substantively from both tradi-

¹ Crowley correspondence (archival).

² Crowley also renamed numerous of the other (i.e. non-trump) cards. However, this article focuses only upon the re-naming of certain trumps, not least due to the fact that the practice of giving titles to the smaller cards was a comparatively recent development, having its origin in Mathers' instructional material for members of the Golden Dawn. With regard to this innovation, Mathers was most likely influenced by Paul Christian's astrological approach to interpreting the smaller cards—see Decker and Dummett, *A History*, 98–99.

³ The discussion is limited to the symbolism of the cards, rather than their formal properties, though the two are intimately connected, particularly with regard to the colour scheme. To cite but one example, the various shades of green and blue of the card titled "Adjustment" reflect the colours attributed to path 22 in Crowley's 777, the path on the Tree of Life to which the tarot card is attributed—see Crowley, *777 Revised*, columns XV–XVIII in Crowley, *777*, 4 & 7. Additionally, as first highlighted by Hoffmann, 'Projektive synthetische Geometrie', Harris' card designs were significantly influenced by projective geometry. For a discussion of this subject and its role in the creation of the Thoth tarot see Kaczynski, 'Projective Geometry', 314–332. Kaczynski's observation that the 'union of the infinite circumference (Nuit) with the centre point (Hadi)' echoes the 'duality (or polarity) principle of projective geometry' (ibid., 322) suggests that projective geometry was peculiarly suited as a formal means of illustrating Crowley's religio-magical philosophy.

tional decks and esoteric precursors is in the naming of tarot trumps VIII, XI, XIV, and XX.⁴ It is no coincidence that the traditional titles of the first three of these are derived from the cardinal virtues, with that of the fourth implicitly part of the same debate.⁵

In elucidating the reasoning behind Crowley's name changes, I examine the origins of the traditional titles of the cards in question. Since the earliest evidence of the tarot dates to around the early to mid-fifteenth century, I necessarily consider ideas rooted in medieval moral philosophy which influenced the creation of the first tarot decks that emerged in Italy during the early Renaissance.⁶

It should be noted at the outset that Crowley placed great emphasis on etymological research. In a letter that appears in the introduction to Crowley's (posthumously published) epistolary work, *Magick Without Tears*, he advises his pupil of the importance of conducting her own research into the origin and meaning of words:

Indeed, I want you to go even further; make sure of what is meant by even the simplest words. Trace the history of the word with the help of Skeat's *Etymological Dictionary*. E.g. *pretty* means 'tricky', 'deceitful'; on the other

4 In Crowley's deck, the trumps VIII and XI are transposed. In this paper I follow Crowley's order of the trumps. Differences in naming such as "Fortune" in Crowley's deck vs "Wheel of Fortune" in the Waite-Colman Smith deck are not deemed substantive for the purpose of this article. Likewise, Crowley's title "The Magus" vs "The Magician" in the Golden Dawn (and Waite-Colman Smith) is deemed sufficiently similar in terms of nomenclature not to require separate discussion.

5 The fourth virtue, Prudence, does not appear in the standard tarot deck comprising 78 cards, of which 22 are trumps (though it does appear in the non-standard Florentine deck of 97 cards known as "Minchiate" and Dummett speculates it was originally present in the non-standard "Visconti di Modrone" pack). On this point, like so many others, scholarly opinion and esoteric tradition part ways; the former claims that Prudence was never present in the traditional standard deck, the latter that it was, but has metamorphosed over time into a different trump (Dummett (with Mann), *The Game of Tarot*, 388, 104, 118). Crowley follows esoteric tradition, believing like Éliphas Lévi that Prudence had been transformed into the trump titled "The Hermit" (Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 488). There was clearly no need to re-name this card in the interest of purging his deck of "Old Aeon" concepts, Hermits being favourably mentioned in *The Book of the Law* cf. 11:24. Moakley's suggestion (Moakley, *The Tarot Cards*, 14–15) that the four suits were inspired by the four cardinal virtues, with Prudence represented by the suit of coins, must be dismissed, as the suits derive from the ordinary playing cards originating in the Islamic world—see Decker, Depaulis & Dummett, *A Wicked Pack*, 29–30 and Farley, *A Cultural History*, 12–18.

6 See Decker and Dummett, *A History*, Forward; and Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack*, 25, 27.

hand, *hussy* is only 'housewife' ... This will soon give you the power of discerning instantly when words are being used to hide meaning or lack of it.⁷

For someone so sensitive to the meaning and usage of words, the act of re-naming is one that would not have been undertaken lightly.

Crowley's perception of the cultural history of the tarot is firmly rooted in the occult tradition—i.e., the perennialist notions espoused by eighteenth and nineteenth-century occultists such as Court de Gébelin, Etteilla, Éliphas Lévi, Papus, MacGregor Mathers and A.E. Waite concerning the origins of the tarot. For occultists such as these, the tarot was a depository of esoteric knowledge, coeval with the Pharaohs and containing the secret wisdom of ancient Egypt. Crowley's adherence to this theory is nowhere better exemplified than in the sub-title of *The Book of Thoth*, i.e.: *A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians*.

However, it is clear that the genesis of the tarot lies in fifteenth century Italy, the imagery of the trump cards deriving from a 'common pool of symbolism' particular to that place and time.⁸ This is arguably nowhere more visible than in the depiction of the cardinal virtues in the tarot—as is readily apparent by comparing early tarot decks with the typical contemporary iconographical treatment of the virtues.⁹

This conflict between the actual history of the tarot and the mythical history espoused by the occultists gives rise to some interesting anomalies. Crowley is a case in point here, bemoaning the decadence that had supposedly crept into the tarot designs over the ages:

The traditional pack has itself been subjected to numerous modifications, adopted for convenience ... The card originally called "The Hierophant", representing Osiris (as is shown by the shape of the tiara) became,

7 Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 26.

8 Farley, *A Cultural History*, 47. Dummett considers the earliest extant tarot cards to be the non-standard deck known as the "Visconti di Modrone" pack which he dates to c. 1445—see Dummett (with Mann), *The Game of Tarot*, 68 & 78–79. Farley notes a 'progenitor' deck dated to c. 1414–1418 painted by Michelino da Besozzo on the instruction of Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan (1392–1447), referred to in archival sources, and considers the earliest standard tarot deck the "Visconti-Sforza" deck (dated to 1440–1470)—see Farley, *A Cultural History*, 39. Farley argues that the decks commissioned at the court of Milan were in fact constructed as 'an allegory of life' based on the vicissitudes of the ducal family; *ibid.*, 50–92.

9 For example, compare: the sculpture depicting Samson and the Lion (along with Hercules and the Lion, a common allegory of Fortitude) on the Fontana Maggiore, Perugia, executed

in the Renaissance period, the Pope. The High Priestess came to be called “Pope Joan” ...¹⁰

For Crowley, the difference between the extant traditional decks and the original “ur-deck” reflected the accretions of time, in particular the shift from a pagan world view to a Christian one. Indeed, in the ‘Bibliographical Note’ to *The Book of Thoth*, Crowley notes that “[t]he mediaeval packs are hopelessly corrupt, compiled by partisans of existing political systems ...”¹¹

Focusing on those tarot trumps where Crowley departs fully from tradition with regard to names, I demonstrate that a major factor behind this decision was what Crowley perceived as the embedded “Christianisation” of the cards in question—a process of which Crowley, thanks to his extensive researches both into the origins of words and of religions, would have been fully cognisant. The irony of this, of course, is that Crowley, whilst indeed correct in his thesis that the existing decks were ‘compiled by partisans of existing political systems’, arising as they did out of the socio-cultural framework of the Renaissance, a period in which the power of the Catholic Church was arguably at its zenith, was mistaken in seeing therein evidence of the corruption or elision of some ancient Egyptian occult wisdom in the iconography and nomenclature of the cards.

On the one hand, Crowley’s endeavour to root out Christian vestiges was in keeping with the steady adoption of the tarot by occultists, which had begun in the eighteenth century with the first writers to publicly espouse an occult theory of the tarot, namely Court de Gébelin and Etteilla, and had continued through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. By the time Crowley came to write his work on the tarot in the 1940s, this process was almost com-

by Nicola Pisano and Giovanni Pisano, c. 1278 with the trump depicting Fortitude from the “Visconti di Modrone” or “Cary-Yale Visconti” tarot c. 1445 (Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Yale University); the quatrefoil panel depicting the figure of Justice on the south door of the Baptistry in Florence, executed by Andrea Pisano in 1330 & installed in 1336 with the trump depicting Justice from the so-called “Gringonneur” or “Charles VI” deck, c. 1480 (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris); the sculptured figure depicting Temperance on the Arca di San Pietro Martire, Cappella Portinari in the Basilica di Sant’Eustorgio, Milan, executed by Giovanni di Balduccio in 1339 with the trump depicting Temperance from the “Visconti-Sforza” tarot, c. 1440–1470 (The Morgan Library & Museum, New York).

10 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 24.

11 Ibid., xii. It is worth highlighting that the ‘Bibliographical Note’ purports to be written by Martha Küntzel (1857–1942), signed with the initials of her magical motto, I.W.E. = ‘Ich Will Es’ and showing her A.A. grade as 8=3, hence the use of the third person. However, the style is unmistakably Crowley’s. The fact that Küntzel died 2 years prior to the book’s publication would also seem to support this conjecture.

plete, with key trumps restyled in a more esoteric manner, both with regard to the actual titles, as well as the iconographical treatment; notably the “Pope” and “Popess” had been recast as “The Hierophant” and “The High Priestess” respectively, and the “Juggler” or “Mountebank” (“Le Bateleur”) had become “The Magician”.¹²

It is important to note, however, that the changes made by these earlier occultists were not necessarily driven by some sort of anti-Christian agenda.¹³ Rather, they were arguably intended to remove the temporal anchor from the cards that so obviously betrayed them as being the products of a (relatively recent) Christian cultural milieu. In this way, claims for an ancient provenance for the tarot—a pre-requisite for the argument that the deck was a receptacle of ancient wisdom—could more easily be made. The fact that the trumps styled on the cardinal virtues had survived pretty much intact by the time Crowley came to write his work on the tarot arguably says much about the inherently Christian bias of “mainstream occultism” until that point.

But the cardinal virtues could have no place in the New Aeon.¹⁴ Whilst Crowley’s renaming of trumps VIII, XI, XIV, and XX brought to a logical conclusion the process of adoption of the tarot by occultists that had been ongoing since the mid-eighteenth century, his agenda was far more ambitious: his dual purpose was to expunge Christian values from the deck and, in what constitutes a deliberate act of “cultural reprogramming”, encode therein the key tenets of Thelema, the religio-magical philosophy of the New Aeon.

In what follows, I briefly discuss the New Aeon and how the cardinal virtues came to be synonymous with Christian values, before finally turning to the renaming and restyling of the cards themselves.

12 For example, compare the traditional renderings of trumps V (“The Pope”), II (“The Popess”) and I (“The Mountebank”) as exemplified in the Tarot de Marseilles (produced in large numbers from the eighteenth century onwards, with the earliest certain example dating to 1718—see Dummett (with Mann), *The Game of Tarot*, 210–211) with the revised depictions of The Hierophant, The High Priestess and The Magician respectively, as exemplified by the Waite-Colman Smith deck, first published 1909.

13 A case in point here is A.E. Waite, who by the time he came to publish his tarot deck had to all practical purposes abandoned magic in favour of esoteric Christian mysticism. See Gilbert, *A.E. Waite*, 123 & 142.

14 In Crowley’s system of Thelema, the New Aeon, otherwise known as the Aeon of Horus, is considered to have begun in 1904 with the reception of *The Book of the Law*. In this work there are numerous references made to Crowley as the ‘Prophet’ of the New Aeon; for example, I:53, I:54, II:10, II:53, II:76—all cited references to *The Book of the Law* are from Crowley (with Desti & Waddell), *Magick*, 305–318 (references given in chapter and verse format). For Crowley’s own account of the events surrounding the reception of *The Book of the Law* see Crowley, *The Equinox of the Gods*, particularly 67–74, 108–118.

2 A New Deck for a New Aeon

The Book of Thoth was the last major work on magic Crowley published during his lifetime.¹⁵ It is clear that he regarded this book and the associated paintings as a work of the utmost significance for the new Aeon of Horus.¹⁶ Writing to a Mr Pearson of the Sun Engraving Co., the photoengraver responsible for transposing Frieda Lady Harris' original watercolours into engravings for publication, Crowley is at pains to explain his motive in seeking to limit Harris' involvement in the practicalities of getting the book published:

It seems important that you should understand my motive. To me this Work on the Tarot is an Encyclopoedia of all serious "occult" philosophy. It is a standard Book of Reference, which will determine the entire course of mystical and magical thought for the next 2000 years.¹⁷

He considered this book the summation of his life's work, a means to 'reproduce the whole of his Magical Mind pictorially on the skeleton of the ancient Qabalistic tradition.'¹⁸ No doubt to the amazement of certain onlookers, given his notoriety for excess of all kinds, Crowley was rapidly approaching the proverbial "three score and ten" during the five years it took to complete the work. Any natural anxiety in this regard was doubtless heightened by the bombs falling on London during the Blitz of 1940–1941. This likely led him to view the project as his final chance to set down for posterity the magical philosophy underlying the New Aeon whose arrival had been proclaimed in *The Book of the Law*.

Crowley was at pains to emphasise the originality of his work on the tarot. This is stated in no uncertain terms in a prospectus for *The Book of Thoth*:

more valuable still is the completely fresh approach to the whole subject which permeates the book. This is no rehash of what has been said before on the subject ... it is a brilliant revaluation of the entire field of occult

15 Originally published in 1944 as *The Book of Thoth; A Short Essay on the Tarot of the Egyptians; Being the Equinox Volume III No. v*.

16 Harris' watercolour paintings of the cards appeared as engraved plates in the book. The first actual separate colour printing of what came to be known as the Thoth Tarot deck appeared almost thirty years later, published by Llewellyn in 1972.

17 Postscript to letter from Aleister Crowley to Mr Pearson, dated May 29th, 1942. See Crowley correspondence (archival).

18 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, xii.

and mystical activity in the light of the most recent advances in science, philosophy, psychoanalysis and Comparative Religion.¹⁹

The ‘brilliant revaluation’ that Crowley highlights is inextricably linked to his reception of *The Book of the Law* in 1904 and the impact this had upon the ‘Magical Mind’ of the Prophet of the New Aeon: ‘This new Tarot may therefore be regarded as a series of illustrations to the *Book of the Law*; the doctrine of that Book is everywhere implicit.’²⁰

A striking feature of ‘The New Comment’ to *The Book of the Law* is the way in which Crowley repeatedly stresses how the magical philosophy underlying the system of the New Aeon, Thelema, is in accordance with the (contemporary) scientific viewpoint. For example, in the commentary to the very first verse of the book (1:1), Crowley writes ‘The theogony of our Law is entirely scientific. Nuit is Matter, Hadit is Motion, in their full physical sense.’²¹ Similarly, in the commentary to 1:56:

All previous systems have been sectarian, based on a traditional cosmography both gross and incorrect. Our system is based on absolute science and philosophy. We have “all in the clear light”, that of Reason, because our Mysticism is based on an absolute Scepticism.²²

Given the above statement, it should come as no surprise that Crowley felt impelled to change the titles of a number of the cards—the traditional decks, as far as he was concerned, being based on fundamentally flawed assumptions.

3 The Four Cardinal Virtues in Medieval Moral Philosophy

The moral qualities that came to be known as the “Cardinal Virtues”—Prudence, Fortitude, Temperance, and Justice—go back to the classical world, extending through Cicero (106–43 BCE) to Plato (428–348 BCE), who, in *The Republic*, describes the ideal city as ‘wise, brave, sober and just.’²³ Although we

19 Prospectus for *The Book of Thoth*, Ordo Templi Orientis, London, 1944 (most likely written by Crowley).

20 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 115–116.

21 Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 81.

22 Ibid., 163.

23 Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, 427e. See also Cicero, *De Inventione*, Book II, LIII, 159. Elsewhere Cicero describes the four cardinal virtues as the source of moral rectitude—see Cicero, *De Officiis*, Book I, v, 15.

find these qualities grouped together under the heading 'virtues' in the Bible, it is only with the early Church Fathers that they become a popular topic of discussion.²⁴

Amongst the first to discuss them in a purely Christian context is Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–c. 215 CE) who writes in his *Paedagogus* '... man's perfection is justice and temperance and courage and piety [prudence].'²⁵ But it is with Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397 CE) that these moral qualities are named "Cardinal Virtues", with the term *virtutes cardinales* ("cardinal virtues") appearing in Ambrose's (first) funeral oration for his brother, Satyrus.²⁶ Ambrose discusses these elsewhere in his writings. For example, in his commentary on Genesis, *De paradiso* (c. 375 CE), the four cardinal virtues are equated to the four rivers which flow through Eden and in the sermon *De Isaac vel anima* they are likened to the four horses that drive the "chariot of the soul".²⁷ In *De officiis ministrorum*, Ambrose writes at length how the cardinal virtues were evidenced in the lives and deeds of Old Testament figures such as David, Abraham, Job, and Solomon.²⁸ Where figures from the classical world are mentioned, their contribution to the knowledge and practice of the virtues is downplayed versus that made by biblical figures.²⁹ In so doing, Ambrose effectively reserves the cardinal virtues for Christians, incorporating them into the broader concept of Christian duty in an act of appropriation that arguably marks the beginning of the "Christianisation" of the cardinal virtues.³⁰

24 Wisdom of Solomon, 8:7 (κJV). This is the only place the four virtues are mentioned in the Bible, though they are referenced in the non-canonical text 4Maccabees (1:18). As Bejczy highlights, the early Church Fathers would have known of these moral qualities directly from Stoicism and Neoplatonism thanks to the Roman education they had received (Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues*, 12).

25 Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator*, 193–194.

26 See Ambrose, *On his Brother, Satyrus* (1), 42–58, in Nazianzus and Ambrose, *Funeral Orations*, 179–186. In this oration, Ambrose discusses his brother's life in terms of the four cardinal virtues.

27 See Ambrose, *De paradiso* (*On Paradise*), Chapter 3, where the river Phison represents Prudence, Gihon Temperance, Tigris Fortitude and Euphrates Justice in *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, 296–299. See Ambrose, *De Isaac vel anima* (*Isaac, or the Soul*), 8.65 where the cardinal virtues are equated to the four 'good horses' that lead the chariot of the soul in *Seven Exegetical Works*, 53.

28 Ambrose, *De officiis ministrorum* (*On the Duties of the Clergy*), Chapter XXIV–L in *Selected Works and Letters*, 49–85.

29 For example, in his discussion of Fortitude Ambrose claims that Cicero, Panaetius and Aristotle got their conception of the virtue of Fortitude from Job. *Ibid.*, 67–68.

30 As Bejczy comments, 'Ambrose was the first Latin author who felt the need to take possession of the scheme [that of the cardinal virtues] in the name of Christ ...' (Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues*, 17).

This process of Christianisation continues with Jerome (c. 347–419 CE) for whom ‘unbelievers’ (i.e. non-Christians) are necessarily precluded from exercising the four virtues.³¹ In a letter to a cleric, Jerome, echoing Ambrose’s chariot metaphor, enjoins him to make the cardinal virtues ‘a four-horse team’ that will bear him as ‘Christ’s charioteer’ to his goal.³² In a similar vein, Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) writes how the four cardinal virtues are dependent on the ‘perfect love of God’ and Julian Pomerius (fl. late 5th century CE) describes how the virtues are divine gifts and, as such, are only available to those who believe in God, with those who do not incapable of possessing them.³³

This idea that the virtues are effectively dependent on Christian faith is also made explicit by Gregory the Great (c. 540–604 CE). In *Moralia in Job*, Gregory identifies the four cardinal virtues with the four corners of the house where Job’s sons and daughters were feasting, as well as with the four rivers of Paradise as per Ambrose.³⁴ He maintains that the cardinal virtues are a ‘gift of the [Holy] Spirit’ and so, by definition, are only accessible to Christian believers.³⁵

Subsequent monastic writers, e.g. Bede (c. 673–735 CE), Alcuin (c. 735–804 CE), Hrabanus Maurus (c. 780–856 CE), and Peter Damian (c. 1007–1072 CE), firmly enmesh the virtues with faith and present them as a moral code to be adopted by believers seeking salvation.³⁶ For example, Peter Damian, writing of the hour of Vespers, comments on how the tradition in monastic communities of celebrating an office of four psalms (in contrast to the five psalms followed by clerics) is related to the four cardinal virtues.³⁷

In spite of attempts by later medieval writers to engage in a more secular discourse with regard to the cardinal virtues, prompted by the rediscovery of key classical texts (such as Boethius’ translations of Aristotle’s works on logic), by

31 See Jerome’s *Commentary on Galatians* Bk 2, 3.11–12, 137–138.

32 See Jerome’s letter to Nepotian (Letter LII) in *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, 185.

33 In *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae* (*On the Way of Life of the Catholic Church*), Augustine defines virtue as ‘the perfect love of God’. Postulating a ‘fourfold’ division corresponding to the ‘various dispositions of love itself’, he proceeds to define the four cardinal virtues in reference to God (Augustine, *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae*, Chapter 15 in *The Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life*, 22–23). Augustine claims the four cardinal virtues for Christianity elsewhere in his writings—see for example Question 61 in *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 121 and *De trinitate*, Book 13 in *The Trinity*, 409. For Pomerius on the cardinal virtues see *De vita contemplativa*, Book 3, Chapter 18 in Pomerius, *The Contemplative Life*, 144.

34 See Part 1, Book 11, section 76 in Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job*, 118.

35 Ibid., section 77, 119.

36 See Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues*, Ch. 1, on which I have drawn extensively in section 3.

37 See Peter Damian, Letter 17 in *Letters* 1–30, 151.

this point the cardinal virtues had become inextricably linked with Christian duty and Christian faith.

4 Crowley on Virtue

Crowley is scathing of the sort of moral attributes that had come to be regarded as virtuous. In his commentary to Chapter 60, 'The Wound of Amfortas' in *The Book of Lies*, he writes that '*The word virtue means "the quality of manhood". Modern "virtue" is the negation of all such qualities*'.³⁸ This idea occurs elsewhere in Crowley's writings, notably in *Little Essays Towards Truth* where he writes 'Let first be noted this word Virtue, the quality of Manhood, integral with Virility'.³⁹ And, of course, one of Crowley's favourite soubriquets, 'The Beast', is, as per Revelation 13:18, 'the number of a man'.⁴⁰ Hence for Crowley, this concept of 'Manhood' carries an implicit challenge to the prevailing system of ethics.

In an essay titled 'Liber DCCCXXXVII, The Law of Liberty' which appeared in *The Equinox Vol III, No 1* (1919), Crowley contrasts the message of Nuit in the first chapter of *The Book of the Law* with the prevailing morality of the times:

Is not this better than the death-in-life of the slaves of the Slave-Gods, as they go oppressed by consciousness of "sin", wearily seeking or simulating wearisome and tedious "virtues"?⁴¹

For Crowley, the very concept of virtue has been usurped and distorted by Christianity. Doubtless, his childhood experiences growing up amongst the Plymouth Brethren form the bedrock for what in mature years became a con-

38 Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 131. Italics as per format in modern edition including commentary. This work was originally published in 1912 without the commentary that has become a standard feature of modern editions, the commentary being written by Crowley for the use of his students in 1921, nine years after the book's publication.

39 Crowley, *Little Essays Towards Truth*, 70. Crowley is correct on the etymology. The Oxford English Dictionary gives the origin of the word from the Latin "virtus", meaning "manliness", "valour", "worth", linked to the Latin noun "vir" meaning "man". Clearly, the word "virtue" is another example of the importation into current linguistic usage of the socio-cultural concerns of a different era. It is worth highlighting here that the 3 of Wands card in *The Book of Thoth* bears the title "Virtue". However, this is not virtue in its ethical sense, rather virtue in the sense of "useful quality" or "power".

40 Revelation 13:18 (KJV).

41 Crowley, *The Equinox Vol III, No 1*, 49.

sidered philosophy of ethics based on *The Book of the Law*.⁴² For example, in his essay 'Liber CCC, Khabs am Pekht' (1919) Crowley obliquely refers to these experiences as the origin of his desire to overturn Old Aeon value systems: 'The misery caused to children by the operation of the law of the slave-gods was, one may say, the primum mobile of Our first aspiration to overthrow the Old Law'.⁴³

In *Magick Without Tears*, Chapter LXX, 'Morality (1)', Crowley explains how current conceptions of morality are actually founded on a series of vices for the purposes of social control:

This is the code of the "Slave-Gods", very thoroughly analysed, pulverized, and de-loused by Nietzsche in *Antichrist*. It consists of all the meanest vices, especially envy, cowardice, cruelty and greed: all based on over-mastering Fear. Fear of the nightmare type. With this incubus, the rich and powerful have devised an engine to keep down the poor and the weak.⁴⁴

And building on the injunction of *The Book of the Law* 1:41, 'The word of Sin is Restriction', Crowley is at pains to stress that repression—'Restriction'—of the sex instinct results in psychosis in the individual and disorder in society:

Mankind must learn that the sexual instinct is in its true nature ennobling. The shocking evils which we all deplore are principally due to the perversion produced by suppressions. The feeling that it is shameful and the sense of sin cause concealment, which is ignoble, and internal conflict which creates distortion, neurosis, and ends in explosion.⁴⁵

It is pertinent to note here that Crowley did on occasion (particularly in his earlier writings) draw a distinction between Christianity as an institution, the source of a dubious code of ethics he set out to attack, and the figure of Jesus Christ. For example, in an essay on Christianity in *The World's Tragedy* (1910) he writes how he holds 'the legendary Jesus in no wise responsible for the trouble' before going on to vow to destroy the deity worshipped by Christians as well as Christianity itself.⁴⁶ However, this subtlety of thought tended to be the excep-

42 For his own description of this period in his life see Crowley, *The Confessions*, 54–81.

43 Crowley, *The Equinox Vol III, No 1*, 180.

44 Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 419–420.

45 Crowley, *The Confessions*, 851.

46 Crowley, *The World's Tragedy*, xxxiii.

tion rather than the rule, and it is clear that Crowley's determination to destroy Christianity became increasingly all-encompassing.⁴⁷

In light of Crowley's views on virtue, let us examine his re-naming of the trump cards.

5 Trump VIII: From Justice to Adjustment

Augustine, paraphrasing Cicero, defines Justice as 'a habit of the soul which, with proper regard for the common welfare, renders to each man his own desert'.⁴⁸ The medieval theologians linked it to ideas of mercy, compassion and charity. Writing to Simplicianus, Ambrose notes 'Whoever can say: "I was an eye to the blind, a foot to the lame, the father of the poor", his limbs are limbs of justice'.⁴⁹

The concepts of mercy, compassion, and charity are roundly rejected by Crowley. In *Magick Without Tears*, writing of "Selfishness"—the antithesis of these concepts—he comments how 'in a way the whole structure of the ethics of Thelema is founded upon it'.⁵⁰ He contrasts this with what he terms 'unselfishness', linking the latter to democracy, on which he scathingly comments, 'this imbecile and nauseating cult of weakness—democracy some call it—is utterly false and vile'.⁵¹

A similarly dim view of democracy is to be found in an essay titled 'Liber CXCIV, Intimation with Reference to the Constitution of the Order'.⁵² Here, Crowley describes how the 'principle of popular election is a fatal folly', linking core Christian virtues to the idea of democracy and echoing Nietzsche's observation that '... the *democratic* movement inherits the Christian'.⁵³

47 For example, in his autobiography Crowley comments that the logical inference on the evidence of the gospels is that Jesus was a 'superstitious fanatic who taught the doctrine of eternal punishment and many others unacceptable to modern enlightenment.' See Crowley, *The Confessions*, 145.

48 See Augustine, 'Cicero's Opinion on the Division and Definition of the Virtues of the Soul' in *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, 58.

49 See Ambrose, Letter 54 in *Letters*, 302.

50 Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 292.

51 Ibid. For an in-depth discussion of Crowley's political thought and the way in which Crowley's views on democracy were shaped by his battle against Christianity and the latter's influence on bourgeois morality, see Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics*.

52 Crowley, *The Equinox Vol III, No 1*, 242.

53 Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 140. Italics as per original.

FIGURE 1 Frieda Harris and Aleister Crowley, Atu VIII, "Adjustment"
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Since Thelema is based on ‘absolute science and philosophy’, it follows that ‘relative’ constructs such as Justice have no place:⁵⁴

This card in the old pack was called Justice. This word has none but a purely human and therefore relative sense; so it is not to be considered as one of the facts of Nature. Nature is not just, according to any theological or ethical idea; but Nature is exact.⁵⁵

Crowley was at pains to emphasise how magic works in accordance with the laws of Nature, whose unfailing exactitude underlies the scientific conception of the physical world:

For true Magick means “to employ one set of natural forces at a mechanical advantage as against another set”—I quote, as closely as memory serves, Thomas Henry Huxley, when he explains that when he lifts his water-jug—or his elbow—he does not “defy the Law of Gravitation.” On the contrary, he uses that Law; its equations form part of the system by which he lifts the jug without spilling the water.⁵⁶

The adoption of a scientific approach in the practice of magic is a constant in Crowley’s work, as is apparent from the strapline of his semi-annual Journal, *The Equinox*—‘The Method of Science, the Aim of Religion’⁵⁷—or his insistence that the practitioner of magic should meticulously write down the results of their practices in a magical diary in the same way as a scientist would document an experiment.⁵⁸

Although Crowley’s card echoes traditional depictions of Justice in the tarot—the sword and scales clearly recognisable, albeit now symbolising the testes and phallus—he makes a radical iconographical departure. The female figure, on the card now titled “Adjustment”, is portrayed on tiptoe, dancing, signifying that constant adjustment is required to maintain exact balance in motion. This contrasts with the typically static figure depicted in traditional tarot decks.

54 Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 163.

55 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 86.

56 Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 219.

57 See Asprem, ‘Magic Naturalized?’ for a discussion of Crowley’s endeavour to employ something of the empirical approach found in contemporary science in his system of “Scientific Illuminism”.

58 Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 491–492.

Further, Crowley introduces the idea of fictional representation, identifying the female figure wearing a domino mask as the Commedia dell'arte figure, Harlequin.⁵⁹ His new treatment thereby explicitly evokes the artificial by recasting the central figure as a character from theatre. In this way, Crowley arguably challenges our concept of reality by positing that nature shares some of the characteristics of art. He describes the figure as 'the ultimate illusion which is manifestation', space and time, which form the backdrop to her dance, being a 'phantom show':⁶⁰

The Universe is a Puppet-Play for the amusement of Nuit and Hadit in their Nuptials; a very Midsummer Night's Dream ... for we understand the Truth of Things, how all is a dance of Ecstasy.⁶¹

Such a conception of reality is essential to Crowley's definition of Magic(k) as the 'Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will'.⁶² If the natural world partakes of the nature of illusion, then the magician, whilst acting in conformity with natural laws, can manipulate it to achieve the desired change.

6 Trump XI: From Fortitude to Lust

The tarot trump numbered XI in Crowley's deck is known as "Strength" or "Fortitude" in traditional decks, the latter often interpreted with respect to withstanding the sins of the flesh.⁶³ In *De paradiso* Ambrose writes of Fortitude enabling the Christian to 'hold in check the guileful vices of the body'.⁶⁴ It was in this sense that Fortitude was frequently paired with Temperance in the battle against worldly desires.⁶⁵

59 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 87.

60 Ibid.

61 Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 189.

62 Crowley (with Desti & Waddell), *Magick*, 126.

63 The former is possibly derived from a misreading of the original Italian name of the trump, "Fortezza", meaning "fortitude" (or "fortress"), for "Forza", meaning "strength" (Decker, Depaulis and Dummett, *A Wicked Pack*, 45). For an alternate view, linking the title "Forza" to the name "Sforza", see Farley, *A Cultural History*, 65.

64 See *Paradise* (17) in *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, 298.

65 See for example Augustine, 'The Way of Life of the Catholic Church', Ch. 22 in *The Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life*, 34.

FIGURE 2 Frieda Harris and Aleister Crowley, Atu XI, "Lust"
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Crowley's choice of "Lust" as the new title for the card is thus a direct attack on the sexual morality espoused in Christian ethics; it will, of course, escape few that Lust is one of the seven deadly sins catalogued by Christian theologians. It is entirely in keeping with Crowley's polemical stance against Christian ethics that he should adopt concepts condemned by the Church, adapting them for his own uses.

Although commonly associated with sex, Lust more generally denotes pleasure and desire.⁶⁶ Crowley writes of his renaming of the card: 'Lust implies not only strength, but the joy of strength exercised. It is vigour, and the rapture of vigour'.⁶⁷ Hence we are to understand by "Lust" not only the unrestricted expression of the sex-instinct but also the free expression of desire in a wider sense. It is arguably in this sense that the word appears in *The Book of the Law* 11:22: 'Be strong, o man! lust, enjoy all things of sense and rapture: fear not that any God shall deny thee for this'.

This is a striking juxtaposition of the ideas of strength as Fortitude and strength as Lust, where the latter encompasses all things of the senses; to be strong is to explore the world of phenomena as the will dictates. In his comment on the above verse, Crowley writes 'To "lust" is to grasp continually at fresh aspects of Nuit'.⁶⁸

In the metaphysics of Crowley's religio-magical system of Thelema, phenomena, or "point-events" as Crowley terms them, are stripped of simplistic value judgments of what is good or bad: the universe is essentially perfect and phenomena are equally valued as manifestations of the union of the feminine principle, Nuit and the masculine principal, Hadit.⁶⁹ Hence, Crowley's conception of Lust necessarily involves a perception of existence diametrically opposed to that incorporated in the prevailing Christian view of a fallen humanity occupying a post-lapsarian world marred by original sin.

The iconography of the cardinal virtue of Fortitude is often depicted as a woman struggling with a lion, a styling that found its way into the tarot at an early stage and continued to feature in later decks.⁷⁰ Crowley's treatment could not be more different. Whereas traditional depictions of the card arguably have

66 See Skeat, *A Concise Etymological Dictionary*, 306. Similarly, the Greek word ἐπιθυμέω, often glossed as "lust" in English translations of the New Testament, has the wider meaning of "desire".

67 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 92.

68 See Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 198.

69 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 168–169. Crowley terms each such manifestation 'a Play of Nuit'.

70 For example, compare the styling of the card in the "Visconti di Modrone" deck with that of "La Force" in the Tarot de Marseilles.

an implicit subtext of restraining the passions in keeping with patristic conceptions of Fortitude, Crowley's card inverts this, advocating an ecstatic expression of desire. Rather than struggling with the lion, the woman is depicted riding it, the reins she holds 'representing the passion which unites them'.⁷¹ Instead of being antagonists, the woman and the lion have now become lovers.⁷²

The other major innovation of course, is that Crowley uniquely identifies the figures on his card with Babylon and the Beast from Revelation 17. The biblical reference is further modulated through his own visionary experience of Babylon (whom he later renamed "Babalon") whilst skyring the twelfth Aethyr of the Enochian system, an excerpt from which he includes in an Appendix to *The Book of Thoth*.⁷³ Babalon plays a crucial role in Crowley's magical theory, being associated with the means by which the magician crosses the Abyss, a theoretical construct separating the phenomenal and noumenal worlds.⁷⁴ Crowley writes of Babalon, 'For there is no other way into the Supernal Mystery but through her, and the Beast on which she rideth ...'.⁷⁵

Hence, giving rein to Lust in service of the Great Work, as personified by the figure of Babalon riding the Beast, is shown to be the ultimate key to spiritual advancement.⁷⁶

7 Trump XIV: From Temperance to Art

In the re-naming of the trump numbered XIV, Crowley rejects the last of the three cardinal virtues that had found their way into the tarot. As noted, Temperance was often paired with Fortitude in the battle against the temptation exerted by the sins of the flesh. Alcuin, discussing the characteristics of Temperance, poses the question '[a]nd is not "Temperance" the distinctive trait of

⁷¹ Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 94.

⁷² They are described as being 'intimately united' (ibid).

⁷³ Ibid., 136–139.

⁷⁴ For an in-depth discussion of the figure of Babalon in Crowley's work see Hedenborg White, *The Eloquent Blood*, in particular chapters 3 and 4, 35–123. For an elucidation of Crowley's engagement with *Enochiana* see Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*, particularly chapter 5, 85–101.

⁷⁵ See the vision of the third Aethyr in Crowley (with Neuburg & Desti), *The Vision and the Voice*, 213.

⁷⁶ It is important to distinguish this from simple libertinism. In keeping with the injunction of Nuit in 1:51 and particularly that given in 1:57, in Crowley's system love in all its manifestations is to be dedicated to the Great Work. In 'An Essay Upon Number' Crowley notes that XI, the number of the tarot trump, is the 'great number of the Magnum Opus' (see Crowley, 777, 49).

FIGURE 3 Frieda Harris and Aleister Crowley, Atum XIV, "Art"
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him who governs his lust and controls his greed and calms and moderates all the passions of his soul?"⁷⁷ Temperance is frequently equated with the idea of moderation more generally.⁷⁸ For certain theologians such as Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335 CE–c. 395 CE), the very definition of evil is encapsulated in the turning to extremes, in contrast to virtue which is to be found lying in the mean.⁷⁹

Crowley writes disparagingly of the concept of moderation:

The Golden Mean, at its best, can only keep you from extravagant blunders; it will never get you anywhere.

The Book of the Law constantly implies a very different policy: listen to its climax-exhortation: "But exceed! exceed!" (AL II:71).⁸⁰

Crowley's desire to change the title of the card was therefore a necessary corrective to what he regarded as the leaching of Old Aeon morality into secular ethics.

By the nineteenth century, the word "temperance" had also acquired a further meaning, that of moderation or complete abstinence from the consumption of alcohol.⁸¹ This would undoubtedly have been anathema for Crowley and another example of the sort of cowardly self-abnegation encouraged by Christian ethics. In an essay titled 'Liber CL, De Lege Libellum' he writes:

The sot drinks, and is drunken: the coward drinks not, and shivers: the wise man, brave and free, drinks, and gives glory to the Most High God.⁸²

77 Alcuin, *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne*, 153. See also Augustine's comment in Chapter 19 of 'The Way of Life in the Catholic Church' that the function of Temperance is 'to restrain and still the passions' in *The Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life*, 30.

78 For example, Aquinas in *The Summa Theologica* II–II, Q. 141 Art. 2 notes this sense of the word as the first part of a two-fold 'acceptation'.

79 See Gregory of Nyssa, *Ascetical Works*, 32.

80 Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 225–226.

81 The first temperance society was established in 1806 at Moreau in New York state as an anti-spirits association, the form taken by the majority of temperance societies that sprang up in its wake. The first English temperance society was founded at Bradford in 1830, similarly as an anti-spirits association. Such societies permitted the drinking of fermented beverages such as wine and beer in moderation. However, by 1832 there emerged a total abstinence society, which set the course for the development of the Temperance movement into a total abstinence, or "teetotal" movement (Anon, *The Temperance Movement*, 2–6).

82 Crowley, *The Equinox Vol III, No 1*, 106–107.

In December 1939, three months after the start of the second world war, Crowley published *Temperance: A Tract for the Times*, a collection of rowdy drinking songs designed to look like the wine-list of an expensive restaurant.⁸³ But the publication had a serious intent, namely of combating another case of the infiltration of the secular sphere by a Christian ethics based on restriction and denial.⁸⁴

Crowley's new name for the trump, "Art", on the one hand references the Art of Alchemy, whose symbolism features extensively in the revised treatment of the card and, on the other, arguably constitutes an encoded meaning in the form of *gematria*, a kabbalistic numerology system whereby the number values of the individual letters of a word are summed to give a single numerical value for that word, akin to the Greek system known as *isopsephy*. Words of the same value are deemed to have a hidden correspondence to one another. Using *gematria*, the word "Art" sums to 210, as follows: A = Aleph = 1; R = Resh = 200; T = Teth = 9; and 1 + 200 + 9 = 210. I believe it is no coincidence that the title of the card is numerically equivalent to the word "Nox": N = Nun = 50; O = Ayin = 70; X = Tzaddi = 90; and 50 + 70 + 90 = 210. In his commentary to the first chapter of *The Book of Lies*, Crowley writes 'Nox adds to 210, which symbolises the reduction of duality to unity, and thence to negativity, and is thus a hieroglyph of the Great Work'.⁸⁵

Traditionally, the cardinal virtue of Temperance is depicted as a woman holding two jars, one containing water, the other wine, representing the dilution of wine with water, a symbol of moderation. Crowley neatly reverses the image: rather than two jars there is one cauldron; and although there is one figure on Crowley's card, it is clearly an androgyne formed of two parts, representing the 'Consummation of the Royal Marriage'.⁸⁶ The card hence depicts the mystical marriage, or *hieros gamos*, a classical alchemical trope denoting

83 d'Arch Smith, *The Books of the Beast*, 33.

84 It is worth noting that the link between the consumption of alcohol and lust (implicit in the biblical story of Lot and his daughters), was also commented upon by the early Church Fathers (see for example Clement of Alexandria, *Christ the Educator*, 141, the story of Lot being found in Genesis 19:30–38). Given its quality of inciting lust, Crowley no doubt also wished to retain alcohol as a weapon in the armamentarium of the magician, and likely sensed in the Temperance movement an attempt to deny a tried and tested way of accessing states of ecstasy—cf. Crowley's commentary on *The Book of the Law* 11:22 where he writes 'Drunkennes is a curse and a hindrance only to slaves' (Crowley, *Magical and Philosophical Commentaries*, 197).

85 Crowley, *The Book of Lies*, 13. Italics as per format in modern edition including commentary. The 'negativity' of which Crowley speaks lies beyond the Abyss, i.e. in the noumenal world.

86 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 102.

the union of opposites, in both image and name—opposites (2) unite (1) and cancel out to zero (o):

The Great Work is the uniting of opposites. It may mean the uniting of the soul with God, of the microcosm with the macrocosm, of the female with the male, of the ego with the non-ego ...⁸⁷

If Nox is a 'hieroglyph of the Great Work' and if in trump xiv is indeed 'fore-shadowed the final stage of the Great Work,' then the conclusion is inescapable: access to the higher grades of initiation lying above the Abyss—arguably one of the key innovations of Crowley's system of Magick—relates to the uniting of opposites leading to their mutual annihilation.⁸⁸

Hence there could be no place in Crowley's system for Temperance, whose traditional role in fortifying the soul against the incitements of lust, and its associations with moderation, is the antithesis of the ecstatic and lustful union of opposites which is the essence of the Great Work.

8 Trump xx: From Judgement to The Aeon

The renaming of trump xx is intimately connected with Crowley's programme of systematic excision of Christian ethics from his tarot deck for the New Aeon. Traditionally, this card depicts the Last Judgement when, according to Christian belief, the wicked shall be punished and the virtuous rewarded.⁸⁹ This was classically used by theologians as a means of exhorting Christians to virtuous behaviour. For example, in a letter addressed to a 'fallen Virgin', Basil of Caesarea (c. 329–379) exhorts her to mend her ways, reminding her of the day of Judgement:

take thought of the last day ... the distress, the suffocation, the hour of death, the instant sentence of God, the angels hastening on, the soul in

⁸⁷ Crowley, *Magick Without Tears*, 7.

⁸⁸ *The Book of Thoth*, 103. Crowley, in his description of the card, refers the reader to an Appendix containing an excerpt from *The Vision and the Voice* which references the nature of opposites above the Abyss, another indication that this mystical marriage of contraries is connected to crossing the Abyss. For this excerpt, titled 'The Arrow', see Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 139–143, with the original to be found in Crowley's skrying of the fifth Aethyr of the Enochian system in Crowley (with Neuburg & Desti), *The Vision and the Voice*, 197–206.

⁸⁹ Cf. Matthew 25:31–46.

FIGURE 4 Frieda Harris and Aleister Crowley, Atu xx, “The Aeon”
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the midst of these things terribly disturbed, bitterly scourged by a guilty conscience ...⁹⁰

This conception of an external figure to administer punishment or reward in accordance with a given set of ethical dictates plays no role in Crowley's Thelema. Instead, the ultimate arbiter of conduct for the "Thelemite" is the twin injunction found in *The Book of the Law* 1:40 and 1:57: 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law' and 'Love is the law, love under will'.

More broadly, the Last Judgement is implicitly connected with ideas of death and resurrection, concepts that for Crowley belong firmly to the Old Aeon, reflecting a primitive understanding of the facts of Nature:

So, when the time was ripe, appeared the Brethren of the Formula of Osiris, whose word is I A O; so that men worshipped Man, thinking him subject to Death, and his victory dependent upon Resurrection. Even so conceived they of the Sun as slain and reborn with every day, and every year.

Now, this great Formula being fulfilled, and turned into abomination, this Lion came forth to proclaim the Aeon of Horus, the crowned and conquering child, who dieth not, nor is reborn, but goeth radiant ever upon His Way. Even so goeth the Sun: for as it is now known that night is but the shadow of the Earth, so Death is but the shadow of the Body, that veileth his Light from its bearer.⁹¹

The shift from a geocentric to a heliocentric view also entails a new conception of the fate of the individual. Death does not mean an end to existence, just as nightfall does not herald the demise of the sun.⁹²

Crowley's re-naming of the card, "The Aeon", reflects his conviction that the reception of *The Book of the Law* in 1904 signified the advent of the New Aeon of which he was to be the Prophet. Consequently, rather than the traditional image of figures rising from yawning graves at the peal of the last trumpet, the design of the card is based on the Stélé of Revealing, the ancient Egyptian

90 Basil, Letter 46, 'To a Fallen Virgin' in *Letters*, 125.

91 Crowley, *The Heart of the Master*, 32–33. Note in this context Bogdan's point that Crowley's views on religious evolution, as reflected in what might be termed the "procession of the Aeons", were heavily influenced by 'the unspoken but obvious postulate in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* ... that Christianity is in fact based on a primitive form of thought that is incompatible with a modern scientific worldview.' See Bogdan, 'Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon', 91.

92 Cf. *The Book of the Law* 11:21 and 11:44 in particular for the rejection of the concept of death.

artefact that Crowley's wife, Rose, apparently pointed out when describing to Crowley the identity of the entity that had contacted her, initiating the events that led to the reception of *The Book of the Law*:⁹³

At the beginning, then, of this new Aeon, it is fit to exhibit the message of that angel who brought the news of the new Aeon to earth. The new card is thus of necessity an adaptation of the Stélé of Revealing.⁹⁴

The significance of the Stélé of Revealing as the supreme glyph of the Aeon of Horus is emphasized in the *Book of the Law* III:10 where it is described as 'your Kiblah', a reference to Islam where the *kiblah* or *qibla* marks the direction of Mecca towards which a Muslim turns to pray. Indeed, in Crowley's *The Gnostic Mass*, the rubric states that a reproduction of the Stélé should be placed on the top of the 'super-altar', with the latter positioned above the 'High Altar' placed in the East of the Temple, 'that is, in the direction of Boleskine, which is situated on the South-Eastern shore of Loch Ness in Scotland, two miles east of Foyers ...'⁹⁵ By 'East', Crowley clarifies that his words do not refer to the compass direction, implying instead that they should be taken metaphorically with regard to the idea of "orientation".

Crowley's restyling of this card serves both as a reminder of the message of the New Aeon encapsulated in *The Book of the Law*, as well as a call to ritually draw on the magical energies of the Aeon of Horus mystically emanating from Crowley's former house, Boleskine.⁹⁶

As opposed to traditional card designs that often depict the Angel of the Last Judgement, in Crowley's card the presence of the angel is implicit in the message.⁹⁷ This angel is no other than Aiwass, the 'praeterhuman' intelligence that communicated *The Book of The Law*, whom Crowley also viewed as his own Holy Guardian Angel.⁹⁸ Besides signifying Crowley as the prophet of the New

93 Crowley, *The Confessions*, 394. The name subsequently given to this object, the 'Stélé of Revealing', is taken from *The Book of the Law* III:10.

94 Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 115.

95 See Crowley, *The Gnostic Mass* in Crowley (with Desti & Waddell), *Magick*, 584.

96 For the idea of Boleskine as a source of "New Aeon magical energy" see the ritual titled *Liber v, Reguli*. This is described as 'an incantation proper to invoke the Energies of the Aeon of Horus', and in the rubric the ritualist is instructed to 'give the sign of Horus ... as he passeth [the point in the circle which marks the direction of Boleskine], so to project the Force that radiateth from Boleskine before him.' *Ibid.*, 574.

97 Crowley writes of the card, 'It is called the Angel, the messenger from Heaven of the new Word.' See Crowley, *The Equinox of the Gods*, 102.

98 *Ibid.*, 97 & 127. Crowley also equates Aiwass with 'the God or Demon or Devil once held

Aeon, this arguably also constitutes an implicit claim that Crowley's New Aeon Magick can bring the practitioner to the 'Knowledge and Conversation' of their own individual Holy Guardian Angel.⁹⁹ Interestingly, whilst Crowley rejects the Christian idea of the Second Coming, he arguably retains the underlying apocalyptic element of the card in viewing the reception of *The Book of the Law* as the 'Great Revelation' that marked the advent of the Aeon of Horus.¹⁰⁰

9 Conclusion

The adoption and esoteric restyling of the tarot undertaken by preceding occultists—commencing with Court de Gébelin and Etteilla towards the end of the eighteenth century and continuing through occultists such as Lévi, Papus, Mathers and Waite—was driven by a desire to conceptualise the cards as a store of ancient wisdom. Crowley's changes to his tarot for the New Aeon, whilst bringing this process to its logical conclusion, were driven by a much more ambitious agenda: firstly, to excise Christian values from the deck and secondly to encode therein the key tenets of Thelema.

Despite the increasingly esoteric styling of the cards, by the time Crowley came to write his work on the tarot the three cardinal virtues, Fortitude, Temperance and Justice, which not only lay at the heart of Christian ethics, but which had by the twentieth century subtly insinuated themselves into the ideology underpinning Western democracies, remained entrenched. Similarly, the Judgement card, even if, in an increasingly secular society, it might be interpreted as some form of spiritual rebirth, still held its traditional eschatological connotations, imbued with ideas of sin, punishment, and reward after death.¹⁰¹

Crowley's fascination with the origin of words meant he was highly sensitised to the sources and socio-cultural implications of the titles of the tarot trumps, as well as being attuned to the symbolism that underlay these. The

holy in Sumer' (ibid., 118) and variously spells the name "Aiwaz", "Aiwass" or even "Aivas". The name is given as 'Aiwass' in *The Book of the Law* 1:7.

99 Crowley recounts how the realisation that it was his mission to teach others to attain the 'Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel' struck him 'like lightning from heaven', suddenly triggered by a near-death experience when he was travelling in China (Crowley, *The Confessions*, 516).

100 Crowley, *The Equinox of the Gods*, 61. I am indebted to Egil Asprem for highlighting this point. The 'destruction of the world by Fire' is envisaged as having occurred in 1904 with the reception of *The Book of the Law*. (Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 115). See also Bogdan, 'Envisioning the Birth of a New Aeon'.

101 See for example Waite, *The Pictorial Key*, 148.

changes he made in his tarot for the New Aeon should be viewed as part of his ongoing battle to remove the fetters of Old Aeon value systems which he perceived as preventing humanity from achieving its innate potential and replacing these with the radically different approach to morality espoused by *The Book of the Law* and encapsulated in the system of Thelema. Whereas previous occultists had for the most part removed Christian imagery for the purpose of facilitating a narrative that the cards, as carriers of esoteric secrets, possessed an ancient provenance, Crowley did so out of the desire to supplant Christianity altogether. It is with this agenda that he undertook the renaming and restyling of the four trump cards in question.

As a final point, one could argue that Crowley left a glaring oversight in his tarot deck for the New Aeon: the tarot trump numbered xv retains its traditional title, "The Devil". Although Crowley considered the true identity of this figure to be something other than that depicted on the card, he nevertheless chose to retain the traditional title, most likely for the same reasons as he delighted in adopting the moniker of "The Beast 666" in his ideological campaign to unseat Christianity from its place as the dominant religion of the West.¹⁰² However, in spite of this singular example of inconsistency, one should be in no doubt that Crowley's real act of subversion lies not in his Romantic posturing as the Beast of Revelation, but rather in his carefully conceived and painstakingly executed strategy of cultural reprogramming, of which *The Book of Thoth* arguably comprises the high-water mark.¹⁰³

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¹⁰² Crowley comments 'In the Dark Ages of Christianity, it was completely misunderstood, describing how the card 'represents Pan Pangenetor, the All-Begetter.' See Crowley, *The Book of Thoth*, 105.

¹⁰³ I would like to thank Ira Kiourti, Ronald Hutton, Egil Asprem, and two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I would also like to thank Ordo Templi Orientis for the permission to use the images from the Thoth Tarot which accompany this article.

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