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Magic Naturalized? Negotiating Science and Occult Experience in Aleister Crowley's Scientific Illuminism

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Abstract
La Magie "naturalisée"? De la négociation entre science et expérience occulte dans l'illuminisme scientifique d'Aleister Crowley.

L'une des questions centrales qui se posent en matière d'ésotérisme occidental moderne porte sur l'attrait persistant de la magie; comment la magie a-t-elle survécu au "désenchantement du monde"? Une explication tentante a été que l'émergence de la "magie occultiste", fondée sur les écrits d'Eliphas Lévi (1810-1875) et les enseignements de l'Ordre Hermétique de la Golden Dawn (créé en 1888) en particulier, ont eu pour effet une "psychologisation" de la magie. Le fait d'interpréter les pratiques magiques comme des techniques psychologiques, et le commerce avec des entités ésotériques comme une manipulation d'états intérieurs, psychologiques, plutôt que comme un commerce avec des êtres spirituels existant réellement, a permis à des modernes possédant une bonne culture et appartenant à une classe supérieure à la classe moyenne, de maintenir à la fois leur croyance à la magie, et leur intégrité rationnelle.
En présentant une étude de cas, celui d'un des occultistes modernes ayant exercé le plus d'influence, à savoir Aleister Crowley (1875-1947), cet article cherche à montrer que "la thèse de la psychologisation" ne résiste pas entièrement à l'examen. Feront l'objet d'une mention particulière le système magique de Crowley, présenté comme un "Illuminisme scientifique", ainsi que le rôle et à l'attrait de la science dans ce système. Contrairement à la thèse de la psychologisation, laquelle, comme on en traitera, représente une sorte d' "escapisme psychologique", Crowley ne cherchait pas à dissocier ses croyances magiques de ses croyances rationnelles en les faisant passer dans le champ de la psychologie et des états intérieurs; au lieu de cela, influencé qu'il était par les idéaux du naturalisme scientifique il a cherché à concevoir une méthode naturaliste permettant de critiquer, de tester et de raffiner rationnellement la pratique magique. En somme, on s'attachera à montrer que le système de Crowley représente un pas en direction de la naturalisation plutôt que vers la psychologisation de la magie.
On présentera une lecture serrée de certaines des idées de Crowley portant sur le rapport entre science et magie, et on procédera aussi à une contextualisation historique dans laquelle on s'attachera spécialement à traiter des rapports entretenus par Crowley avec des courants intellectuels marquants au sein desquels on s'intéressait à cette question (notamment, la Society for Psychical Research, Sir James Frazer, ainsi que des philosophes naturalistes—de T.H. Huxley à Henry Maudsley).

Keywords
Crowley, Aleister; Ritual magic; Scientific naturalism; Psychical research; Occultism; Psychology

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0. Introduction

In spring 1909 the first issue of a new esoteric journal, titled *The Equinox*, was published in London. The Editorial signalled the launch of a new magical Order, referred to only as "The Brothers of the A.·.A.·.". Their new occult paradigm was called "Scientific Illuminism", and their motto was proudly declared as 'The Method of Science—the Aim of Religion'.[1] Behind the journal and the mysterious A.·.A.·. was a small group of occultists coming mostly from the shattered remains of the Golden Dawn, and was led by Aleister Crowley[2] (1875-1947). Crowley saw the formation of his Order as a watershed in the history of occultism. In his view, occultism was now to be saved from "charlatanism" and "obscurantism", and finally be founded on a strictly scientific basis.[3]

"Science" is a term which became increasingly inflated when adopted by occult and new religious discourses in the second half of the 19th century and onwards.[4] In this article I will set out to explore how it is used and what it means in Crowley's Scientific Illuminism. I will show that unlike most positions within the modern esoteric community, Crowley had marked affinities with naturalistic science, and for this reason sought to negotiate science with occultism in a different way than most other occultists allowed. Especially I will focus on how Crowley's emphasis on science led to a different regard for one of the other major legitimising factors in the occult revival: the appeal to personal experience. These considerations go hand in hand with a theoretical discussion related to an aspect of the so-called secularisation of esotericism.[5] It is commonly held that modern ritual magic, as a part of the secularisation of esotericism, has mainly become "psychologised". I will take a brief look at what this assumption means, and, by bringing together the observations made from the questions mentioned, argue that in the magical system that Crowley's

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[1] Crowley, 'Editorial', 2.

[2] Crowley has recently started to receive wider attention from academic scholarship. Apart from the standard biographies, such as Richard Kaczynski, *Perdurabo* and Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, Hugh Urban has explored Crowley's sexual magic in the light of contemporary discourses on sexuality, and Marco Pasi has analysed his ambiguous attitudes to politics. See Urban, 'Unleashing the Beast'; Urban, *Magia Sexualis*; Pasi, *Aleister Crowley und die Versuchung der Politik*. For a nice summary of the current state of research on "Crowleyana", see Pasi, 'The Neverendingly Told Story', and the first chapter of Pasi, *Versuchung*.

[3] Crowley, 'Editorial', 2.

[4] See especially Olav Hammer's rhetorical study of modern esoteric movement texts: Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*.

[5] One of the main themes of Wouter Hanegraaff groundbreaking study in *New Age Religion and Western Culture.*.

Scientific Illuminism presents, psychologisation is at best secondary. Instead, I will argue that Crowley's work represents primarily a move towards the *naturalisation* of magic.

1. Magic in Modernity: A Theoretical Preface

1.1 *The Secularisation of Esotericism, the Psychologisation of Magic*

That the rise of scientific naturalism in the 19th century profoundly influenced the direction in which esoteric and occult ideas and movements later evolved has been pointed out several times.[6] A subset of this line of research is the study of magic's relation to modern science and society; how did magic "survive" the Enlightenment, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, secularisation, disenchantment and so on, and continues to have appeal in occult communities even in the 21st century?[7]

In a quite recent article, Wouter Hanegraaff propounds the idea that modern ritual magic, as a part of esotericism in general, presents a dominant tendency towards *psychologisation* when confronted with modern secular and scientific thought.[8] It should be noted that this tendency of psychologisation could take on several meanings. Broadly considered, it represents the increasing tendency to incorporate terminology and theories borrowed from the new psychological discourses so prevalent from the beginning of the 20th century, and to use these in the interpretation of occult theories and practices. But this terminological psychologisation can still take numerous directions, depending on the kind of psychological theory adopted, the intentions of the occultist in adopting it, and so on. It is to be noted that psychology was, and still is today, far from being a unified discipline. In Hanegraaff's version of the psychologisation thesis of magic, however, it seems that a more specific type of psychologised interpretation is implied. According to this view, modern magicians feel a strain of "cognitive dissonance" when their magical practices are faced with the "rational and scientific ideology" of the modern world, which

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[6] See for instance Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*; idem, 'The New Age Movement and the Esoteric Tradition'; Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*.

[7] A particularly indispensable study from an anthropological perspective is Tanya Luhrmann, *Persuasions of The Witch's Craft*. See also Hanegraaff, 'How magic survived the disenchantment of the world'. My own sociological study of contemporary ritual magicians in Norway also touches upon this; see Egil Asprem, 'Thelema og ritualmagi—med magi som livsholdning i moderne vestlig esoterisme'.

[8] Hanegraaff, 'How magic survived', especially pp. 366, 368-71.

they consequently feel the need to deal with. As a result, a certain type of psychologisation of the techniques, ontology and efficacy of magic takes place, whereby magic in the end is thought to operate in a 'separate-but-connected "magical plane"', existing on a different level of reality, accessible with the cultivation and use of the imagination.[9] The function and effect of this psychological interpretation is to *insulate* magical practice from rational critique, thereby legitimising it. Hanegraaff writes that '[t]he dissipation of mystery in *this* world[10] is compensated for by a separate magical world of the reified imagination, *where the everyday rules of science and rationality do not apply*'.[11] The psychologisation of magic is seen as a way for magicians to suspend their disbelief by confining magic to a place outside the empirical realm of verification, evidence and rational criticism. This version can be said to propose a kind of *psychological escapism*: psychologisation is a way for the magician to hide his or her beliefs and practices from the threatening natural scientific tribunal of truth.

I do not dispute that this tendency exists, and perhaps especially prevalent in the particular sources examined by Hanegraaff.[12] In my view, however, psychologisation in this escapist sense is only *one* possible way of negotiating magic with a modern scientific worldview, among several others. I furthermore suspect that the focus of this study, Crowley's Scientific Illuminism, represents a different strategy altogether.[13] Whereas the psychological escapist attempts to *withdraw* magic from critical inquiry by confining its validity to a realm of merely subjective experience, Crowley is seen to *embrace* natural scientific inquiry and tirelessly *pursue* such critical assessment of magical techniques, practices and results, reclaiming the subjective experiences for intersubjective scrutiny.[14] As I will try to demonstrate as we go along, whenever Crowley psychologises it is not as a means to escape scientific inquiry, but rather as an instrument of his broader naturalistic approach.

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[9] Ibid., 370.

[10] I.e. after the "disenchantment of the world".

[11] Hanegraaff, 'How magic survived', 370. Emphasis added.

[12] Especially Israel Regardie, who himself practiced as a psychiatrist influenced by the Reichian and Jungian schools.

[13] Perhaps surprisingly, academic studies of Crowley's magic are scarce. The most notable studies are Pasi's as of yet unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, *La notion de magie dans le courant occultiste en Angleterre (1875-1947)*, and his 'Lo Yoga in Aleister Crowley'. Another recent work that includes a discussion of Crowley's occult and magical ideas is Owen,*Place of Enchantment*.

[14] The title of this paper should be read as a reference also to Willard van Orman Quine's famous article 'Epistemology Naturalized', which argued that the philosophical discipline of epistemology has more to learn from the naturalistic scientific method, than science has to learn

1.2 *Experience and "Scientism" as Legitimating Strategies in the Victorian Occult Revival*

It has become commonplace to see the Victorian interest in heterodox religious currents such as spiritualism, Theosophy and occultism in general as a response to the struggle between religion and natural science in the Victorian era.[15] One could perhaps say that the dominant position conquered by naturalism in the 19th century changed the habitat of the religious ecology. The religious uncertainty spurred by a science that increasingly challenged fundamental beliefs prompted a reaction where the strategies for legitimising one's religious views had changed.

In his study of strategies of legitimating esoteric positions in modernity, Olav Hammer observes three basic features: appeal to (constructed) tradition, appeal to science and appeal to experience.[16] For the present purpose, the latter two are of primary importance. In spiritualism for instance, which took the Western world largely by surprise in the 1850s, after the Fox sisters had made contact with "the other side", the appeal to experience became the main strategy to validate one's belief in the afterlife. Anybody could attend a séance and judge from the "proof" offered by the mediumistic phenomena displayed there. Indeed, the idea was widespread among spiritualists that the "unholy alliance of atheism and materialism" was to be battled with what was perceived as the methods of science *itself*: demonstration by proof.[17] Spiritualism saw itself as capable of providing this proof of the supernatural through the rock of experience, thus also providing a "scientific" basis to combat the crisis of faith that naturalistic science had brought about.

The appeal to science in a crusade *against* science is also clearly present in the two *magna opera* of Theosophy. The subtitle of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky's first major work, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), was *A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, and that of her later *Secret Doctrine* (1888), *The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*.[18] These very titles signify the expressed motive of her occult writings to find a "middle ground"

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from traditional epistemology. My thesis is that Crowley develops a parallel attitude towards the relationship between magic and science: magic has more to learn from science than vice versa. Thus magic should be *naturalised*.

[15] A key study of this struggle in 19th century Britain is Turner, *Between Science and Religion*. See also Webb, *Flight from Reason*. For a standard overview of the development of many of the key occult currents of this age, see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*.

[16] See Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*.

[17] Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 63.

[18] See Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*; Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*.

between science and religion, and her ultimate, great campaign to reconcile the two.[19] Blavatsky seemed less interested in the *methods* provided by naturalistic science than with their *results*, however. Both books mentioned above are full of references to discoveries and concepts that had quite recently appeared and acquired value in the scientific literature, such as "evolution", "energy", "atom", and so forth.[20] The appeal to science is still clearly present as a way of legitimising one's religious claims.

1.2.1 *Science in the Service of Religion: The Society for Psychical Research*

Another interesting child of this cultural climate is the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). The society, created at Trinity College, Cambridge in 1882 by a handful of agnostic academics, some of a very respectable stature, is most symptomatic of the Victorian crossroads of science and religion. Similarly to the spiritualists, this group felt the impact of religious doubt and sought a way out through the evidence of experiment and demonstration. However, while the spiritualists' "scientific demonstrations" generally did not convince anybody familiar with scientific methodology,[21] the SPR encouraged a more strictly scientific approach. The hope was that the inquiries which were made by the SPR into the fields of telepathy, mesmerism, hypnotism, hallucinations, mediumistic "trances" and the like could support the hypothesis that the soul existed independently from the body, thereby opening the door for acceptance of life after death and other comforting religious doctrines.[22] For one prominent psychical researcher, Henry Sidgwick, professor of moral philosophy and the first president of the SPR, such proof was even seen as necessary in order to uphold any convincing system of ethics.[23]

Despite the SPR's obviously biased foundation, it considered itself "a scientific society". This claim is not to be dismissed offhand. In its early years the SPR attracted many members with a solid scientific grounding, and their more or less naturalistic approach seems to have been considerably more authentic from a scientific perspective than that of the common spiritualist.[24]

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[19] Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 194.

[20] In Olav Hammer's terms, this can be seen as the rhetorical strategy of "terminological scientism". See Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 226ff.

[21] Among the cases where naturalists actually *were* persuaded, one of the most interesting examples is perhaps Alfred Russel Wallace, co-founder with Darwin of evolutionary biology, who turned away from scientific naturalism at the benefit of spiritualism. See Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 35-6; Oppenheim, *The Other World*.

[22] Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 120-121.

[23] Ibid., 113.

[24] Oppenheim, *The Other World*, 136.

It is also to be remembered that, at this point, psychology was still in its infancy, and the research programme of psychical research was seen by many as a promising field of inquiry for a future science.[25] The idea that science and religion could be reconciled was, generally, far from belonging merely to the marginalised fringe of Victorian society. Rather, as Janet Oppenheim has noted, the goals of the SPR placed the organisation 'squarely amidst the cultural, intellectual, and emotional moods of the era'.[26]

2. Crowley, Psychical Research, Scientific Naturalism and the Occult

2.1 *A Rendezvous at Trinity College*

It was this very same cultural, intellectual and emotional mood that Aleister Crowley encountered when he left home in 1895 to attend Trinity College, Cambridge, where the SPR had been established thirteen years earlier. The presence of the SPR was still very much felt at Trinity. Its headquarters were there, and the founder Henry Sidgwick was still a fellow at the College.[27] We cannot positively ascertain whether Crowley at this point met with any of the psychical researchers, but the thought that he might very well have attended a lecture with Sidgwick is a tempting one. At any rate, given the SPR's solid presence at Trinity, it seems quite certain that Crowley would have been exposed to their agenda during his College years.

Another prominent figure whom Crowley might have encountered during these years was James George Frazer, the first edition of whose *Golden Bough* had been published only five years earlier. This is a fact to be noted, since Frazer would continue to have a considerable influence on Crowley in his post-Golden Dawn years, when, to a large extent, he would adopt Frazer's intellectualist interpretation of magic, as well as his evolutionary view of human culture.

2.2 *Crowley and the Golden Dawn*

It was, however, in the legendary Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn[28] that Crowley would be introduced to occultism and magic. During his short but

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[25] Ibid., 4.

[26] Ibid.

[27] I am indebted to Marco Pasi for sharing this observation with me.

[28] Some standard historical surveys of the Order and its activities include Gilbert, *Golden Dawn*; Gilbert, *Golden Dawn companion*; Gilbert, *Golden Dawn Scrapbook*; Howe, *Magicians of the Golden Dawn*; Regardie, *The Original Account*.

intense stay with the Order between 1898 and 1900 Crowley learned basically everything on which he would later come to build his own system and interpretations. But it was also his first encounter with the *social* milieu of occultism, and this was not a milieu that particularly impressed him. Crowley later described the community he encountered as consisting of 'for the most part muddled middle-class mediocrities'[29] and as 'an abject assemblage of nonentities; the members of the Order were as vulgar and commonplace as any other set of average people'.[30] Only very few people were to his liking, notably George Cecil Jones, the Welsh analytical chemist who introduced Crowley to the Order in the first place, and Allen Bennett, a very renowned, accomplished and even feared magician and mystic, who would be Crowley's informal tutor of ritual magic.[31] As for the rest of the members, Crowley found that they 'possessed no individuality; they were utterly undistinguished either for energy or capacity'.[32]

It is important to note that Crowley seems to have thought that the 'vulgar and commonplace' members and the social aspects of the lodge were direct threats to the magical and mystical work that the Order was supposed to be all about. It possessed a social structure that invited *poseurs* and *pretenders* to magical attainment. In this connection it is perhaps interesting to note Crowley's own proposal to MacGregor Mathers, the chief of the Golden Dawn, in the midst of the turmoil of reforming and reconstituting the Order in 1900. To prevent the presence of insincere members claiming magical attainments only with a view to gaining social status, a practice of anonymity through the wearing of masks during meetings and rituals was to be installed.[33] The ideal was that every new candidate would only know for sure *one* other person among the members: the one that introduced him or her to the Order. I suggest that these proposed measures signify something important about Crowley's attitudes towards the occult subculture. Crowley strongly resented the occult *pretenders*, a resentment that prompted his attempts at improving the way occult and magical techniques *ought* to be studied and practiced.

2.3 *Crowley and Scientific Naturalism*

In an early autobiographical piece published in *The Equinox* in 1912, Crowley touches upon his intellectual convictions during the years after he parted with

[29] Crowley, *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, 176.
[30] Ibid., 177.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 195.

the Order.[34] Here he stresses time and again that he found himself comfortable with a certain scepticism, finding that 'his mind was more and more attracted to materialism'.[35] Studying the world religions, he came to reject the 'folly of all this supernaturalism',[36] preferring to look for the answers to ultimate questions in philosophy and metaphysics instead. It is notable that he mentions some of the most important names of British scepticism and scientific naturalism as being those he would now consult. Among those mentioned are the radical empiricist David Hume, the scientific naturalist Herbert Spencer, "Darwin's bulldog" Thomas Henry Huxley, the Irish naturalist John Tyndall, and the pioneering English psychiatrist Henry Maudsley.[37]

Here, it is fitting to mention an interesting anecdote concerning Maudsley. Crowley ran into him on a ship that took them from India to Egypt in 1904.[38] In his autobiography, Crowley expresses great sympathy and curiosity for the man. In describing their encounter, Crowley says of Maudsley that he 'was a profound philosopher of the school which went rather further than Spencer in the direction of mechanical automatism. . . . He was the very man I wanted'.[39] The reason why Crowley wanted to talk with such a staunch materialist and psychological reductionist as Maudsley was that he wanted to discuss *his own* reductionist theories about the meditative "states" of yoga, particularly the one called *samâdhi*. Crowley was convinced that these states were completely dependent on 'physico- and chemico-physiological conditions', and could hypothetically be induced solely by pharmaceutical stimuli.[40] According to Crowley himself, Maudsley had agreed with all of Crowley's theories. Furthermore, and this is important, Crowley was convinced that *any* non-reductionist explanation of mysticism was bound to lead one back to 'the whole discarded humbug of the supernatural'.[41] Luckily, he himself was 'armed in the panoply of the positive natural philosophy of modern science'.[42]

There are two major points to be made about this. The first concerns Crowley's conception of himself as being 'armed in the panoply of the positive natural philosophy of modern science': Maudsley and Crowley actually shared

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[34] Crowley, 'Temple of Solomon the King'.
[35] Ibid., 359.
[36] Ibid., 360.
[37] Ibid.
[38] This happened just before Crowley's famous prophetic reception of *Liber Legis* in Cairo later that spring (Crowley, *Confessions*, 386).
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.

similar convictions, and there is indeed some accuracy in this self-conception. Secondly, it is important to note that this is how psychologisation usually presents itself in Crowley's work.[43] Crowley is ready to "psychologise" mysticism only in a *reductionist* or ultimately *naturalistic* sense. What he clearly would *not* allow is any *sui generis* understanding of these phenomena. This would immediately rule out the sort of psychological escapism discussed earlier, which bases itself first and foremost on a notion of an irreducible mind, or a kind of "magical solipsism" ("as long as I think it, it is real").

2.4 *Crowley and Psychical Research*

In the years to come, Crowley would also have more contact with certain influential figures of the SPR. His relationship to them sheds some interesting light on Crowley's self-positioning between science, occultism and psychical research. One of the most notable connections in this respect is Crowley's friend Everard Feilding, the secretary of the SPR between 1903 and 1920 and one of the SPR's most active inquirers. Fielding is an interesting link, since it is documented that he was a member of Crowley's magical Order, the A∴A∴, even from the very beginning.[44] He is therefore the most definite link between psychical research and Scientific Illuminism.

In his autobiography Crowley recounts an interesting series of events concerning Feilding and his fellow SPR researchers W.W. Baggally and Hereward Carrington.[45] Carrington was another friend of Crowley's, and an influential psychical researcher.[46] In 1908 the three were given an assignment by the SPR to explore the famous and successful Italian medium Eusapia Palladino. They concluded that some of her spectacular phenomena could not be attributed to trickery, and thus made Palladino's claims to extraordinary powers and her continued popularity considerably easier to maintain.[47] Having read Feilding's stunning report about Palladino, but still remaining sceptical, Crowley went to Naples in 1912, and attended a séance with Palladino himself. Although he did not doubt that the report had been written by capable and trained scientific minds, Crowley's still intended to check the claims first hand and with an even

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[43] Another example of it is his introduction to the Goetia, written in 1900 (see Crowley, 'The Initiated Interpretation').

[44] Kaczynski, *Perdurabo*, 149-51.

[45] Crowley, *Confessions*, chapter 70.

[46] Carrington was for instance the co-writer, together with S.J. Muldoon, of the very successful *The Projection of the Astral Body*.

[47] Oppenheim, *Other World*, 151-152.

more critical attitude: 'Feilding and the rest are clever, wary, experienced and critical, but even so, can I be sure that when they describe what occurs they are dependable witnesses?'[48]

It is intriguing to see how Crowley deals with his experience of the séance with Palladino, since he ends up criticising the credibility of his own immediate perceptions during the event. He notes that at one point he became aware that Palladino's wrist had escaped from his handgrip without him even noticing. Crowley adds some further reflections on this, and notes how easy it is for even the most perceptible person to be tricked in such settings. This is where he finds the probable source of error in the work of the other psychical researchers.[49] In the end, what is most puzzling to Crowley is not the phenomena studied by psychical research, but rather the credulity of the psychical researchers themselves, 'the adhesion of so many prominent men of science to spiritism', as he puts it.[50]

The thing to be noted about this passage is, once again, Crowley's self-understanding. It seems clear that he conceives his own scepticism and methodological naturalism with regard to occult phenomena as going *further* than that of the SPR, who in his opinion ended up becoming a society of mere advocates for spiritualism.

3. A New Dawn of Magic: Aleister Crowley's "Scientific Illuminism"

3.1 *Magic in the Age of Science: Crowley's Frazerian Evolutionism*

Crowley's *magnum opus* on magic, *Magick in Theory and Practice*, opens with two lengthy quotations from Frazer's *Golden Bough*.[51] By means of these quotes, Frazer provides the reader with his intellectualist interpretation of magic, including a hint towards the evolutionary idea that magic "paved the way for science", although it was itself a failed precursor to it.[52] These evaluations are very much in tune with Crowley's own position on magic. Adopting Frazer's evolutionism, Crowley firmly believed that the modern age had evolved beyond religion and "magic" in the traditional sense, and towards a superior age of science. Modern science had *superseded* both traditional magic

[48] Ibid., 682.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid., 685.
[51] Crowley, *Magick: Book Four*, 123-124.
[52] Frazer quoted in Crowley, *Magick*, 124.

and religion. But in Crowley's view, this did not mean that magic was simply a "survival" that should be abolished. Rather it meant that magic must be *updated* to suit the new age of science. He consequently presents himself as someone who has come to destroy 'that unscientific… MAGICK (of tradition)'.[53] In the age of science, magic must be *naturalised*.

3.2 *The Rise of the Brothers of the A∴A∴: The Formation of "Scientific Illuminism"*

In July 1906 Crowley discussed the possibility of establishing a new Magical Order together with his old tutor from the Golden Dawn, George Cecil Jones.[54] During the next year, Crowley and his small circle of magical companions worked towards this goal, writing rituals, texts and instructions to be used in their magical and mystical work.[55] The watershed finally occurred in 1909, with the publication of the first volume of *The Equinox*, signalling the launch of the Order A∴A∴ and its Scientific Illuminism.

As mentioned in the introduction, the Editorial expressed the Order's intentions to get rid of "charlatanism" and "obscurantism".[56] This resonated not only with the common scepticism against spiritualist mediums, but also with Crowley's bad experiences from his time in the Golden Dawn. The "social posing" of the old Order was to be expelled with the motto of the new A∴A∴: 'The Method of Science—the Aim of Religion'.[57] In Crowleys mind,

> *The Equinox* was the first serious attempt to put before the public the facts of occult science, so-called, since Blavatsky's unscholarly hotch-poch of fact and fable, *Isis Unveiled*. It was the first attempt in history to treat the subject with scholarship and from the standpoint of science.[58]

This positive view of science and scientific methodology is very evident from the Editorials in the following issues of *The Equinox*, which put particular emphasis on the notion that an appeal to personal experience in itself is insufficient for elaborating such a methodology. Rather, they call for exact measurements and *quantitative* studies:

> We require the employment of a *strictly scientific method*. The mind of the seeker must be unbiased: all prejudice and other sources of error must be perceived as such and extirpated.

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[53] Crowley, *Magick*, 135.
[54] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 172.
[55] Ibid., 181.
[56] Crowley, 'Editorial', 2.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Crowley, *Confessions*, 604.

> We have therefore devised a Syncretic-Eclectic Method… to attack the Problem, *through exact experiments and not by guesses*.[59]

But what were the implications of this new scientific approach? In the following sections I will explore this question through a closer analysis of some of the practical instructions written by Crowley, in particular those published in *The Equinox* and intended as official study material for the A.·.A.·.. In so doing, I will mainly explore three aspects: the careful use of a magical record to stress the externalisation of personal experience which makes inter-subjectivity possible, the conception of rituals as scientific experiments, and the idea of testing the obtained results through inter-subjectively verifiable methods. I will end with a comparison between Crowley's instruction for one specific type of magical operation—astral travel—and instructions for the same operation in the Golden Dawn. By means of such a comparison I hope to show the practical import of the alterations Crowley made in the name of Scientific Illuminism.

3.3 *The Magical Record: Magical Rituals as Scientific Experiments*

A scientific experiment is much like a recipe. The experimenter sets up a clear and distinct list of "ingredients", and sets down a rigid procedure for how to do what, and when. Relying on an understanding of causality according to which "like causes produce like effects", it is assumed that when such an experiment is conducted in exactly the same way, under the exact same conditions, it will always produce exactly the same results, regardless of who conducts the experiment, when he does it, or where.[60] In the magical instructions published by Crowley in *The Equinox* we see a tendency towards conceiving of magical rituals in a similar experimental fashion. The necessity of thorough planning and concise descriptions is emphasised. An excellent example of this concept of magical practice as experiment is evident already from the very first practical manual of Scientific Illuminism that has been published, known as "Liber Exercitiorum" ("Book of Exercises"). Its first section concerns the *magical record* or diary:

> 1. It is absolutely necessary that all experiments should be *recorded in detail* during, or immediately after, their performance.
> 2. It is highly important to note the physical and mental condition of the experimenter or experimenters.

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[59] Ibid. My emphasis.

[60] For an account of how science progresses through the accumulation of such experimental effects rather than through novel predictive theories, see Gooding, *Experiment and the Making of Meaning*.

> 3. The time and place of all experiments must be noted; also the state of the weather, and generally *all conditions which might conceivably have any result upon the experiment* either as *adjuvants* to or *causes* of the result, or as inhibiting it, or as *sources of error*.
> ...
> 7. The written record should be *intelligibly prepared* so that others may benefit from its study.
> ...
> 9. The more *scientific the record is, the better*.[61]

Throughout, the emphasis is on expelling vagueness in the interest of clarity. It is interesting to note that this emphasis is incompatible with the usual appeal to personal experience. The fact that "sources of error" have to be taken into account, and the precise procedure of the operation or experiment must be recorded so that it may be *replicated* and tested by others are clear examples of this. The underlying assumption is that immediate experiences can be misleading, and that a scientific epistemology must go beyond such personal experiences. Furthermore, the appeal to "intelligibility" stems from a recognition that the prevailing obscurantism of magical and occult texts must be rooted out in order to establish the new scientific paradigm of magic. The necessity of such clarity in experimental prescriptions is stressed in another essay by Crowley published in the same issue of *The Equinox*, where he gives two examples, one of a scientifically valid procedure description, and another of a nonsensical and obscure one*:*

> "I concentrated my mind upon a white radiant triangle in whose centre was a shining eye, for 22 minutes and 10 seconds, my attention wandering 45 times" is a scientific and valuable statement. "I prayed fervently to the Lord for the space of many days" means anything or nothing. Anybody who cares to do so may imitate my experiment and compare his result with mine. In the latter case one would always be wondering what "fervently" meant and who "the Lord" was, and how many days made "many."[62]

"Scientific" precision in the use of the magical diary or record is crucial to the programme outlined by Crowley. The instructions in "Liber Exercitiorum" give a couple of good examples of how this should be applied in practice. Being primarily a training manual for aspiring students of Scientific Illuminism, it gives specific exercises in some elementary magical and mystical techniques. There are training programmes in "physical clairvoyance" (i.e. the art of prediction by divination), the yogic disciplines of *âsana* (positions or pos-

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[61] Crowley, 'Liber Exercitiorum', 25-26. My emphases.
[62] Crowley, 'The Soldier and the Hunchback', 123.

tures), *prânâyâma* (control of breath) and *dhâranâ* (control of thought and imagination), and of the general physical aptitude of the student.[63] In all these tests and exercises, the careful recording of what has been done and what has happened is emphasized. For instance, in clairvoyance one should train one's occult ability of prediction by guessing tarot cards, and carefully note how many one gets right and how many wrong. By making such quantitative figures it can be estimated on thoroughly scientific grounds whether the results are statistically significant or not, and Crowley himself gives sound statistical figures for showing what kind of results would count as merely coincidental.[64] In training *âsana*, which takes a lot of static strength and endurance, one should carefully note 'the severity of the pain (if any) which accompanies it, the degree of rigidity attained, and any other pertinent matters'.[65] Similarly, in the *prânâyâma* exercise it is noted that 'various remarkable phenomena will very probably occur' during the practices, which 'must be carefully analysed and recorded'.[66] In the *dhâranâ* exercise, which focuses solely on mental phenomena, this is stressed as well, and becomes perhaps even more important. In these exercises one should focus one's mind on various mental images, and then in increasingly more difficult exercises "manipulate" these images, include moving objects in various constellations 'such as a pendulum swinging, a wheel revolving', or 'a piston rising and falling while a pendulum is swinging'.[67] The point of these exercises is to discipline the mind, through concentrating and visualising, but also through keeping all other thoughts out of the mind. For this purpose, the magical record is employed again: 'Note carefully the duration of the experiments, the number and nature of the intruding thoughts, the tendency of the object itself to depart from the course laid out for it, and any other phenomena which may present themselves'.[68] In other words, some sort of scientifically appropriated introspection seems to be implied.

Since these exercises are considered official instructions from the A∴A∴, they should also be viewed as tests. This means that when the students feel that they master the exercises, they should be officially tested in them by their more accomplished superiors.[69] While Crowley does not explicitly say here what

[63] Crowley, 'Liber Exercitiorum', 26-31.
[64] Ibid., 26-7.
[65] Ibid., 28.
[66] Ibid., 29.
[67] Ibid., 30.
[68] Ibid.
[69] All the exercises end with comments like 'When you feel that you have attained some success in these practices, apply for examination, and should you pass, more complex and difficult practices will be prescribed for you' (ibid., 31).

these "tests" would involve, it seems likely that special attention would be given to the records kept by the student. Especially in exercises like *dhâranâ*, which concerns processes which are completely "iinternal" and therefore not directly observable (as would be the case with exercises in maintaining yogic postures), this would undoubtedly be the case.

3.3.1 *"The Aim of Religion—The Method of Heterophenomenology"?*

As appeals to "science" and scientific nomenclature by new religious or occult spokespersons have usually been interpreted as a "rhetorical" or "discursive strategy" (and, more often than not, rightly so), it seems to me that the question whether the methods prescribed by Scientific Illuminism can in any way be called *sound* from a scientific perspective deserves some scrutiny.[70] Was Crowley's appeal to science *merely* a rhetorical strategy, a faddish way to express and sell one's religious ideas in a society where naturalistic science had replaced religion as the main institution of truth? Or was his expressed wish to apply scientific ways of inquiry to magical phenomena more sincere? I believe Crowley's re-evaluation of the magical diary indicates the latter.

We have already seen that the prescriptions given in "Liber Exercitiorum" stress the "experimental" aspects of magical and mystical work. Here the understanding of the nature of experimentation seems to be more consistent with that of the naturalistic sciences than one would perhaps expect. There is an emphasis on clarity of procedures, there are detailed descriptions of the circumstances and phenomena encountered, and there also seems to be a conception that the same causes produce the same effects. As Crowley writes in another magical manual: 'By doing certain things certain results will follow'.[71]

There is, of course, no doubt that the *effects* produced by the experiments hitherto considered are of a radically different kind than those usually considered by naturalistic science. In "Liber Exercitiorum" it seems clear that the aim is to produce certain *mental* and/or *sensual* phenomena in the *experimenter*, i.e. the magician. Certainly this way of experimenting is different from the one in physics or chemistry, where the experimenter should be as little involved as possible. On the other hand, the situation would not be entirely alien to experiments in *psychology*.[72] One could even argue that the importance Crow-

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[70] See for instance Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, which includes an entire section (V) called 'Scientism as a language of faith'.

[71] Crowley, 'Liber O vel Manus et Sagittae', 13.

[72] As Dr Ulrike Popp-Baier has pointed out to me, Crowley's use of a kind of "experimental introspection" is strongly reminiscent of the early establishments of experimental psychology represented by figures such as Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) and Oswald Külpe (1862-1915), and also the appropriation of these methods by early proponents of the psychology of religion,

ley assigns to the keeping of magical (or scientific) records constitutes a response to one of the standard methodological problems of psychology, namely the problematic epistemological relationship between personal experience and third-person access to it. Two historically significant answers to this problem have been based on the supposition that the two *cannot* be reconciled. On the one hand, *behaviourism*, represented in its earliest period by figures such as John Watson (1878-1958) and later, famously, by B. F. Skinner (1904-1990), would deny the importance or even existence of something like subjective experience and mentality, while focusing solely on measurable *external* behaviours (i.e. "input and output") in order to conform to the rigidity of naturalistic scientific methods. On the other hand, *phenomenology*, represented in psychology by William James (1842-1910) (another prominent member of the SPR, it might be added), among others, would stress the importance of *introspection* to unravel the mysteries of mind.[73] We have already seen Crowley's enthusiasm for the naturalistic approach of Maudsley, which, although it admittedly came before behaviourism, still is significant in its insistence on methodological naturalism in the study of the human mind.

It is tempting to contend that the emphasis in Crowley's writing upon the inter-subjective availability of the magically induced experiences through rigorous and carefully written records is reminiscent of another method insistent on scientific methodology, namely the *heterophenomenology* formulated in recent decades by Daniel Dennett.[74] This method has been proposed to overcome the perceived distinction between subjective *qualia* (if these exist at all) and what can be measured and tested *quantitatively*. Instead of the first-person methodology of ordinary phenomenology, Dennett proposes a third-person view on the same issues, based upon a rigorous inter-subjective method. Dennett writes about the problems of ordinary phenomenology, that it

> is in even greater need [than ordinary hard sciences] of a clear, neutral method of description, because, it seems, no two people use the same word the same way, and *everybody's an expert*. It is just astonishing to see how often "academic" discussions of the phenomenological controversies degenerate into desk-thumping cacophony, with everybody talking past everybody else.[75]

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i.e. the so-called Dorpat school. See Wulff, 'Experimental Introspection and Religious Experience', 131-150.

[73] It is perhaps also interesting to note that this split seems to parallel the old Diltheyian distinction between "Verstehen" and "Erklären", and between qualitative and quantitative approaches. For more on this, see von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*.

[74] See Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*, especially chapter 4.

[75] Ibid., 66.

This could just as well have been a description of the states of affair in modern occultism. Furthermore, Dennett claims that heterophenomenology represents a

> *neutral* path leading from objective physical science and its insistence on the third-person point of view, to a method of phenomenological description that can (in principle) do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experiences, while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science.[76]

I certainly do not intend to argue that Crowley's methodology for a Scientific Illuminism was a forerunner of what has been articulated in cognitive psychology in recent decades. The objects and agendas are, of course, completely different, and the traces of heterophenomenological methodology in Crowley's work, although rigorous, are clearly only a shadow of the kind of rigidity and thoroughness called for by Dennett. However, I think there is *something* to this comparison. Crowley's emphasis on carefully noting all available facts of the matter concerning one's own mental processes as well as all external influences (both pertaining to the ritual itself and otherwise) represents, I would argue, a genuine drive towards "naturalizing" the study and practice of magic in the sense of keeping 'the methodological scruples of science'. In seeking to reconcile the domain of magical experience, which had been so dominated by subjectivity and unverifiable claims, with a scientifically sound methodology, one sees Crowley struggling with an analogous problem, and finding an analogous answer.

3.4 *The Testing of Astral Experience: Two Methods*

While the above method, reminiscent of heterophenomenology and intending to make subjective experience inter-subjectively available and open for critical scrutiny, is the underlying epistemological base for Scientific Illuminism, it is still not the end of the story. In the following section I will consider some more concrete methods designed to "test" the veracity and validity of magically induced visionary experiences. This testing takes on two forms: verifying factual claims made by spiritual entities in visions, and applying a kind of kabbalistic exegetical technique in order to judge the "spiritual" validity of the visions according to magical correspondences.

3.4.1 *Verifying Factual Claims*

It should be quite clear what the first category implies. If a spirit makes some claims about the external world, this spirit immediately stands before the

[76] Ibid., 72.

empirical tribunal of truth. The importance of conducting tests for verifying such claims is stressed by Crowley time and again. In a short note published in *The International* in 1917, Crowley expresses amazement over the fact that so many occultists are uninterested in checking such claims even when it could easily be done. About occultists dabbling with the ouija board, he has this to say: 'Every inanity, every stupidity, every piece of rubbish, is taken not only at its face value, but at an utterly exaggerated value. The most appallingly bad poetry will pass for Shelley, if only its authentication be that of the planchette!'[77] When a spirit poses itself as Shelley, you would expect it to have some literary skills. This is an empirical prediction which lends itself to a scientific approach.

A nice example is to be found in a letter dated June 19, 1919, where Crowley "corrects" his student Jane Wolfe.[78] Wolfe had claimed to be in contact with an entity named Fee Wah, which appeared to be of Chinese origin. Crowley suggests that this entity should be expected to speak Chinese. The test of truth could therefore be to bring a copy of some classical Chinese literature, and ask the spirit to translate. The accuracy of the translation could then easily be checked, and judgement be made about the claims of the spirit.

3.4.2 *Kabbalah as Scientific Method: Golden Dawn and Scientific Illuminism juxtaposed*

Even more intriguingly, Scientific Illuminism applies an appropriated Kabbalistic method to check both the validity of spirits encountered, and of the visionary experiences themselves. Already in the Golden Dawn system of magic, Kabbalistic doctrines were reinterpreted and given new functions to fit the new system of occult syncretism. Elements of the Kabbalah, especially the so-called Tree of Life with the ten *sephirot* and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet were utilised as the very foundation of an elaborate system of correspondences, to which all other systems were connected.[79] In a ritual setting, this whole body of correspondences was employed and manipulated in order to invoke certain forces that the set of symbols was thought to represent. One discipline in which this was deployed was "astral skrying" or "astral travel", where the symbols would be deployed to "guide" the magician to particular places in the "Astral Light". In order to show how Crowley adopted the basic framework of this practice from the Golden Dawn, but adapted the use

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[77] Crowley, 'The Ouija Board: A Note', 319.

[78] Letter to Jane Wolfe, dated June 19, 1919.

[79] I have argued elsewhere that this is a central function of Kabbalah in modern occultism (Asprem, '*Kabbalah Recreata*').

of Kabbalah to get a more elaborate system of testing the experiences, I will now turn to a comparison between the two.

A Golden Dawn Instruction

Influenced by earlier occult philosophers, particularly the French occultist Eliphas Lévi,[80] the magicians of the Golden Dawn worked with an occult cosmology that supposed the existence of a subtle, "astral plane" or "Astral Light", situated behind or beyond the phenomenal world. This world could be reached and interacted with by virtue of a properly cultivated and disciplined use of the magical imagination.[81]

An introduction, with examples of such astral work, is provided by Moina Mathers,[82] writing under the magical pseudonym of soror V.N.R..[83] This instruction describes the meditative use of certain symbols taken from Hindu traditions, known as "Tattwas", which, according to the teachings or "knowledge lectures" of the Order, correspond to the elements, and thus to different realms in the astral world.[84] Soror V.N.R. describes how, for instance, one can use the Tattwa known as Apas-Prithivi, which is formed like a silvery crescent lying horizontally with its back downward, corresponding to the element water.[85] Since the nature of this symbol, and the astral realm to which it is a key, is of water, the other ritual paraphernalia, symbols and gestures one should employ must also be of the watery kind. Thus, when ritually invoking the forces before the visualisation itself takes place, one should principally use the cup (the "elemental weapon" corresponding to water), draw the "invoking pentagrams" of water, and so on. After these preliminary ritualistic acts have been performed, the magician starts employing the imagination in a more active way. First, one should stare intensely at the image of the Tattwa, so as to form a vivid representation of it in one's own mind that would remain clearly even when the eyes are shut. Then, 'having succeeded in obtaining the thought vision of the symbol', one should 'continue vibrating the Divine Names [i.e. those kabbalistically corresponding to the element in question] with the idea

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[80] An especially influential book of his was *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*. See the latest English translation, Lévi, *Transcendental Magic*.

[81] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, 150-152.

[82] MacGregor Mathers' wife and, interestingly, the sister of French philosopher and one-time president of the SPR, Henri Bergson.

[83] Moina Mathers, 'Of Skrying and Travelling in the Spirit-Vision', reprinted in Regardie, *Golden Dawn*, 467-473.

[84] See also Regardie, *Golden Dawn*, 456-466.

[85] Moina Mathers, 'Skrying and Travelling', 469.

well fixed in your mind of calling before you on the card [i.e. the Tattwa] a brain picture of some scene or landscape'.[86] This 'scene or landscape' is supposed to be a place in the Astral Light that belongs to the element invoked through the symbols and ritual acts.

At this point a very vivid picture of a landscape should appear in one's imagination: 'For example, I perceive appearing an expanse of sea, a slight strip of land—high grey rocks or boulders rising out of the sea. To the left a long gallery of cliffs jutting out some distance into the sea'.[87] Here we notice an interesting aspect of the procedure. Having obtained the visionary experience, it becomes necessary to *test its authenticity*. That is, one has to make sure that this vision is not merely a figment of one's mundane imagination, but an actual and (in a more objective sense) "real" location within the astral realms. This testing is done by drawing up certain "test symbols", taken from the vast system of correspondences. In this example, Moina suspects that among the sources of error concerning the veracity of the vision are memory recollections on the one hand, and constructs of one's own imagination on the other. To "check" these influences, she draws up the Hebrew letters *tau* and *kaph*.[88] These should correspond with the planets Saturn and Jupiter, which in turn are said to govern memory and mental image construction respectively.[89] If these landscapes were only taken from memory or constructed by one's own mental creativity, the false visions would now be banished or expelled. If that does not happen, but the visions remain, the magician may safely go on to explore the astral landscape s/he has discovered, and be confident that they are *not* merely figments of one's own psyche.[90] One may then astrally "project" oneself into the landscape, interact with it and the spiritual creatures one may encounter there. Once again, these creatures should be "tested", in the sense that one should ask them to give signs or ritual gestures corresponding to the "right" elements.

Crowley's Adaptations and Applications of Kabbalah as a Test System

In Crowley's system, the kabbalistic system is expanded and put to use as a more elaborate way of testing the visions. In 1909, the same year that Scientific Illuminism was presented for the first time in *The Equinox*, Crowley published

[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid., 470.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 474 n.10.
[90] Ibid., 470.

a highly idiosyncratic work on Kabbalah, which went under the title *Liber 777*.[91] This book is really an elaborate diagram, where all the lines are made up by the ten Kabbalistic *sephirot* and Hebrew letters, while the almost 200 columns correlate them with concepts borrowed from various religious and esoteric systems from all over the world. The result is a neatly arranged system of correspondences, showing the "hidden connection" between Roman gods, Taoist concepts, Buddhist meditations, concepts from Christian mysticism and so on, within the framework of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life. As already mentioned, this was a continuation of a project already present in the Golden Dawn. Even explicitly, *Liber 777* is the expansion of a *Book of Correspondences* which MacGregor Mathers worked on in the 1890s together with Crowley's old friend and tutor from the Golden Dawn, Allan Bennett.[92]

A couple of years later, another innovative Kabbalistic compendium, *Sepher Sephirot*, was published as a supplement to *The Equinox*.[93] This book is really a kind of dictionary of certain Hebrew words. But rather than being based on an alphabetic listing, the words are here listed on a *numeric* basis. By exploiting the alphanumeric structure of the Hebrew language (i.e., each letter also has a numerical value) it becomes possible to calculate the numerical sum of words. This corresponds with the specific exegetical technique known in kabbalistic mystical hermeneutics as *gematria*. By adding up words in this manner, it becomes possible to see hidden structures and correspondences whenever two words add up to the same number. Traditionally, this tool has been used to expand the possibilities of interpretation of scripture beyond the usual range of semantic meanings. In Scientific Illuminism, however, this gematrical method, combined with the correspondences of the *sephirot* presented in *Liber 777*, also becomes one of the most important methodological tools for testing visions.

In the instruction "Liber O",[94] Crowley explains thoroughly how one should set up a complete magical ritual, among other things for exploring the astral planes. The beginning of such astral work is similar to what we find in

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[91] The whole title being *777 vel Prolegomena Symbolica ad Systemam Sceptico-Mysticæ Viæ Explicandæ, Fundamentum Hieroglyphicum Sanctissimorum Scientiæ Summæ* ("777, or symbolical prolegomena to the system for the explication of the sceptico-mystical path, the hieroglyphical fundament of the supreme science of the most holy"). See Crowley, *Liber 777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley*.

[92] Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 64.

[93] *The Equinox* vol. 1, nr 8(1912). For a reprint, see Crowley, *Liber 777 and Other Qabalistic Writings*, part three. Interestingly, also this work was initially conceived by Allen Bennett. As Crowley writes in his *Confessions*, he only expanded on lists Bennett had already written in his magical notebooks (Crowley, *Confessions*, 213-214).

[94] Crowley, 'Liber O', 13-30.

the Golden Dawn. One should compose a ritual with a set of symbols carefully chosen from the correspondences one knows, such that all things invoked correspond to the particular force one wants to deal with. In Crowley's system, *Liber 777* becomes the guide for picking such symbols, and thereby becomes a "periodic table of magic" of sorts, telling the practitioner which "elements" to use in the experiment:

> Let us suppose that you wish to obtain knowledge of some obscure science. In [*Liber* 777] column xlv ["Magical powers"], line 12, you will find "Knowledge of Sciences." By now looking up line 12 in the other columns, you will find that the Planet corresponding is Mercury, its number eight, its lineal figures the octagon and octagram, the God who rules that planet Thoth, or in the Hebrew symbolism Tetragrammaton Adonai and Elohim Tzabaoth, its Archangel Raphael, its choir of Angels Beni Elohim, its Intelligence Tiriel, its Spirit Taphtartharath, its colours Orange (for Mercury is the Sphere of the Sephira Hod, 8) Yellow, Purple, Grey and Indigo…
>
> *You would then prepare your Place of Working accordingly.*[95]

The principle, in other words, is the same as in the Golden Dawn, but it has been made more elaborate, and, when one can rely on a complex but concise *table*, more rigidly structured.

This is how the Kabbalistic system is employed for the purpose of invocation. But what then about the visionary experience in itself, induced by the invocation—the "effect", as it were, of the experiment? We remember that Moina Mathers in her instruction emphasised the role of testing visions *during* the experience. In order to be sure that what the magician saw was actually something conjured up by the magic, and not just a product of ones own mundane imagination or memory, certain symbols were to be used to "banish" the sources of error. This element is also present in Crowley's writing, but he takes it a step further. As he writes in a later essay on astral travel:

> Apart from the regular tests—made at the time—of the integrity of any spirit, the Magician *must make a careful record of every vision*, omitting no detail; he must then make sure that it *tallies in every point* with the correspondences in *Book 777* and in "Liber D" [*Sepher Sephirot*]. Should he find (for instance) that, having invoked Mercury, his vision contains names whose numbers [by *gematria*] are Martial, or elements proper to Pisces, let him set himself most earnestly to discover the *source of error*, to correct it, and to prevent its recurrence.[96]

The occult correspondences, which appear only in the tables of *777* and in the numerical value of words and names (as listed in *Sepher Sephirot*), are utilised

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[95] Ibid., 15-16. My emphasis.

[96] Crowley, 'Notes for an Astral Atlas', 505. Emphases added. This piece was originally written in 1921 at the "Abbey of Thelema" in Sicily.

for *checking* or *verifying* the authenticity of spirits invoked. But a striking aspect of this quote is that, while one follows the procedures of the Golden Dawn, the emphasis is placed once again upon the *record* to be kept, and the checking of one's experiences *in hindsight*. In other words: *the experience itself can never be the final word.* There is still the possibility that when going through the records and checking up the names and symbolic correspondences that have been given in the visions, one will discover that one has indulged in self-deception (that is to say, if the names or symbols do not seem to show any pattern), or even been tricked by a "foul spirit" intruding the operation (that is to say, if the correspondences follow a *wrong* pattern, for instance signalling Mars when one had invoked Mercury). Only by discovering such "errors" is progress possible. In this sense, Kabbalistic hermeneutics has been transformed from being a tool opening up for expansive interpretations of a text into a "scientific" *formalism* which (allegedly) makes it possible to *quantitatively* assess certain visual experiences and say something about their validity.

As Crowley writes in his *Confessions*, the Kabbalah provided him with a method that was totally compatible with 'the agnosticism of Huxley':[97] the method it posited was "scientific" in the sense that it was concerned with the sceptical *criticism of "facts*", arrived at by empiricism (in this case, occult experiences).[98] Furthermore, Crowley saw in it a procedure for criticising and overcoming 'the historic claim of mystics' that their experiences were ineffable. Crowley insisted that he found the idea of inherently "inexpressible" ideas repugnant, because of its 'confession of incompetence and its denial of the continuity of nature'.[99] Therefore, Crowley claims to have

> subsequently developed a complete system, based on the Cabbala, by which any expression may be rendered cognizable through the language of intellect, exactly as mathematicians have done: exactly, too, as they have been obliged to recognize the existence of a new logic. I found it necessary to create a new code of the laws of thought.[100]

Thus, along lines that are similar to those of his heroes in the fields of naturalistic science, Crowley conceives of himself as expelling "ineffability", obscurantism and the like by inventing a *quantitative* method, based on a formal system (akin to logic and mathematics, in his view) derived from Kabbalistic hermeneutics.

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[97] Which, it is to be noted, had a much more sceptical tone than what is commonly meant with "agnosticism" today.

[98] Crowley, *Confessions*, 511.

[99] Ibid., 511-512.

[100] Ibid., 512.

Concluding Remarks: Psychologisation vs. Naturalisation in Crowley's Magic

In conclusion, I want to make a final remark concerning the relation between psychologisation and naturalisation. Having seen that Crowley does indeed use psychologised language to explain magical concepts at some points (see especially the discussion of the meeting with Maudsley, and the interpretation of yoga),[101] and relies heavily on the concept of an astral world which is accessible through the psyche, one could perhaps wonder why I think that the term "psychologisation" does not apply well to Crowley's system. In this respect, one should not forget that the *kind* of psychologisation of magic observed by, for instance, Hanegraaff, represents a sort of escapism from the threat of rational criticism. It will be noted that while this kind of psychologisation must rely upon certain *sui generis* and/or irreducible conceptions of the psyche, Crowley's view on psychology was mainly one designed to remain within the confines of purely naturalistic approaches. Thus, when he theorises about the "psychological nature" of spiritual attainment, it is in a *quantitative* manner, with emphasis on test and experiment and the possibility of inducing the same states by the paraphernalia of *science* instead of magic. Effectively, this sort of psychologism places magic *within* the continuum of scientific naturalism, and does not provide for an escape from it. In fact, the possibility of such psychological escapism represented by doctrines of magic that emphasise subjective experience is something which, as we have seen, Crowley abhors, actively attacks and seeks to prevent. Far from accepting that the magical realm was a "separate reality" which science could not touch, he struggled to devise scientific methods for reaching it. Whether his attempts were successful or not is a different question, but I see no reason to doubt the *sincerity* of Crowley's ambition in this direction. In this sense, then, Crowley's system can be seen as representing a *naturalisation* of magic, and the psychologisms which do show up from time to time are merely secondary, and subject to his more fundamental scientific naturalism.

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[101] For a closer discussion of this, see Pasi, 'Lo Yoga in Aleister Crowley'.

additional suggestions, proof readings and corrections. Any inaccuracies and fallacies remaining are solely my own.

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