

Historical Continuity & Legitimacy in Magical Orders

A lecture composed by Fr. Prospero, Sr. Phoenix and Fr. Ambrosius, originally delivered to the First International Thelemic Conference in Milan, Italy.

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

We shall consider our chosen topic from a double perspective; the first is more theoretical, the second more empirical. That we chose the topic at all needs some explanation. We shall argue that there is a need for magical orders, at least Thelemic magical orders, to participate, critically and with caution, in the mythos of historical continuity. We see that there is a need to avoid the twin horrors of the Scylla of historicism (in effect forgetting that 'historical continuity' is a myth, not a 'hard' empirical fact) and the Charybdis of vulgar anti-historicism (which mistake itself misconceives the nature of history, and in so doing loses sight of its use value)

However, historical continuity is only one of three terms in our theme. The second is 'Legitimacy'. We shall consider this 'legalistic' concept and why it may be of importance, arguing finally that, properly conceived, there is a need for some concept of legitimacy in magical orders and that a degree of historical continuity is part of that legitimacy.

The last of our three terms is 'Magical Orders'. We will analyse this concept as well in order to define what separates an Order from any other form of organization, and how the specifics of the particular form of cohesion that defines an Order require a particularly narrowly defined 'legitimacy' of a sort that must make reference to some kind of historical continuity.

Needless to say, behind our argument, like the Spectre of the Red Death at the feast casting his blight on *everyone's* pretensions without respect of person, is this, the Secret we *none* of us dare whisper too loudly: True Magicians don't need Orders, Orders need True Magicians.

Let us start by considering 'Historical Continuity'. We have implied at least, in the foregoing, that in our view - others are entitled to theirs - in *our* view there is no directly accessible and objectively existent Historical Continuity. The Continuity of History itself is not an a priori, but a description 'after the event'. The key concept here is 'event'. An 'event' is a conglomeration of actions and perceptions of those actions, where to perceive is itself an action, in a *finite* and *limited* segment of chronological time, the boundaries of which are definable as 'start' and 'finish' empirically. Though, outside of physics and perhaps not even there, 'start' and 'finish' are always to some extent arbitrary and defined by considerations, *pragmatic* considerations, themselves derived from an *intentionality* directed towards the phenomena observed. An integral part of the 'event' is thus the description of the event for each themselves, and for each other, by the participant observers. Battles, Plagues, Earthquakes

and the death of Mrs. Murphy's Cow are, though different in scale, all 'events'. Since they are discrete, though they may 'overlap' through simultaneity or sequence like clusters or strings of bubbles, the rich concatenation of events impinging upon an observer would very soon cause overload if it were not immediately subjected to a process of simplification-through-description. (Unless, of course, by the most rigorous of training and discipline the acting and participating observer was able to cease to describe only to simplify, and was able to describe by act the full and immediate richness and thus be able by *intention* to choose freely from the potentialities in the event, becoming the undetermined shaper of the event in progress. Yes dear hearts, we are speaking of the true magician!) This simplified enveloping description by an individual of the complex of impinging events upon them becomes the determining structure of the apparent continuity of the observer from event to event which that observer calls 'me'. In order to preserve this 'continuity' against threat, objects are abstracted from events and endowed by the description with the power of the event that they signify. Crudely the objects are 'physical/material', a ring, a book, a shoe, a pair of underpants, the body, fetishes all, that as possessions define 'me' as 'I', the 'Ego and his own' to borrow a phrase, more correctly 'the Ego as his own'. More subtle extensions of this are brought into play when 'property' is extended to non-material or 'intellectual property'. The continuity of Ego defined by possession of fetishes as the signifiers of personal history is the definition of Identity.

Even allowing for differences of point of view a number of participant observers temporarily sharing an event are bound together by the event in which they share for the duration of the event. If over time the descriptions used by a group of observers are harmonized, perhaps homogenised is a better term, by, say, a sequence of similar events, then a collective ego arises, a 'we' deriving from an 'us' through an 'ours'. Like an Ego, this collective identity has an innate and immanent need to defend itself against 'Other'. its means of so doing is its 'History'. But this History, this continuity-in-description, is not the real but the Mythic, the Symbolic, and a 'symbolic' sustained by the possession of a fetish or fetishes around which intentionality can be bent or warped into self-reference.

Those of you who have remained awake through this monologue so far will have, we trust, realised that the argument presented is very compressed; time constrains us and robs our argument of its beauty, power and scope. Nor have we pandered to intellectual insecurities, ours or yours, by hanging our convictions on the peg of lists of names of authorities, publications and so forth. Anyone conversant with the history of ideas in the last 200 years or so, and the last three decades in particular, will recognise our 'place of coming forth'. If you don't, well, 'Those degrees, even if not worked, are open to you in the Libraries of the Order' or should be. But we digress.

From a certain point of view the process of initiation can be seen as a 'natural' (so called) ego being 'deconstructed' and being replaced with a deliberately (as opposed to contingently) created magical identity or ego; this is brought to breaking point and transcended by the power of the dialectic of the contradictions of its own absurdity into *Power* as the non-attached power to

describe, to spell and grammatically construct (yes, spells and grimoires) of the true magician, intimated, in parenthesis, earlier in the foregoing. An Order then, challenging the 'natural' ego, may use its 'magical collective identity', its mythos of historical continuity, as a source wherefrom, by osmosis, the candidate can create his or her own magical ego under guided and structured conditions. If however that Historical Continuity which is the Order's is not contradictory, is not finally absurd, even though it *must* also be noble and consistent, then the candidate cannot finally transcend the Order, the School becomes a Prison, however much that Prison be in appearance like a five star hotel. In the first instance Historical Continuity is a proper and ethical pedagogical device, in the second it is decidedly not so.

Now to 'Legitimacy'. The legalistic concept originates mythologically when Nimrod, that Mighty Hunter, taught the Sons and Daughters of Men 'mine' and 'thine'. Historical Continuity, as we have argued, resolves into the reproduction of Ego by the possession of objectified memories of described events in the form of fetishised objects, material or intellectual property endowed by description with meaning above and beyond any immediate practical use value. Legitimacy then is a 'second-order' fetish object, the power of which is to endow first-order fetish objects with the quality 'mine' or at least 'not-thine'. Its derivation is a re-cognition in the description of the empirical evidence that NN has an X, and has had an X for a continuous 'historical time', implying that NN should have the very same X in perpetuity, in other words 'has a right to it', and by further implication the *sole* right to it. If NN, like most of us, is at heart temporarily mortal, then also NN has the right to pass on X to NN2 their progeny or heirs by the same logic, since NN2 is in their time 'in loco' NN. Legitimacy in its logical empirical structure thus requires quasi-demonstrable historical continuity of possession. If however degeneration occurs, the logic turns back on itself and MM's possession of X, howsoever achieved, is threaded into the mythos of the Historical Continuity to act as a quasi-demonstration that MM is 'now' to all intents and purposes 'NN in the living flesh'. The heir ceases to be heir and becomes, in concept but not in fact, Avatar, and as such the apparent sole living embodiment of the very Historical Continuity from which Legitimacy is assumed to derive. As such it is logical, if pathological, at this point in the evolution to claim sole and eternal right to decide legitimacy, the circle closes, even if the now hollow trappings of election or nomination are retained.

There is an alternative and real legitimacy; it is established in each instance by contrast in non-hollow, meaningful electoral or nominational process conducted in business way between individuals who recognise themselves as equal before the contract. But that is another discussion, and this form of legitimacy is rare and precious indeed, nor does it require possession, only stewardship of the fetishes of the collective involved. The captain of a pirate vessel, for example, was first among equals, and only captain for as long as he could do the job demonstrably well. His authority was also only absolute in times of harmony amongst the crew, or outside of the job of actually doing the raiding. Were there to be a conflict, his Quartermaster would assume command. In the end days of the Roman Empire, the Emperor was the field marshal of the country's armed forces, and answerable to the Senate. The

Praetorian Guard, as well as being his personal protectors, were responsible for removing him in case of incompetence or incapacity.

A second order fetish is one where any real use value of first order is absent, the use value is fully and only in the realm of the symbolic, the clearest example of this is the religious icon. True Names are in themselves descriptions. History is an assimilation of descriptions-become-names-as-icons, truly a Necronomicon, an icon of dead names, and Historical Continuity become fetish in its own right is in the case necromancy or in the extreme case, necrophilia. There is a broader sense of necromancy beyond the 'dark art' of talking with the dead to gain information, namely the point where it crosses over from a Magical to a Religious form and that is the worship of the Ancestor, particularly where the ancestor is deified through myth and practise. The Loa and the Orishas of the Afro American religions, the Japanese cult of Shinto, are examples of institutional necromancy.

What is seen more clearly and more often in the institutionalised religio-magical practice of necromancy is the desire to acquire virtue by osmosis from the mere association with and proximity to the 'virtuous' dead. This is the mechanism which underlies the cults of the 'Catholic' saints as 'present' in their reliques.

This process of the osmosis of virtue by necromantic transfer, at least of an undeclared popular belief in such a transfer was well documented in Argentina at the time of Eva Peron's death, it lay behind the *genuine* emotive response, however stage managed, by the people of the Great Helmsman Mao Tse Tung, and the Great Leader Kim Sung, as earlier by the people of the USSR for Little Father Stalin, for these monsters were by (their own) definition the paragon and paradigm of virtue. Moreover, such popular mass necromancy bordering on necrophilia is not limited to oriental cultures already tuned to the cult of the great ancestor, nor the hot emotiveness of Hispano-Americans. It can happen in cold-blooded, reserved England, as witness the grotesque excesses that we saw accompany the death and burial of Diana, Erstwhile Princess of Wales.

What then is a Magical Order, what is its unique and defining character? An Order we contend is an organisation founded and conceived for the protection, mediation and clarification of a Secret. In the case of Magical Orders that Secret is Magic(k) and Magic(k) is the technology of Gnosis. We of Thelema are party to that variant of Gnosis called antinomianism, we admit of no ultimate duality, and our Secret, like all good secrets is out there in public like a candle in daylight, so obvious it is hidden from all who do not already implicitly hold it. As Thelemites we should not accept any legitimacy in our Order(s) but that of freely entered and freely maintained contractual bond, no authority except that transferred from the whole to the centre by contract, maintained by contract, the contract renewed in each act of initiation. If this is forgotten, if authority is my mythic heirship only and freedom is reduced to fiefdom it is not a Thelemic Order but an order of slaves, however deluded that they are the shock troops of freedom. 'Success is your proof' and the only success that legitimises the existence of an order is the real and

demonstrable change in its initiates instigated at each initiation. We contend that a close study of the rituals of O.T.O., even in the truncate form published by Francis King, make it clear that Crowley/Baphomet/Therion intended just such a contractual structure and not the new feudalism in 'his' Order. A Sufi saint once said that there are no ultimate authorities, not even God, there are only sources, even God; we add that there are no authorities worthy of the name who are not a living source, all else is trappings, mere sound and fury signifying nothing, or perhaps just a noisy relic in the Historical Continuity.

Having concluded our theoretical considerations, let us now look at the symptomal level, some would say the empirical aspect of our chosen scheme. Let us begin by looking at how continuity and legitimacy work in the everyday world, and why they are important in that broader context.

It was Proudhon who said 'property is impossible'. There is nothing in the material world that cannot be lost, stolen or taken away. Ownership of anything is a matter of who had it last and how hard they are prepared to hold on to it.

When we grow old and weak, we rely on our offspring to do our fighting for us. We have laws, ostensibly to ensure that the fighting is done fairly. Inheritance, which is the typical instance of historical continuity, is the securing under law of the right of one's descendants to benefit from one's own work. This is the genetic imperative, pure and simple. We favour our own line over others', and we tend to think that we will live on in our children.

It is the same with kingship, which is the other obvious example of 'lineal descentance'. If so-and-so was a mighty ruler and we all benefited from his reign, we had better stick to his descendants to reign after him, to prolong our winning streak. Again, we come back to genetics, and the preservation of desirable characteristics. The history of royalty is similar to that of breeding racehorses.

We find that the behaviour of magical orders is strikingly similar to conventional social groups. Magickal orders tend to act like royal families, or to be more precise and less polite, like American WASPs attempting to trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower, or American tourists trying to find their Scottish clan tartan. Let us look at why they should want to. We shall use the familiar figure of Aleister Crowley as the lynchpin here.

How does it benefit me to prove that 'my' OTO is the same one that Crowley joined? Is it simply the thrill of being able to trace my lineage back to the Beast, an experience which many a young Magician has rightly enjoyed? This is an issue of morale, and is not to be lightly discounted. We are on the cusp of two Aeons; the age of self-reliance not yet fully upon us, and it may be that the newer Brethren will be comforted and enheartened to think themselves kinsmen of the Prophet.

I might think to myself that since Crowley was an admirable magician, surely his descendants and heirs would be as well; but I would be deluding myself if I

thought that way. The offspring of excellent men are rarely excellent themselves. Shakespeare wrote a play called *King Lear*, which illustrates this unfortunate fact.

So what about the supposition that Crowley was in possession of the 'true' secret of the Ninth Degree, and that this secret is one's birthright, if one can but prove oneself a magickal descendant of Crowley? Secrets are the intellectual property of Orders; yet the secret of the Ninth Degree was acknowledged by Crowley himself to be blatantly obvious to any with eyes to see. He himself was granted the Ninth Degree after he had spontaneously worked out the Secret, and was prepared to offer the same dignity to anyone who made the same discovery, as his letters to Kenneth Grant explicitly demonstrate. It seems that the Ninth Degree of OTO is the right of anyone who holds the Secret, not vice versa!

The material property of Orders, such as copyrights held, is another matter. This has to do with the earthly and temporal condition, not the spiritual Authority, of any given Order. To confuse the two is to make the imbecile and catastrophic mistake of the Caliphate OTO under its present leadership. It does not matter who has Crowley's copyrights. It does not matter who has Crowley's ring. It does not matter who has the original manuscript of the Book of the Law. To ascribe special spiritual significance to material goods simply because of their associations with holy figures is to regress to the age of Chaucer's Pardoner and his 'holy reliques'. Thelema is very clear on this point. It does not matter if Boleskine itself is destroyed: 'an invisible house there standeth'. The only artefact mentioned in Liber AL is the Stele, which is still in Cairo, so far as I know.

This is not to say that relics may not play a significant part in the unfolding of the Aeon; there are many instances on record of the discovery of items at times of moment, such as the finding of Crowley's ring in a drawer at the Germer ranch by Grady McMurtry. Such events may in my view be rightly interpreted as 'signs from above'. However, it is the *event* that is important, and the *message*, not necessarily the item. The Stele of Revealing had the label 666... does anyone care what happened to that gematrically significant label? The OTO may have been favoured by Hoor all those years ago, but that does not mean that they are still so favoured. Present real success is the only proof.

So much for lineal succession as the vehicle of property transfer in Orders, be that property intellectual or material. Secrets, i.e. intellectual property, are nothing but the fruit of research, and research can be duplicated, particularly when the likes of Crowley made it absurdly easy to do so. Material property can make magickal work easier, but does not necessarily in itself have any magickal significance. So is there anything else that can be transmitted from one person to another?

Again we must turn to the Book of the Law for guidance in this. There is no magickal heir to the Beast. AL II v.76 remains unsolved. The one clear and unambiguous case of lineal transmission - 'one to follow thee' - has not yet

been fulfilled. We have had the Beast with seven heads, but the second Beast, that has two horns like a lamb and speaks like a dragon, is yet to come. We cannot know whether it ever will.

Authority at the level of the Beast or the Scarlet Woman may not be claimed until that time; no, not even by the likes of Mr. Amado Crowley, who seems to think that his alleged genetic kinship with the Beast entitles him to have something to say about the Prophet's work. Fortunately, in Amado's case, the worthlessness of his work is obvious from the start and guards us against taking him at all seriously, should we be tempted to do so. One person grasps at the relics of Crowley's jewellery box, another begs us to believe that he had his origins in Crowley's scrotum... was there ever a time when there was *dignity* in the legitimacy contest?

One occasion does come to mind. It is obvious to all that the current leadership of the Caliphate OTO is concerned with preventing any other claims to that name, even to the extent that its Grand Treasurer General denies that it is the Caliphate OTO and naively expects all and sundry to call it simply '*the* OTO'. The first Caliph was cut from very different cloth indeed. Grady McMurtry's legal battle with Marcelo Motta was about defending his order's right to call itself OTO, not about attacking the rights of others to do the same. It was Motta's exclusivist stance which made this necessary, and it is deeply ironic that the Caliphate have now become just as exclusivist as Motta's organization tried to be.

Indeed, however much one admires Crowley/Baphomet and accepts Therion as the Prophet, and we do, it has to be said that even Crowley's succession from Reuss is not so free of legalistic challenge as those who depend wholly on 'historical continuity' for legitimacy would wish us to believe. According to certain reliable sources, a letter allegedly from Reuss which gives details of Crowley's expulsion from OTO is currently being authenticated. We neither know nor care how AC came by the authority of OHO, by the way; it is what he proceeded to DO with this authority that we deem significant; namely, that he used it as a tool for establishing the New Aeon!

We would do well, all of us, to learn from the errors of the relic-hunters and those desperate to acquire magickal legitimacy from the dwindling shade of Crowley: but we would also do well to avoid the pitfalls prevalent amongst those chaotic magicians who discard the whole question of continuity as irrelevant. Part of the point of historical continuity is to build something that will last through time, if needs be. In these hectic times of disposability and built-in redundancy, very little seems permanent or even stable. Yes, one can be that kind of magician if one wants, rolling the dice and saying to hell with tomorrow; but anyone who has developed any worthwhile magickal ability knows the responsibilities that come with it. This is not to say that an 'ahistoric' school of magic of the highest order cannot be built; Frater U.: D.: 's 'Ice Magic' is a case in point but such a school by its very nature is not an Order but a looser project built round a discourse or method.

Authority in the A.:A.: and orders like it is another matter altogether. Though the A.:A.: has at times been concerned with the issuing of charters and authority that seems at first glance to rest upon the same, it is not nor has ever been that kind of Order; it has to do with individual attainment. A person who has truly attained a Grade can recognise another as having attained that Grade, and in a praemonstrated A.:A.: would have a certificate to indicate that they too had been similarly recognised - but this is a matter of technical qualification, not of governmental authority. One achieves no authority with one's new Grade (beyond that relevant to one's own personal work, that is) except the confirmation that one is now, by dint of experience, able to recognize another's similar attainment, and confirm that in its turn.

Whilst on the question of A.:A.: it has to be said that when Fr. N.N. (Gerald Yorke) ceased to be Fr. N.N. and became a Buddhist, there went the last manifest Praemonstrator. Only an agreement between the various 'lines' and those whose authority rests on unchallengeable achievement can legitimately (in the contractual sense) rectify this situation. Yet we see, even if implicitly, claims to Praemonstration being made, in Breeze's 'Equinox III.IV not least. In that example the overextended 'historical legitimacy' claims re: OTO are being generalized in an attempt to annex A.:A.:. For this to be legitimate (which we contest most strongly) then the 'Avatar' would have to be amongst us (which we contest even more strongly).

Ladies and Gentlemen, we are all concerned with Orders that are, at their core, magickal. We can agree, one hopes, that some kind of *authority to initiate* is the only real magickal power that can be passed on within the context of a Magickal order.

What is initiation? The reorganization of a person so that they are more coherent and purposeful than they used to be, and their participation in a company of people who have undergone a similar degree of reorganization. Anything else is psychodrama, window-dressing, sugar on the pill. Initiation is the system whereby an Order reproduces.

Ultimately, it is the Current that really initiates people. The tramp next to you on the bus may be a Master of the Temple, for all you know: 'it may be that yonder beggar is a King'. For that matter, and speaking technically, any person whatsoever can claim the Grade of Master of the Temple, and found their own Mystery School, without the need for contact with any other initiate. With all this in mind, hasn't the notion of historical succession been rather blown out of the water?

It might be asked, quite fairly, why we in the OTO Foundation bothered with starting a new lineage of OTO instead of just kicking off our own totally new Magickal Order. In point of fact, we did not start a 'new' lineage, we accepted a lineage that had lain dormant. It's true, the difficulties associated with being an OTO are legion; not least the danger of being tarred with the same brush as certain others, or having people mistake us for them, which would indeed be unfortunate. But with all that, there is one positive advantage in being an

OTO, which we have touched on before, and that is the venerability of the name itself.

Venerability is, of course, largely a subjective matter. Older, more experienced, more cynical magicians - the core of any Magickal Order, who have lost all the illusions they ever had and STILL stick to it - generally couldn't give a damn about this kind of thing. All cats are grey in the dark, as they say in France. But to the young, idealistic, enthusiastic magician, the label is important. There is nothing intrinsically special about the letters OTO, though those with too much time on their hands are welcome to sit up into the night playing with their gematria. There isn't anything particularly special about a nation's flag, either. Most of them are simple dyed bits of cloth. But they become invested with meaning. If you can show that you're part of a movement with its roots deep in history, you can draw strength from that, if you need to at certain stages of development.

There are many OTOs, all equally legitimate; or rather, all equally unable to prove sole legitimacy. The title OTO has thus become a family name. The original parent has spawned many children. It is folly to act as if there was an inheritance which only one of us was entitled to, or as if only one of us was entitled to bear the name.

Material property goes the way of material things; intellectual property is superseded by new research. All that can really be conveyed from generation to generation is identity; the family name, the family face. We don't give a damn who holds the Crowley copyrights - they will be public domain before we are a twentieth of the way into this Aeon. We do give a damn that we are OTO. Not THE OTO, because no such animal exists, but AN OTO. Nobody has the right to prohibit our use of the name, or any other legitimate claimant's; nobody has the right to claim the name of the OTO for themselves alone.

Love is the law, love under Will.

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