

# Merging the Principles of Occultism and Anarchism



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## Merging the Principles of Occultism and Anarchism

The "occult," from the Latin word for "hidden," is a generalized term used to describe typically clandestine studies in philosophy, spirituality, religion, and/or magical practices. The long, detailed and complex history of the occult has been misunderstood, overlooked or ridiculed because of its tendency to fuel human imagination with its mysterious nature and end up in fictional works, baseless conspiracy theories or anti-occult agendas. Because the occult is subject to misinformation, misunderstanding and extensive publicity, it has been dismissed from being an important field of history and modern scholarly study.<sup>1</sup> A primary reason for the neglect of the occult on behalf of scholars is likely because Western "occultism" is actually comprised of many various traditions, belief systems, ancient religious elements and scientific approaches to the study of nature, which make "occultism," difficult to define and interpret. In turn, in order for one to better understand occultism, one must delve into the various components and traditions that make up western occultism.

There are some movements and terms within the occult that should be regarded as particularly important to the edifice of Western occultism. "Esotericism" (oftentimes interchanged with the term "occultism" in many sources) is one important term under the umbrella of occultism that should be well-defined before engaging in the scholarly study of the occult. The "Western Esoteric Tradition" or "esotericism" is, like the term "occultism," a word with many meanings. What is "esoteric" consists of mysterious studies, "teachings or facts that are 'secret' because they are deliberately hidden," accepting and striving to understand the inherent mystery in all things, "'Gnosis,' understood as a mode of knowledge emphasizing the 'experimental,' the mythical, the symbolic, rather than forms of expression of a dogmatic and discursive order," and the intention to restore dead but useful spiritual material from ages past (the "primordial tradition").<sup>2</sup> However, unlike the term "occult" which can consist of many

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1 Wouter J. Hanegraaf, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

2 Antoine Faivre, *Western Esotericism: A Concise History*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2010), 1-5.

loose and freelance practitioners of magic, the Western Esoteric Traditions or "esotericism" should be understood as a bundle of traditions that were generally embraced by or analyzed by the whole of occultists throughout Western culture. Major examples of esoteric movements are Hermeticism and Kabbalism, which both greatly contributed to shaping Western esotericism and esoteric ideals among occult individuals.

Hermeticism is the philosophical movement based on the writings and works of Hermes Trismegistus, supposedly a Greek philosopher from Alexandria (representing both Greek Hermes and Egyptian Thoth, though "Hermes Trismegistus" was likely many authors under the same name). Many of the major aspects of the Western Esoteric Tradition are attributed to Hermes Trismegistus and/or Hermeticism, such as alchemy,<sup>3</sup> astrology, study of nature, and theurgy.<sup>4</sup> An important element to Hermeticism is its emphasis on universality, which in turn allows for syncretic and tolerant viewpoints on a multitude of religious/spiritual systems (both ancient and contemporary) that allow for an integration of belief systems in order to found a solid conclusion.<sup>5</sup> This religious toleration is likely the reason that Hermeticism has remained "occult" or "hidden" throughout history since the Renaissance.

Kabbalism, or study of the Kabbalah, is another philosophical movement that was extremely important in building the foundation for the Western Esoteric Tradition. With roots in Jewish mysticism, the Kabbalah gained much popularity in the Renaissance and was integrated into Neoplatonic philosophical systems and Christian theology on behalf of esoteric philosophers.<sup>6</sup> The Kabbalah is a symbolic approach to understanding the composition of the universe with an emphasis on symbology, numerology, Gematria (numeric values of Hebrew letters), elements and different planes of existence (or non-existence). To many Kabbalists, all things in the universe are somehow tied to or integrated within the symbolic Kabbalistic "tree of life," which is a visual graph utilized to represent

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3 Hanegraaf, 192.

4 Faivre, 25.

5 Faivre, 35-36.

6 Faivre, 31-32.

Kabbalistic philosophy. Though the definitions of terms like "occult," "esoteric," "Hermetic," and "Kabbalah," are much more complex than the definitions and vague descriptions provided, their general concepts must be understood in order to understand their importance to occultism and their ties to the political history of the West.

Similar to the occult, anarchism, a major political ideology, is yet another misunderstood aspect of Western culture that has been subject to misuse of terminology, misunderstanding, disparagement, and lack of integral study among scholars. Comparable to occultism, anarchism is a "rich, profound and original body of ideas and values,"<sup>7</sup> that consists of many intricacies and complex concepts. Like occultism and the various elements of occultism, anarchism should be clearly defined in order to pursue study on the matter. Anarchism has oftentimes been "dismissed as inherently terroristic and nihilistic," as well as filled with "turmoil, license and violence."<sup>8</sup> However, among anarchist theorists themselves, this description of anarchism is not at all the case.

The origin of the contemporary anarchist movement is oftentimes attributed to the writings of William Godwin, who, in 1783, published *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*. The work is still regarded as being extremely important to the development of anarchist theory and contains important principles that are essential to understanding what anarchism truly is. William Godwin begins *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* with a set of numbered ethics that he called the "Summary of Principles."<sup>9</sup> The "principles" are a set of ideological declarations that uphold the foundations of modern anarchism. Godwin describes the existence of government as a mistake in order to create order from chaos, and that mistake has resulted in a vast amount of injustices on behalf of the governmental systems that humankind has devised.<sup>10</sup> Rather than enduring the

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7 Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible: A History of Anarchism* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010) Amazon Kindle version, location 247.

8 Marshall, location 151.

9 William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness*, fourth edition (London: J. Watson, 1842), XIV.

10 Godwin, *Enquiry*, XIV.

injustices and controls of governmental/authoritative entities, true justice should be measured by the "universality" of "happiness."<sup>11</sup> In order to pursue this endeavor, intellectual development must ensue which leads to soundness and a lack of prejudice among individuals which in turn leads to a "freedom of enquiry."<sup>12</sup> Rather than anarchism being a state of chaos and violence, Godwin argues that a government-free existence should be a progressive movement by design and should result in "free will," among the masses, free from control by others and free from unnecessary control by the whims of others.<sup>13</sup>

These major "principles" of anarchist theory are still very much in place among anarchists today and have been perpetuated throughout more contemporary anarchist works that claim to be more blatantly "anarchist." Peter Marshall (an anarchist historian), in his book *Demanding the Impossible* (a contemporary work published in 2010), describes anarchism in a similar light. Rather simply, Peter Marshall defines an anarchist as "one who rejects all forms of external government and the State and believes that society and individuals would function without them."<sup>14</sup> Marshall's straightforward definition of an anarchist retains the major elements of Godwin's principles and presents them in a clear-cut manner as: rejection of government/authority, functionality as the universal means to happiness and humankind's success, and individuality as the basis to improve the self, community and will.<sup>15</sup> One could argue that Marshall's contemporary definition of an anarchist stems directly from Godwin's (as it most assuredly does), and Godwin's "principles" are seemingly the earliest source for anarchist ideals. However, many of the ideals found throughout William Godwin's *Enquiry* were not new ideas to his time and could be found in sources important to the Western Esoteric Tradition by major esoteric philosophers.

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11 Godwin, *Enquiry*, XV

12 Godwin, *Enquiry*, XVI.

13 Godwin, *Enquiry*, 172-182.

14 Marshall, location 233.

15 Marshall, location 250.

Though scholars have either neglected or argued against the correlation of the two, occultism and anarchism are inherently adaptable to one another and have had entwined ideologies since the Renaissance. Neoplatonic movements during the Renaissance triggered occult ideologies that match those found in later anarchic sources. Renaissance thinkers such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola came to occult conclusions (based on much evidence from theological and philosophical information) that had the tendency to threaten central authority to those that held it during the Renaissance. As the Western Esoteric Traditions of the Renaissance blended with Enlightenment-era science, much of occult mysticism was replaced with attempts at rational thought and during this time the Anarchist Movement was birthed. However, once again during the 19th and early-20th centuries, occultism and anarchism became conjoined, as evident in the writings of the occultist Aleister Crowley, who challenged all authoritative entities.

Regardless of an apparent 19th-century split between spirituality and anarchist thought (as evident in William Godwin's works), esoteric ideals have resulted in anarchic reactions by certain individuals toward authoritative entities since the Renaissance, which is the case with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola in the Renaissance and Aleister Crowley in the 19th-20th centuries. The ideologies within anarchist theory and the esoteric belief systems formulated by Pico and Crowley are not all that different, and rather, are strikingly identical. Thus, some occult belief systems such as Pico's syncretic esotericism and Aleister Crowley's religion known as "Thelema" are intrinsically enmeshed with anarchist belief systems (such as William Godwin's outlook), despite their apparent separation or irrelevance to each other. Modern anarchism owes itself to the traditions of esoteric philosophy prior to William Godwin, and, despite their apparent separation in the 19th century, stayed on the same track and came to the same anarchic conclusions whilst becoming separate popularized movements. During the Renaissance, revival of Platonic thought (Neoplatonism) and humanism combined with esoteric teachings such as Kabbalistic mysticism and/or Hermeticism paved the way for certain individuals, like

Pico, to strive toward mystical self-perfection on their own behalf without the intrusion of authoritative entities such as the Catholic Church. During this time period, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola demonstrated the height of Renaissance esoteric individuality on the verge of anarchic conclusions but was hindered by the Church, which acted as the form of external government more so than actual government during that time. Much later after the Renaissance, the revival of esotericism and a spark in philosophical anarchist movements both occurred in the 19th century, but as separate entities, both with similar messages in some regards but differing in the subject of the purpose of spirituality. During this time period, Aleister Crowley represents the pinnacle of Western esotericism, but he was simultaneously a believer in anarchist ideals as his self-invented belief system was an amalgam of the two (while preserving the Western Esoteric Tradition from the Renaissance).

The correlation of occultism and anarchism has not been subject to much study, as they are seemingly regarded as completely separate philosophical movements with different aspects and different histories (esotericism rooted in spirituality while anarchism is rooted in political history). The apparent commonality between the two should in fact be studied, then perhaps the two could be better understood-- the nature and qualities of occultism and anarchism are oftentimes ambiguous and shrouded in confusion. Those that have looked into the two combined are seemingly uncomfortable with the matter, such as Marco Pasi, who has argued that Aleister Crowley did not have an anarchic outlook because Crowley believed in Platonic form of cosmic order.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps unknown to Pasi, anarchists (such as Godwin and Marshall) also believe in order, whether cosmic or not. The incompatibility of anarchism and occultism (as occasionally presented by Pasi) is in fact an illusion based on a misunderstanding of both.

In order to understand the compatibility that is actually present, one must trace the origins of anarchism and occultism back to the Renaissance and investigate philosophical movements such as

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<sup>16</sup> Marco Pasi, *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* (Durham, UK: Acument Publishing Ltd., 2013), 49.

Neoplatonism. "Neoplatonism" is a generalized term used to describe the ideas which have been built and expanded upon the philosophies of Plato. More specifically, Neoplatonism stems from Plato's teachings, but also includes many philosophical outlooks that have reinforced or added to Plato's philosophies, such as the writings of Plotinus.<sup>17</sup> Neoplatonism is comprised of many complex and intricate ideas about the nature of existence, ontology and cosmology. According to Pauliina Remes, Neoplatonism is "the understanding of metaphysics as a hierarchy of intelligible and sensible layers of which the higher is the explanatory, as well as the better and more powerful."<sup>18</sup> Neoplatonism can also be defined as "a commitment to the psychological as an irreducible explanatory category and the connected dogma of the immortality of the soul."<sup>19</sup> In other words, Neoplatonists understand that perfection must exist and can be achieved because perfection can be intelligibly perceived and understood as a concept and is the basis for all things in existence as well as the connection between humans on earth with a universal divinity.

Generally speaking, Medieval cosmology was governed by the Aristotelean idea of a "Great Chain of Being," in which everything was part of a grand hierarchy planned by and before the perfection of God. The "Great Chain of Being" was an understanding of the universe as a hierarchical order in which the lowest end of the hierarchy was the realm of Hell, then the hierarchy continued through the animal kingdom, then through human existence on earth, and then all the way to the perfected realm of God and Heaven ("the highest possible kind of creature") at the top of the hierarchy.<sup>20</sup> Human beings were not mobile on the cosmic hierarchy of the "Great Chain of Being" as their place, purpose and existence on Earth was all part of a grand plan on behalf of God. Attempting to alter oneself or adjust the "links" on the "Great Chain of Being" was understood as a direct violation of

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17 Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism* (Durham, UK: Acument Publishing Ltd., 2008), 3.

18 Remes, 3.

19 Remes, 3.

20 Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 59.



God's plan and as a movement toward the "general dissolution of the cosmical order," which would result in the world "ceasing to be 'full,'" and "be in any sense 'coherent.'"<sup>21</sup>

By the time of the Renaissance, Neoplatonists would alter the way that the "Great Chain of Being" and the organization of the universe was understood. The Renaissance gave rise to humanism, which valued development and betterment of mankind, "patriotism," "active citizenship," scholarly learning, writing, rhetoric, and art.<sup>22</sup> Very importantly, humanists encouraged attainment of knowledge from "Greek and Latin texts" and emphasized that the Greek and Latin sources "contained instructive and relevant material that could not be found in the Bible."<sup>23</sup> The emphasis placed on Greek texts allowed for a resurrection of Plato's teachings as well as the Platonists that followed him, such as Plotinus. In the Renaissance, the idea of a cosmic hierarchy was maintained; however, the nature of that hierarchy was subject to re-analysis by those who had resurrected the teachings of the early Greek Platonists. Neoplatonism became a prominent philosophical stance during the Renaissance that altered the way people viewed the "Great Chain of Being" and what their place was within it. To the Neoplatonists of the Renaissance, the place of human beings within the "Great Chain of Being" could be altered because human beings could envision perfection and ideal circumstances and do their best to achieve them, thus placing them closer to the entity at the top of the hierarchy. By separating the immortal, free and intelligent soul from the insubstantial shell of the body,<sup>24</sup> Neoplatonists came to the conclusion that humans could find a "way up" the hierarchy through "the conception of a self-transcending and generative Goodness,"<sup>25</sup> and by striving toward an ideal existence, humanist principles, visions of perfection, excellence, analyzation of the soul, and "cosmic unity."<sup>26</sup>

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21 Lovejoy, 60.

22 David Gilmour, *The Pursuit of Italy: A History of a Land, Its Regions and Their Peoples* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 76-77.

23 Gilmour, 77.

24 Remes, 99-100.

25 Lovejoy, 84.

26 Remes, 3.

Though Neoplatonism should not be described as anarchic or occult in any way, Neoplatonism should be understood as a historical gateway toward anarchism and occultism. Because Neoplatonist ideals allowed for a reevaluation of metaphysics on behalf of theologians and philosophers, Neoplatonists questioned the connection of humans to nature, God, and each other. Concepts within Neoplatonism could indeed lead to rebellion-- If one was able to regard the Great Chain of Being as not fixed and one was able achieve perfection, it could render the hierarchies on Earth useless because one could surpass hierarchical "links" through independent action. Though applied to Christian principles in order to stay non-heretical and avoid persecution, the esoteric and occult principles of the Renaissance could not have existed without Neoplatonism. Engrained in the philosophy are elements of a volatile cosmic hierarchy, a universal soul and methods of "gaining access to a supersensible reality, [and] constructing or describing this reality in its structure."<sup>27</sup> Such principles would have been considered on the verge of or as outright heresy if not applied to Christian principles during the Renaissance because the Catholic Church valued a strictly-situated hierarchy (people under Church, which is in turn under God, as well as the Catholic Church acting as the necessary link between people and God). The Catholic Church emphasized an organized hierarchical system in order to redeem the soul, and believed that analysis of the "supersensible realities" in question was strictly the duty of the Church. Therefore, some Neoplatonic principles, philosophies, thoughts, and teachings that evolved during the Renaissance became what should be regarded as the "occult" or hidden, in order to avoid persecution.

Some Neoplatonists during the Renaissance, however, reconciled the principles of Neoplatonism with Catholicism, such as Marsilio Ficino. Ficino founded a Neoplatonic university in Italy based on the style of Ancient Greek universities which was intended to replace the previous scholastic universities that operated with an Aristotelian outlook.<sup>28</sup> By combining the ancient Platonic

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<sup>27</sup> Faivre, 26.

<sup>28</sup> Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola: The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2-1498*, vol. 78 of *The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1500* (Boston, MA: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 206.

principles (such as the immortality of the soul and the achievement of perfection) with evidence from the Bible, Ficino came to the conclusion that Neoplatonism was in fact justifiable because Biblical accounts of mankind's interactions with God prove that mankind can achieve more perfect states of being and that God determines the fate of one's immortal soul.<sup>29</sup> To Marsilio Ficino, Neoplatonic perfection was proved to be true because Jesus Christ was representative of achieving "total perfection" as a man.<sup>30</sup> Such claims about Neoplatonic philosophy were easier to integrate within the Church, as they were still compliant with many church doctrines. Notably, Ficino's Neoplatonic system of Christianity was subject to a form of pre-determinism, as God decided the fate of one's immortal soul and chose who would achieve true perfection. In Marsilio Ficino's *De Vita*, Ficino wrote that if one wants to be closer to God, or the "lord of your horoscope" that one should discover and pursue the path that God chose for him/her (their "natural profession") rather than being one who "subjects himself, by a profession contrary to his nature" which is set by God.<sup>31</sup> In this case, if God determined perfection and the Catholic Church was the chosen entity on Earth to represent God, technically it remained the duty of the Church to help individuals achieve perfection, which to them, was compliance to God and Church. Ficino's system of Christian astrological pre-determinism and discovering one's "natural profession" could be easily utilized by the Church in order to keep the Church functional in its position as the checkpoint to Heaven. However, not all Renaissance Neoplatonists agreed with the pre-deterministic principles as founded by Marsilio Ficino.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, a Renaissance occultist, theologian and philosopher was a Neoplatonist from the Renaissance who disagreed entirely with Ficino's viewpoints. Pico took an opposite approach to Ficino's Neoplatonic ideals in that he didn't embrace astrological and theological principles of predeterminism. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola argued that humans create their own

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<sup>29</sup> Edelheit, 208.

<sup>30</sup> Edelheit, 208.

<sup>31</sup> Marsilio Ficino, "On Life (De Vita)," 1490, in *The Renaissance Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Atchity (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 70.

destiny, which was ordained by God himself, and that humans could and should "fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer."<sup>32</sup> Compared to Ficino's viewpoints, which were restrictive (as everything was predetermined and one was supposed to discover their role in the world as determined by God and Church), Pico's viewpoints promoted freedom of the will and argued that humans should utilize that freedom to "practice" and carry out an "aspiration to the angelic way of life."<sup>33</sup> To Pico, Neoplatonism was a creed of freedom that allowed humans to determine their own path within the Great Chain of Being.

An interesting element to the foundations of Pico's arguments was his attempt to integrate all knowledge that was available to him, including many major elements from the Western Esoteric Tradition. Pico can be described as the definitive Renaissance occultist because he embraced many fundamental ideals within the occult, such as Jewish Mysticism (Kabbalism and Gematria),<sup>34</sup> Hermetic principles and the writings of Hermes Trismegistus,<sup>35</sup> numerology,<sup>36</sup> and more. Whereas Pico's famous "Oration, on the Dignity of Man" was a grand declaration of human freedom of the will, the *900 Theses* was the comprehensive syncretic work to reinforce his declaration with all different aspects of knowledge, even controversial ones, such as Islamic sources or other heretical sources (Jewish, ancient, occult, etc.). His *Platonick Discourse upon Love* was intended to be a guide to living life that allowed a person to achieve their own free will and blaze their way toward an ideal life.

The "Oration, on the Dignity of Man" is Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's most famous and most blatantly outspoken work. In the "Oration," there are many elements present that pose a threat to authoritative entities (which in Renaissance Italy, would have been mostly the Catholic Church). In this

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32 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, "Oration, on the Dignity of Man (Oratio de Hominis Dignitate)," 1486, in *The Renaissance Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Atchity (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 83.

33 Pico, "Oration," 85.

34 B.C. Novak, "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Jochanan Alemanno," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 45 (1982): 125.

35 Novak, 125.

36 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, ed. S.A. Farmer, vol. 167 of *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Board of Regents for Arizona State University, 2008), 335-337.

document (which was to serve as an introduction to his syncretic works), Giovanni Pico della Mirandola presents an outward call for human freedom and reinforces it with "Neoplatonic mysticism."<sup>37</sup> The "Oration" announces that freedom was granted by God and therefore should be an unhindered attribute among humans. Pico wrote, "To him [man] it is granted to have whatever he chooses, to be whatever he wills,"<sup>38</sup> by God, which to Pico is self-evident because of humankind's ability to ponder the nature of existence and develop intellectually.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, Pico argues that humankind is "constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will," and utilizes both the Bible and "occult theology" to prove his claims (such as Hebrew mystic principles and Pythagorean theories).<sup>40</sup> The points within the work are taken a step further when Pico argues that one should utilize freedom of the will to become closer to divinity, as setting one's own destiny puts one closer to God more than anything else.

Giovanni Pico's *900 Theses* was a very comprehensive compilation of principles that he wanted to integrate into the Catholic Church as valuable religion-changing ideas. Pico's theses, based on all different forms of knowledge available to him, presented ideas about cosmology, theology, spirituality, philosophy and more. He felt that these ideas were important yet left out of the Bible and therefore should be acknowledged and studied. The theses include many esoteric ideas, such as writings by "Mercury Trismegistus the Egyptian"<sup>41</sup> and by "Hebrew Cabalist wisemen."<sup>42</sup> By integrating ideas from all different belief systems and taboo beliefs such as occult elements of the Western Esoteric Tradition, Pico's *900 Theses* transcended and overturned dogmatic restrictions/controls of the Catholic Church and integrated heretical ideas (by taking the stance that they were not heretical, and rather, were extraordinarily important in reinforcing Christianity). One of Pico's theses reads, "There is no science

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37 Kenneth J. Atchity, *The Renaissance Reader*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1996), 80.

38 Pico, "Oration," 83.

39 Pico, "Oration," 82-83.

40 Pico, "Oration," 83.

41 Pico, *900 Theses*, 340

42 Pico, *900 Theses*, 344.

that assures us more of the divinity of Christ than magic and Cabala."<sup>43</sup> To Pico, a claim like this reinforced Christianity, whereas to church officials, it was a threat to their ideology. Additionally, in the same block of theses, Pico wrote, "No power exists in heaven or earth seminally and separated that the magician cannot actuate and unite," and "Whatever miraculous work is performed, whether it is magical or Cabalistic or of any other kind, should be attributed principally to God the glorious and blessed, whose grace daily pours supercelestial waters of miraculous power liberally over contemplative men of good will."<sup>44</sup> Theses such as these gained negative attention from the Church because they overrode the functionality and purpose of the Church as a checkpoint between God and humans. To Pico, anyone who practiced "magic" did so because of the way that God structured the universe, and anyone who built upon their own intellect and stayed of "good will" could achieve a "magical" connection with God. These "Magical Conclusions," as well as many other theses (both based on Pico's own opinions and the opinions of others) included in the very long work, transcend control factors because the practice of magic, mysticism and the integration of esoteric beliefs can potentially create a direct link to God, without the need for any authoritative figures in between. Pico believed that if one were to analyze and integrate all knowledge from his *900 Theses*, then one could ascend through the Great Chain of Being on one's own.

Another work by Pico, *A Platonick Discourse Upon Love*, is an esoteric and Neoplatonic book that explains the nature of the universe, the nature of love, and how the attribute of love is important to humankind and the composition of the universe. In the book, Pico refers to Plato to define "love" as the "desire for beauty," which consists of desire among humans to seek out and strive for perfection, be it through "Sense, Reason, [or] Intellect."<sup>45</sup> According to Pico, intellect is the "Angelick" portion of love that is "wholly intent on Contemplation of spiritual Conceptions; not inclining to Material Things, but

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43 Pico, *900 Theses*, 497.

44 Pico, *900 Theses*, 497.

45 Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *A Platonick Discourse upon Love*, ed. Edmund G. Gardner (London: Grant Richards Ltd., 1914), 21-25.

when divested of Matter, and spiritualiz'd, their Will is onely fed with intemporal spiritual Good."<sup>46</sup> In other words, Pico concluded that "love," and the process of building intellectual love with the desire to know answers regarding the mysteries of the universe inevitably put one closer to divine entities, and set one on the path of "good." To Pico, by practicing love, building the intellect, and embracing freedom of the will, one was strengthening the power of the soul and getting closer to divinity as well as building a harmonious existence with nature and others on Earth.<sup>47</sup> In this case, which contains esoteric renditions of what constitutes the soul, Pico offers specific instructions on how to maintain a harmonious order despite potential mobility on the Great Chain of Being-- love and knowledge. Pico also instructs the reader how to make the soul closer to God, which also revolves around love and knowledge. Pico's concepts of harmony and closeness with God do not include authoritative entities such as the Catholic Church, and rather, emphasize that one can only follow one's own will in order to achieve such things.<sup>48</sup> These ideas demonstrate yet again that Pico threatened those in power during his time because to Pico, love and knowledge were the alternatives to control factors such as the Catholic Church.

If one extracts the major points from each of these works by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, one can compile three elements to Pico's thinking that are extraordinarily important and anarchic in nature. In "Oration, on the Dignity of Man," Pico's emphasis is on free will, individuality and following one's own destiny. In his *900 Theses*, Pico's arguments are compiled from all different sources in order to found universal truths on theology; that all forms of knowledge all tie into the same grand scheme of the universe. In *A Platonick Discourse upon Love*, Pico argues that love and knowledge naturally build harmoniousness with existence and God. Therefore, Pico believed in the importance of a free will, based on and reinforced by universal truths extracted from all forms of knowledge, with said

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46 Pico, *Discourse*, 25.

47 Pico, *Discourse*, 40-47.

48 Pico, *Discourse*, 40.

knowledge and love being the most important elements to existence.

The ideas expressed in Pico's works directly correlate with various anarchist principles as set by anarchist philosophers. Pico's notions of free will, truth/knowledge and harmony through cooperation (love) can be also found in William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, specifically in the "Summary of Principles" section. Among these principles, Godwin argues "The most desirable state of man, is that, in which he has access to all these sources of pleasure, and is in possession of a happiness the most varied and uninterrupted,"<sup>49</sup> which is a claim emphasizing freedom of the will and enduring happiness. Godwin also states, "Reason depends for its clearness and strength upon the cultivation of knowledge,"<sup>50</sup> which is parallel to Pico's standpoint on knowledge acquisition. Finally, Godwin concludes his "Principles" with, "The pleasures of intellectual feeling, and the pleasures of self-approbation, together with the right cultivation of all our pleasures, are connected with soundness of understanding."<sup>51</sup> In turn, to Godwin, "Soundness of understanding is inconsistent with prejudice," and "Soundness of understanding is connected with freedom of enquiry," and "Soundness of understanding is connected with simplicity of manners."<sup>52</sup> These principles by Godwin follow the same path as Pico's of freedom and knowledge that lead to harmonization with others. Though the end results of Pico's principles are parallel to Godwin, the means to the end are different between Pico and Godwin. Whereas Pico strongly embraced esotericism and theology to accomplish goals of freedom, knowledge and love, Godwin took a stance that was entirely more secular and from a "scientific" point of view of experimentation cycles and predictable evidence.<sup>53</sup> Pico's evidence for the essentiality of human freedom was (in part) reliant on Kabbalistic and Hermetic sources revolving around spiritual principles which are absent from the rational arguments of Godwin.

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49 Godwin, *Enquiry*, xiv

50 Godwin, *Enquiry*, xvi.

51 Godwin, *Enquiry*, xvi.

52 Godwin, *Enquiry*, xvi.

53 Godwin, *Enquiry*, 145-151.



Pico's occult and anarchic viewpoints resulted in extremely negative attention and direct threats from the Catholic Church. Though Pico never outwardly called for the Catholic Church to end or be overthrown, Pico was forced by the Church under the threat of execution to retract certain statements, arguments and claims that he had made, especially those in favor of Jewish Mysticism and those that supported the later Platonists and their ideas.<sup>54</sup> The backlash of authority was noticeably directed toward Pico's usage of esoteric/occult ideals that threatened the authoritative decisions made by the Catholic Church. Pope Innocent VIII concluded that the *900 Theses* be deemed heretical. Pope Innocent VIII claimed that Pico's *900 Theses* were "harmful to the Catholic faith and human kind,"<sup>55</sup> and he declared that all prints of Pico's *900 Theses* were to be burned. Pico drafted a responsive defense called, *Apologia*, an attempt to defend his theses, which challenged the Catholic authority intellectually. Rather than trying to overturn the authoritative entities that threatened him, Pico maintained his syncretic stance and continued to argue that he only wanted to integrate all that he claimed into the Christian orthodoxy. After enduring turbulent times because of his being deemed a heretic, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola died at a young age of disputed causes (perhaps assassinated with poison due to his rebellious nature<sup>56</sup>).

After the death of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and into the late Renaissance, the development of occult studies continued, but esoteric studies began to evolve into more rational versions of science. For example, the Swiss occultist Paracelsus continued the esoteric traditions, but pushed them further for the sake of scientific development rather than to "compel, binde, afflict and Torment the Spirits, forcing to do what they [magicians] will have them."<sup>57</sup> Paracelsus considered the subjects of esoteric study an "art" and therefore he sought to protect the "art" of "Magick" from

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54 S.A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486)*, vol. 167 of *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Board of Regents for Arizona State University, 2008), 15-16.

55 Farmer, 16.

56 Farmer, 177.

57 Paracelsus, *Of the Supreme Mysteries of Nature*, trans. R. Turner (London: J.C. for N. Brook and J. Harison, 1656), 37.

"nigromancers and sorcerers" that attempted to carry out self-serving conjurations.<sup>58</sup> Paracelsus strove for the use of magic to produce factual evidence and did so through observation and experimentation, rather than blind mysticism, which demonstrates the seed of a gradual movement toward scientific rationalism over superstition. Though he maintained traditions important to esotericism, such as astrology, alchemy, and spirituality, Paracelsus' magical arts were a method of cause-and-effect experimentation in order to come to solid conclusions, which is a primary element of contemporary science.

The life and trials of Giordano Bruno in "Reformation"-era Europe also demonstrate the transition of occultism into a rising pattern of rationalism. Like Paracelsus, Bruno embraced some esoteric ideals, such as Hermeticism, but also quarreled with the Catholic Church because of his beliefs in certain scientific discoveries (such as the theories of Copernicus). As per usual in the scene of rising rationalism, Bruno remained loyal to some spiritual beliefs, but desired truth and factual evidence over anything else.<sup>59</sup> This desire for truth led him to trouble with authority, specifically the Catholic Church. To Bruno, his "belief in the power of human reason (especially his own reason) to penetrate the mysteries of things was accompanied by contempt for the argument from authority in philosophy, contempt for humility, submission, obedience in the speculative life."<sup>60</sup> Bruno's support for Hermetic beliefs and support for scientific heliocentric theories (as well as other theories claiming that our sun is but one of countless stars) led to his execution in the late 16th century, and simultaneously made him a martyr for both science and magic.<sup>61</sup>

Philosophical exploration for truth over superstition snowballed in the late 16th century and throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. By the end of the 17th century, the "Enlightenment" period had

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58 Paracelsus, 81-85.

59 McIntyre, *Giordano Bruno* (New York: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1903), 101.

60 McIntyre, 101.

61 John Gribbin, *The Scientists: A History of Science Told Through the Lives of its Greatest Inventors*, (New York: Random House Inc., 2002), 17-19.

begun, during which rationalism was favored and much of the esoteric tradition was rejected for scientific study. Though the transition was long and there is "no single moment in history when science replaced mysticism as a means of explaining the workings of the world,"<sup>62</sup> the esoteric traditions were rendered fantastical among many (though with some exceptions such as Isaac Newton, who is known for making great leaps in scientific study but also retained much of the spiritual teachings of the occult traditions). Eliminating mysticism as an obstacle to overcoming human issues is evident in the opinions of John Locke in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he argued that "spirits" are merely an idea of human understanding and that anything that actually is "spiritual" in nature cannot be understood by humans because of the inability to put these "ideas" to the test.<sup>63</sup> Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* addresses many human issues such as government, science, rhetoric and more without the hindrance of spirituality. This concentration on experimentation, human issues and science without mystic outlooks extended throughout the Enlightenment and separated spirituality from matters of government.

The writings of William Godwin are definitive products of the Enlightenment. Godwin, an early writer on the nature of anarchist political/social thought, provided "the first clear statement of anarchist principles, looking forward eagerly to the dissolution of that 'brute engine' of political government."<sup>64</sup> However, absent from William Godwin's works are any sort of spiritual reinforcement of his claims. In fact, William Godwin went as far as to be an anti-mystic when expressing his opinions. His work, *Lives of the Necromancers*, establishes an extremely rational and dismissive viewpoint on magic, metaphysics and more, which in turn created a 19th century wedge between what is considered "anarchism" and what is considered "esoteric." *The Lives of the Necromancers* covers many aspects of occultism, such as astrology, alchemy, and Rosicrucianism, but blends them with things like witchcraft,

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62 Gribbin, 68.

63 John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Openlibrary.org digital edition, 2009, originally printed 1753), 207-209.

64 Marshall, 5.

necromancy and devilry, all under the umbrella of wishful thinking on behalf of humankind to change the outcome of the future. In regards to Enlightenment thinking about all things magical, William Godwin wrote, "The improvements that have been effected in natural philosophy have by degrees convinced the enlightened part of mankind that the material universe is every where subject to laws, fixed in their weight, measure and duration, capable of the most exact calculation, and which in no case admit of variation and exception."<sup>65</sup> Though Godwin was not fond of human-invented laws imposed on other humans, Godwin found scientific laws as set by experimentation and observation to be useful and override any mystic outlooks which he argued were merely "superstitious fear[s]" and "powers of the imagination."<sup>66</sup>

The secularization of anarchism by Godwin has alienated the concept of spirituality from what constitutes political anarchism. With this in mind, spirituality was rendered useless by Godwin and therefore remained absent from political anarchism. In this case, spiritual reasons for founding an anarchistic society were phased out of the anarchist agenda. As the champion of anarchism, Godwin's opinions set the stage for anarchist principles and at the same time his opinions set him as an anti-mystic and more so the champion of secular anarchism. Because of this, mainstream anarchism has oftentimes been tied to secularism and has actually received some negative feedback on behalf of some anarchists. Though he wrote his works considerably later than Godwin, Leo Tolstoy criticized the anarchist tendency to be secular and felt that Godwin "lacked the spiritual weapon which has always destroyed power..."<sup>67</sup> With this in mind, it shouldn't be argued that the secularism has gone unnoticed, but it should be plausible evidence that the secular nature of anarchism is prominent enough that some anarchists such as Leo Tolstoy have argued against it. Though there are likely other potential variables involved in the secularization of Anarchism, it seems evident through Godwin's works that anarchist

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<sup>65</sup> Godwin, *Lives of the Necromancers* (London: F.J. Mason, 1834), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Godwin, *Necromancers*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Marshall, 375.

principles and occult principles experienced a distinct and deliberate split in the 19th century.

Perhaps a backlash to the anti-mystic nature of Enlightenment philosophers and ideals was the revival of occultism in the 19th century. Because rationalist thinkers such as John Locke and William Godwin refused to address (or even purposely downplayed) spirituality, questions revolving around spiritual issues were left open and people began to revive once-prominent spiritual questions. Various mysterious elements, such as the discovery of the Great Pyramid, assimilation of spiritual knowledge from India, and scholarly study on dead religions (such as Druidism) began to revive popular interest in spiritual "mysteries," and thus the esoteric traditions were revived for the sake of scholarly and comparative study.<sup>68</sup> By the latter half of the 19th century, mystic movements such as Spiritualism (a popular method to communicate with the deceased) and contemporary occultism emerged as popularized operations from "traditional" sources of esotericism, and new philosophers built upon traditional ideas, such as the Frenchman, Alphonse-Louis Constant (known by his alias, Éliphas Lévi).<sup>69</sup>

Though he was one among many in these 19th century occult movements, Éliphas Lévi was important in contributing to the revival of esotericism in the 19th century. True to the occult traditions of the Renaissance, Lévi adhered to the Greek philosophies that the esoteric traditions were built upon (in particular Neoplatonism) as well as Hermeticism, Kabbalah, Astrology and more.<sup>70</sup> However, Lévi built upon these traditions in order to construct a new outlook on spirituality in the form of "practical magic" for the reader of the 19th century.<sup>71</sup> Lévi's inputs on the matter set the standard for the 19th century outlook on occult ideals, and would no doubt influence succeeding occultists in the Western World. Due to the new widespread forms of knowledge from colonized regions (such as French archaeological discoveries in Egypt or British extraction of Hindu mysticism in India),<sup>72</sup> and popular

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68 Faivre, 77-78.

69 Faivre, 77-80.

70 Éliphas Lévi, *Transcendental Magic, Its Doctrine and Ritual*, trans. Arthur Edward Waite (London: G. Redway, 1896) xvii-xx, 7.

71 Faivre, 80.

72 Faivre, 77-78.

revivals of esotericism among artists and fictional authors,<sup>73</sup> a major change occurred during this time which resulted in the less secretive nature of "occult" teachings. Rather than occultism being a risk, it was actually a popular phenomenon. For these reasons, Lévi's works were widespread and accessible to a wide array of readers. With this in mind, it is evident that Lévi knew this dynamic as he specifically reached out to a general base of readers to teach the benefits of practical magic and argued that it didn't take "priests" and "kings" to learn the usage and values of magic.<sup>74</sup> Rather, one of Lévi's particularly important messages in his book, *Transcendental Magic, Its Doctrine and Ritual*, was the logic that "imagination" combined with "will" was the key to magic and therefore anything could be accomplished, formed, or made true.<sup>75</sup> Lévi also argued throughout the work that genuine belief and action to carry out a belief could make anything come to fruition. Rather blatantly, Lévi says to his readers, "Believe in your power, then act," and "An idle man will never become a magician. Magic is an exercise of all hours and all moments. The operator of great works must be absolute master of himself."<sup>76</sup> Messages such as these were most definitely the seed of revived individualism within occultism; however, the dynamic was wholly different in that Lévi's works were geared toward any readers that were willing to take in the information, unlike the works of the Renaissance that were typically geared toward other philosophers, clergy, the educated elite, etc. It is evident through Lévi's writings that he intended for magic to be useful, understandable, and effective to commoners as well as build self-reliant traits and knowledge among them.

Simultaneous with these occult revivals and popular occult movements throughout Europe, social/political movements were materializing as well, in particular, anarchist movements. In the mid-to-late 19th century, anarchist movements were appearing in response to economic issues,

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73 Faivre, 87-88.

74 Lévi, 28.

75 Lévi, 35.

76 Lévi, 195.

governmental hegemony, globalization, and competing governmental ideologies.<sup>77</sup> During this "classical period" of anarchism, messages of "individualism" and "collectivism" were being carried out in the very same places that occult movements were popular, such as France and the United Kingdom.<sup>78</sup> However, the anti-mystic nature of popular anarchism still prevented the intrusion of esoteric ideals into the anarchist agenda. For example, Joseph Déjacque published a popular anarchist article in 1854 (coincidentally the same year as Lévi's *Transcendental Magic*) that "advocated 'war on civilization by criminal means' and [on] secret societies" called "La Question Révolutionnaire."<sup>79</sup> In this article, Déjacque condemns the activities of occult congregations of elites, of whom he believed kept secrets and built agendas against commoners in order to keep their power and did so behind closed doors.<sup>80</sup> Déjacque draws the comparison of occult organizations to Ancient Roman elites, who "drink from gold cups," participate in "orgies" and conspire to choose new "tyrants."<sup>81</sup> To Déjacque, the only "sociétés secrètes" that should ever exist are the ones that are for the purpose of seeking refuge from those in power during revolutions and to organize fights for freedom during revolutions-- all other secret societies should be condemned, and after revolution, revolutionary societies should be dissolved.<sup>82</sup> Déjacque simultaneously supports freedom of thought ("liberté de pensée"), love ("liberté d'amour"), and action ("liberté d'action").<sup>83</sup> Though occultism was perhaps building more of a following, much of it was still carried out secretly and therefore would have been perceived as a threat to some like Déjacque. Scenarios similar to this matter with Déjacque likely kept a solid wedge between anarchism and occultism despite the fact that their ideals were very similar (note Lévi's power of imagination and benefit of action in contrast to Déjacque's freedom of thought and action). This wedge was not

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77 Carl Levy, "Social Histories of Anarchism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, vol. 4, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 1-15.

78 Levy, 10-11.

79 Marshall, 434.

80 Joseph Déjacque, "La Question Révolutionnaire," *La Républicain*, July 2, 1854.

81 Déjacque.

82 Déjacque.

83 Déjacque.

everlasting, however, as their amalgamation would commence by the end of the 19th century and early 20th century.

Aleister Crowley is considered to be the most famous occultist of 19th-20th century Britain.<sup>84</sup> From an early age, Crowley was initiated into different occult orders and secret societies, all during the boom of occult popularity in the late 19th century. Crowley was greatly impacted by the occult movements of his time period (such as the initiatory orders of the Golden Dawn and Ordo Templi Orientis) but was also influenced by the political movements of the time period, as well (such as socialist movements and anti-modernist movements within the British intellectual/scholarly communities).<sup>85</sup> Similar to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Aleister Crowley attempted to amalgamate all of the various teachings known to him in order to formulate his own religion that established anarchic conclusions about the world. Aleister Crowley's attempt to create Thelema (the name for his religion) is a straightforward combination of western esoteric occultism and anarchist principles, and therefore Aleister Crowley should be considered the unrivaled source for referencing the compatibility between anarchism and occultism.

During the mystic boom of the 19th century, Crowley absorbed many different teachings from many different perspectives. According to Marco Pasi, Crowley was "a traveller and explorer, but also - perhaps above all - in the intellectual and spiritual sense."<sup>86</sup> In this case, Crowley was greatly influenced by very diverse knowledge bases, such as East Asian mysticism (Buddhism and yoga), scientific naturalism, and especially western esotericism (magic, alchemy, ritual, astrology, Kabbalah, Tarot, etc.).<sup>87</sup> However, despite being the definitive 19th-20th century occultist, Aleister Crowley was also influenced by the political issues of his day, such as movements for anti-industrialism, anti-

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84 Faivre, 85.

85 Pasi, 23, 40-41.

86 Pasi, 23.

87 Pasi, 23.



bourgeois, and pro-socialist ideals.<sup>88</sup> Pasi writes, "...in Crowley's writings, there is no lack of references to politics - both concerning the current events of his time and, from a more abstract point of view, concerning political doctrines or ideologies."<sup>89</sup> Crowley's disdain for Victorian England's industrial, socially-stratified and authoritative nature led Crowley to anarchistic participation within the British "voluntaryism" anarchist movement founded by William Morris, which emphasized "ethical socialism" (as opposed to Marxist socialism).<sup>90</sup> In Crowley's autobiography, it is evident that this form of "anti-modern" anarchism was an influence for him, but it was merely a starting point for his own much grander ideas.<sup>91</sup> Thus, Crowley expanded his anarchic understanding through his own works and came to conclusions even more anarchistic in nature than the "voluntaryist" anarchic movement. His own distinct anarchic ethics are present throughout many of his major works. *The Book of the Law*, which was to serve as the primary doctrine of his religion, Thelema, makes a straightforward call to abandon all authority and follow one's true will. *777* and *The Book of Thoth* are both syncretic works that (like Pico) reinforce his religious system by exploring all different mystical teachings throughout history. Crowley's *Book 4* is a source that explains the practicality of his magical systems, and explains how harmonization can be maintained through the magical process.

*The Book of the Law*, also known as *Liber Al vel Legis* was written by Aleister Crowley in Cairo in 1904. The text is the central text of "Thelema," or Crowley's religious system that was to be essential to the modern age or new "aeon," which was tied into the zodiac and a paradigm shift of spirituality.<sup>92</sup> The source was purportedly a spiritual prophetic message brought to Crowley from the astral plane by an entity called "Aiwass" that spoke to him and told him exactly the content to write between noon and 1PM on April 8th, 9th, and 10th of 1904.<sup>93</sup> The text is written cryptically as a declaration on behalf of

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88 Pasi, 42.

89 Pasi, 23.

90 Levy, 10, Pasi, 40-41.

91 Pasi, 41-42.

92 Aleister Crowley, *The Book of the Law (Liber Al vel Legis)*, 1926, reprint (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 2004), 70.

93 Crowley, *Book of the Law*, 69.

the spiritual messenger Aiwass that introduces to the reader the spiritual nature of the universe, the pantheon of "gods" that should be regarded in the coming aeon, and the principles that mankind should follow in the new aeon. *Liber Al vel Legis* is divided into three sections. Each section is centered around a particular spiritual concept that is designated to help the reader find their "true will" (which should be regarded as a free and independent will).<sup>94</sup>

The first section of *Liber Al vel Legis* concentrates on the nature of the universe. This section places emphasis on the individual above all else and explains that the individual is the one true source of power because individual consciousness is its own emulation of the entire universe (a microcosm of the macrocosm, which is a Neoplatonic and Hermetic concept emphasized by Éliphas Lévi). By following the logic that the individual is its own universe and each human being can learn to fully direct their own universe (just as the greater universe in space and time directs itself) the section concludes that restraint (restricting oneself in thought and action on behalf of others) is the worst possible sin and that "thou hast no right but to do thy will."<sup>95</sup> The section also provides the reader with the creed of Thelema (the name of Crowley's religion and the Greek word for "will"). The "Code of Conduct" reads, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law. Love is the law, love under will. There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt."<sup>96</sup> The creed provided by Crowley is seemingly a straightforward tenet as a map to anarchism without chaos. To clarify, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law," refers to following one's will and pursuing/building their own specific purpose regardless of the restrictions set in place by authoritative figures. In order to prevent chaos from ensuing and in order for humankind to find true happiness, humankind must embrace "love" as the only "law" and do so with truth and compassion ("Love is the law, love under will"). In doing "what thou wilt" combined with "love," Crowley concludes the creed with the fact that there need be "no law

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94 Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 31.

95 Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 31.

96 Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 13.

beyond "Do what thou wilt," if the two principles are combined and genuinely achieved by an individual. If no law is needed beyond "Do what thou wilt," which is upheld with "love," humans would no longer need authoritative regimes, governments, dogmatic religions, militaries, methods of control or hierarchies in the new aeon. Essentially, the "one law" is Crowley's roadmap to a functional anarchic existence on earth.

Whereas the first section of the book deals with spiritual and universal principles of the "one Law," the second and third sections of *Liber Al vel Legis* deal with carrying out the Law of Thelema on the mortal plane. The second section deals with political and social control factors of society, and the importance, how and why one should still fully embrace the Law of Thelema despite obstacles on earth. Section two instructs the reader that one should not fear kings, gods, or any other person despite the backlash that may occur, and even calls out to kings to embrace the same principles and their political power would no longer matter to them.<sup>97</sup> It calls for the reader to not think in terms of "because" in regards to the Law of Thelema and not to attempt to embrace Thelemic Law on the basis of power, as either would corrupt and negate "Do what thou wilt."<sup>98</sup> This section is important because it explains the process in which the various means of control amongst humans could be dissolved-- once again by the same Law of Thelema.

The third section of *Liber Al vel Legis* discusses the nature of the new religion of Thelema and what is to be done in the new aeon, starting with violent revolution. This section instructs the reader to abandon all dogmatic religions and only embrace the Law of Thelema. Crowley (or Aiwass) demands that the new aeon must be free of any sort of prior religious belief systems, or else it will corrupt the Law of Thelema and render its ideology useless.<sup>99</sup> The section deconstructs religious systems and other various human-made distractions that could potentially hinder a person from becoming enlightened.

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<sup>97</sup> Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 38-40.

<sup>98</sup> Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 43.

<sup>99</sup> Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 63-66.

The chapter also takes an aggressive standpoint against dogmatic religions as an obstacle in the way of finding one's "true will."<sup>100</sup> In this chapter, the new religion of Thelema is tied to religious rites, rituals, Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew traditions, and "magick," thus rendering the new religion of the new aeon as one that's tied to the Western Esoteric Tradition, which is important because it preserves the occult essence of Crowley's writings and arguments.

What should be essential to understanding *Liber Al vel Legis*, is the perspective that free will ("do what thou wilt") is of the utmost importance to humankind. In the case of this book, free will is pitched in a manner that founds it as a rule, rather than simply a good idea. Crowley designates freedom of the will as the one true law that all of humankind should abide by. In *The Book of the Law*, Crowley demands that authoritative entities (anything that exercises the "sin of restriction")<sup>101</sup> and dogmatic religions that hinder humankind from following the one true law of mankind<sup>102</sup> should be expunged from existence. Essentially, to "do what thou wilt" on one's own behalf will preserve harmonization with nature and the universe by acknowledging that "love is the law," and that one should genuinely "love under will." Very important is the preservation of occult knowledge which allows the work to remain within the Western Esoteric Tradition, despite the call for a reset in the new aeon.

In order to understand the esoteric influences that Crowley used to construct his religion, one should look to *777* and *The Book of Thoth*. Similar to Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's approach to the understanding of information, Aleister Crowley attempted to compile all different belief systems to come to a universal truth about existence, which is that all things are tied together through the universal language of Kabbalah and symbolism. The purpose of *777* is to prove that all things can be tied together under Kabbalah, and Kabbalah is the universal language of all things, symbols, words,

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<sup>100</sup>Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 63-66.

<sup>101</sup>Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 31.

<sup>102</sup>Crowley, *The Book of the Law*, 63-64.

mathematics, and belief systems.<sup>103</sup> With this in mind, the study of Kabbalah was intended to be the means to discovering the universality of various belief systems<sup>104</sup> (such as Ancient Egyptian beliefs, Ancient Greek Beliefs, Ancient Hebrew Beliefs, and even Abrahamic religions such as Christianity) and "systematise alike the data of mysticism and the results of comparative religion."<sup>105</sup> Though 777 was compiled before the introduction of *The Book of the Law*, Crowley later returned to the work to make sure that all the data within 777 reinforced the messages behind *The Book of the Law*.<sup>106</sup> By doing so, Crowley was enabled to utilize all different belief systems to conclude that they all tie into Kabbalah and therefore also uphold the truth behind the messages of free will in *The Book of the Law*. *The Book of Thoth* was written by Crowley much later, but was a much more refined and philosophical approach to combining all the belief systems into one systematic and functional Tarot system. Crowley's "Thoth Tarot" was intended to also combine all spiritual elements together into symbolic categories that could be understood for their universality and ties to Kabbalah and the law of Thelema ("do what thou wilt"). Whereas 777 was a large database of knowledge, *The Book of Thoth* was an attempt to make all of that knowledge practical and useful. Regardless of their differences, 777 and *The Book of Thoth* demonstrate that, for Crowley, all things universally tie into Kabbalah and therefore all things simultaneously tie into "the one law." Similar to Pico's syncretic works, Aleister Crowley concludes that by utilizing all the symbolic knowledge combined, one can create a connection with divine entities, the natural world, or God ("I.H.V.H." or "Tetragrammaton" to Crowley).<sup>107</sup> By making these connections and understanding all symbolism within the Kabbalah, one could transcend to a state of true free will, free of any outside factors.

*Book 4*, which was a manual for magical self-illumination, perfection and how to establish a

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103Aleister Crowley, *777 and Other Qabalistic Writings of Aleister Crowley*, ed. Israel Regardie (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 1973), 125.

104Crowley, 777, 127.

105Crowley, 777, ix.

106Regardie, 777, viii.

107Aleister Crowley, *The Book of Thoth (Egyptian Tarot)*, 1944, reprint (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 2007), 40-44.

connection with the universe concentrated on systems of self-mastery that allowed the magician to be free of distractions such as dogmatic religious rules.<sup>108</sup> Because Aleister Crowley's one law of finding one's true will was so important, *Book 4* was intended to be the magical guide to doing so. Crowley writes in regard to his systems of "magick," "one must concentrate the higher principle, the Will. Failure to understand this has destroyed the value of all attempts to teach 'Yoga,' 'Menticulture,' 'New Thought,' and the like."<sup>109</sup> In order to understand Crowley's "magick," one must follow one's will, and upon doing so, one can understand "magick" as well as the other various forms of spirituality that have existed. In this work, Aleister Crowley also calls out control factors such as dogma which have been utilized to steer humans away from their true will.<sup>110</sup>

If one gathers the major arguments from Crowley's works, one can compile three major elements that are extremely anarchic in nature, just like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. *The Book of the Law* or *Liber Al vel Legis* describes "the one law" or the Thelemic law, as an anarchic conclusion which is, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." The source directly instructs the reader that all laws, morals, dogmas and leaders should be abandoned in favor of following the Law of Thelema, else the world plunge deeper into chaos. Aleister Crowley assures readers that a functional anarchistic society, governed only by spiritual laws instead of man-made laws, would indeed be effective and would be the only way to continue to manage the planet. *The Book of the Law*, or *Liber Al vel Legis* is the epitome of the correlation between anarchism and an occult belief system as it entwines the two into a permanent bond. In *777* and *The Book of Thoth*, Crowley ties all forms of knowledge into the Kabbalah and Tarot, which inevitably leads to enlightenment within Thelema and within the universe. In *Book 4*, Crowley provides the methodical means to genuinely delve into one's own true will based on ritualistic systems of magic and spirituality. Therefore, parallel to Pico and Godwin, Aleister

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<sup>108</sup>Aleister Crowley, *Book 4*, 1913, reprint (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 1980), 7-8.

<sup>109</sup>Crowley, *Book 4*, 53.

<sup>110</sup>Crowley, *Book 4*, 10.

Crowley believed in the importance of a free will, reinforced by cooperation and/or "love," reinforced by the universality of all forms of knowledge, with said knowledge being the means to induce a free will.

It's easy to see the tie-in to anarchism throughout Aleister Crowley's works. Like Pico, Aleister Crowley's viewpoints fit into Godwin's principles. Marco Pasi, author of *Aleister Crowley and the Temptation of Politics* argues very straightforwardly that Aleister Crowley's works and Thelema were not by any means anarchic. Pasi explains, "It would be easy to interpret this aspect of Thelema [the one law] from a purely anarchist or libertarian perspective, and probably this is how most readers, including Thelemites, would see it today. Things however are not so simple. Following one's own 'True Will,' in fact, is clearly understood by Crowley within the framework of an organicist vision, which seems to be difficult to reconcile with an idea of unlimited freedom."<sup>111</sup> It is evident that Marco Pasi is incorrect in regards to this issue, and it seems evident by his lack of explanation of anarchism that Pasi did not compare Crowley's works to genuine anarchist ones. Pasi argues that Crowley was not anarchist because of his "organicist vision," however, it seems evident through the works of Godwin that anarchism is also an "organicist vision." Within anarchism, though one should follow individualistic traits, one should still understand that "Justice is a rule of the utmost universality, and prescribes a specific mode of proceeding, in all affairs by which the happiness of a human being may be affected."<sup>112</sup> To Godwin, virtue is carried out by protecting the wills and merits of all individuals as long as the "actions of men" are from the "purest motives" and are not hurting anyone or infringing upon the will of others.<sup>113</sup> Godwin's idea of virtue is in itself an "organicist vision" of freedom but with harmonization with other individuals. Therefore, in regards to Pasi's argument, Crowley's agenda was still anarchic because of the desire to make all things cooperate in order to form a greater whole, as this

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<sup>111</sup>Pasi, 49.

<sup>112</sup>Godwin, *Enquiry*, xv.

<sup>113</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry*, 71-74.

is an element to anarchism as well as Thelema. Pasi's argument should be rendered useless, as it is very clear throughout *The Book of the Law* that Crowley makes a straightforward call to abandon all the control factors in favor of "True Will" and "love."

Unlike the restrictions and threats placed upon Pico, Crowley was more enabled to directly challenge authority because of the times and popular movements. Intellectual scholarly circles that were already criticizing authority and esoteric revivalist groups (anonymous initiation-based societies where Crowley could write to others with similar interests and under anonymous names) allowed for Crowley to release his works without hindrances. Pico lived in a time where the political scene was controlled by a religious entity. Though Crowley's works were still controversial, Crowley lived in a society where the political entities were more secular and would not have been bothered (as much) by esotericism. Despite the negative attention that he did receive from the press,<sup>114</sup> Crowley could seek refuge within collective occult groups and initiation-based societies as they were popular movements within the artistic and social spheres of Britain.<sup>115</sup> Simultaneously, freedom movements were occurring throughout Europe, and Crowley could blend into the other freedom movements that were already in place to challenge authority. His messages were overshadowed by world conflicts, such as World War I and II,<sup>116</sup> and were also overshadowed by controversies surrounding the nature of his messages.<sup>117</sup> However, his messages did not die out entirely and Crowley has since been able to transcend his controversies. Even after his death at 72, Crowley's books remain in wide circulation (especially in contrast to Pico) and attract a wide array of followers known as "Thelemites."

Anarchism and occultism are inherently compatible with one another and it is evident through the works of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola that they have been since the Renaissance. As Neoplatonism built itself up to the climax of syncretic esotericism, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

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114 Pasi, 9.

115 Faivre, 84.

116 Pasi, 23-24.

117 Pasi, 9.



utilized esotericism to establish that freedom of the will, knowledge and love are the most important elements to a human existence. Unfortunately, his message was stamped out by the authoritative entities of his time. During the Enlightenment period in Western history, esotericism was widely criticized by rationalists and was therefore absent from the dawning of political anarchism. By the time of the 19th century, an esoteric revival was in full swing, which set the stage for the reunification of anarchism and occultism. Upon delving into the works of Aleister Crowley, one discovers that as a prominent occultist, he came to the same conclusions as Pico-- he emphasized freedom of the will, vast amounts of knowledge, and love and ritual as the means to harmonization. This creed as emphasized by both Pico and Crowley of a free will, intelligence and accord with other people matches with the principles of William Godwin, of who is regarded as a major anarchist thinker. Unfortunately, esotericism and anarchism are still seemingly portrayed as separate movements, despite the fact that their principles are oftentimes in alignment with one another. As is the case with William Godwin's *Lives of the Necromancers* and Marco Pasi's argument, the basis of the myth of incompatibility between occultism and anarchism seems to rest merely on a misunderstanding of one or the other. It should be understood, then, that the basis of both anarchism and occultism is "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law. Love is the Law. Love under Will," and therefore anarchism and esotericism should enjoy a firm, reliable and relevant relationship.

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