

The Holy Guardian Angel

A comprehensive and thorough review of the 'Holy Guardian Angel' and the attainment of the 'Knowledge and Conversation of' it as those concepts are described in the published prose works of Aleister Crowley.

by

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ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TOPICS in the works of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) is the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ (HGA) and, implicitly, the attainment of the ‘Knowledge and Conversation of’ it (KCHGA). It is also one of the least well-understood topics in Crowley’s corpus, arguably due in part to the sometimes ambiguous ways in which he presented it. Numerous interpretations of the Holy Guardian Angel abound, from the ‘subconscious’ and a ‘projection of the personality’ at one end of the scale, through to an actual extraterrestrial alien at the other.

The objective of this essay is to engage in a comprehensive and thorough review of the occasions where Aleister Crowley wrote about the Holy Guardian Angel in his published works of prose in an attempt to derive a definitive account of what he actually meant when he used that term.

A Bird’s Eye View

In order to frame the discussion that will follow, we will need to begin by examining at a high level the place that Crowley gave the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ in the overall scheme of his philosophy and world view, the relative importance he ascribed to it in comparison with other ‘magical’ concepts, and the significance of the term itself. Since, for this purpose, we are primarily interested in what Aleister Crowley actually wrote, this first section will inevitably be relatively quotation-heavy.

KCHGA as the ‘Great Work’

Critical to understanding the role of the Holy Guardian Angel in Aleister Crowley’s philosophy and work is to realise its absolutely central position. He equated ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ with the ‘Great Work’, and made it the central objective of the magical system of training in the outer order of his A.:A.: organisation. In *One Star in Sight* — a ‘detailed account’ of ‘the structure and system of the Great White Brotherhood’¹ — Crowley explained that:

¹i.e. the A.:A.:

The Grade of Adeptus Minor is the main theme of the instructions of the A.:A.: It is characterised by the Attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. This is the essential work of every man; none other ranks with it either for personal progress or for power to help one's fellows. This unachieved, man is no more than the unhappiest and blindest of animals. He is conscious of his own incomprehensible calamity, and clumsily incapable of repairing it. Achieved, he is no less than the co-heir of the gods, a Lord of Light. He is conscious of his own consecrated course, and confidently ready to run it.

Crowley continued to stress the central importance of KCHGA right until the end of his life, writing in his last work, *Magick Without Tears*, that:

It should never be forgotten for a single moment that the central and essential work of the Magicians is the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel.

He explicitly linked KCHGA and the 'Great Work' in Chapter ΓΑ of *Liber Aleph*:

This Great Work is the Attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of thine Holy Guardian Angel.

as well as in Chapter III of *Magick in Theory and Practice*:

It is the second half of the formula² which symbolises the Great Work which we are pledged to accomplish. The first step of this is the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, which constitutes the Adept of the Inner Order.

The key is to understand that when Crowley used the term 'Holy Guardian Angel' within the context of his A.:A.: organisation and within the context of his overall program of 'magical' training, he used it to refer to a concept of individual attainment, of 'personal progress', and of self-development. The importance of this fact will become clear later in this essay.

The HGA and the 'True Will'

The usage of the term within the context of 'personal progress' becomes even more striking when we observe that Crowley also used 'Holy Guardian Angel' to refer to the 'True Will', or to the revelation of that will. This is perhaps stated most clearly in *Heart of the Master*, where he explains that:

²i.e. the formula of Tetragrammaton.

The Way of Perfection is thus twofold: first, the True Will must be consciously grasped by the Mind, and this Work is akin to that called the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel. Second, as it is written: ‘Thou hast no right but to do thy will,’³ each particle of energy which the Instrument⁴ is able to develop must be directed to the doing of that Will

The connection is again explicitly made in his ‘new comment’⁵ to AL I, 7:

So also our own Silent Self,⁶ helpless and witless, hidden within us, will spring forth, if we have craft to loose him to the Light, spring lustily forward with his cry of Battle, the Word of our True Wills. This is the Task of the Adept, to have the Knowledge and Conversation of His Holy Guardian Angel, to become aware of his nature and his purpose, fulfilling them.

and in his ‘new comment’ to AL II, 65:

It is curious that this verse should be numbered 65, suggesting L.V.X.,⁷ and Adonai, the Holy Guardian Angel. It seems that He is Hadit. I have never liked the term ‘Higher Self’;⁸ True Self is more the idea. For each Star is the husk of Hadit, unique and conqueror, sublime in His own virtue, independent of Hierarchy.

where he defines the Holy Guardian Angel as the ‘True Self’, of which the will is ‘but the dynamic aspect’.⁹ He further identifies the Holy Guardian Angel as ‘Hadit’, and asserts that ‘each Star’ — i.e. ‘every man and every woman’¹⁰ — is the ‘husk of Hadit’. That is to say, the Holy Guardian Angel is within each person, and not external to them.

In Chapter XVIII of *Magick in Theory and Practice* he further explains that:

It should go without saying that until the Magician has attained to the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian

³AL I, 42

⁴i.e. the mind.

⁵Written in 1920 and privately published in 1926 as *An Extenuation of The Book of the Law*.

⁶We will return to the idea of the ‘Silent Self’ later in this essay.

⁷LXV, as opposed to ‘L.V.X.’, is 65 represented in Roman numerals, and is the enumeration of *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente*, an ‘account of the relations of the Aspirant with his Holy Guardian Angel’.

⁸The subject of the ‘Higher Self’ also comes in for further investigation later in this essay.

⁹*The Message of the Master Therion*.

¹⁰AL I, 3

Angel he is liable to endless deceptions. He does not know Himself

and the identification is made very directly in *Liber Samekh*, the ‘Ritual employed by the Beast 666¹¹ for the Attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel’ (emphasis added):

the Adept will be free to concentrate his deepest self, that part of him which unconsciously orders his true Will, upon the realization of his Holy Guardian Angel. . . **For his Angel is an intelligible image of his own true Will**, to do which is the whole of the law of his Being.

Significantly — as we shall discover later in this essay — Crowley also makes the identification in Chapter 7 of *The Equinox of the Gods*:

Teeth are displayed when our Secret Self — our Subconscious Ego, whose Magical Image is our individuality expressed in mental and bodily form — our Holy Guardian Angel — comes forth and declares our True Will to our fellows, whether to snarl or to sneer, to smile or to laugh.

It is worth pointing out that although the HGA forms the subject of *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente* — one of the three most important ‘Holy Books’ of Thelema — the term never actually appears in *The Book of the Law*. It is Crowley’s equation of the Holy Guardian Angel with the revelation of the ‘True Will’ which provides the linkage between the term — which might otherwise be seen as a strictly ‘magical’ idea rather than a ‘Thelemic’ one *per se* — and Thelema.

HGA as an ‘Absurd’ Term

In Chapter II of *Magick in Theory and Practice* Crowley wrote that:

He who became the Master Therion was once confronted by this very difficulty.¹² Being determined to instruct mankind, He sought a simple statement of his object. His will was sufficiently informed by common sense to decide him to teach man ‘The Next Step’, the thing which was immediately above him. He might have called this ‘God’, or ‘The Higher Self’, or ‘The Augceides’, or ‘Adi-Buddha’, or 61¹³ other things — but He had discovered that these were all one, yet that each

¹¹i.e. Crowley.

¹²i.e. the difficulty of ‘avoid[ing] the clouding of the mind by doubt and metaphysical speculation’.

¹³Which, together with the four listed, would sum to 65, the number of NVIT and the enumeration given to *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente* as we have already noted.

one represented some theory of the Universe which would ultimately be shattered by criticism — for He had already passed through the realm of Reason, and knew that every statement contained an absurdity. He therefore said: ‘Let me declare this work under this title: “The obtaining of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel”’, because the theory implied in these words is so patently absurd that only simpletons would waste much time in analysing it. It would be accepted as a convention, and no one would incur the grave danger of building a philosophical system upon it.

This is echoed back in 1909 in the first volume of *The Equinox*, where J.F.C. Fuller quotes a letter from Crowley in the first installment of *The Temple of Solomon the King*:

Abramelin calls him Holy Guardian Angel. I adopt this:

1. Because Abramelin’s system is so simple and effective.
2. Because since *all* theories of the universe are absurd it is better to talk in the language of one which is patently absurd, so as to mortify the metaphysical man.
3. Because a child can understand it.

Clearly Crowley thought the ‘theory implied in these words’ — that is, that there really is an ‘angel’ somewhere out there in the universe who has been specially appointed to watch over one — is ‘patently absurd’. So much so, in fact, that ‘no one would incur the grave danger of building a philosophical system on it.’ As it happens, it appears Crowley may have succumbed to an unjustified degree of optimism, here, because it turns out that many people do indeed ‘[build] a philosophical system’ on the literal ‘theory implied in these words.’

* * *

From our ‘bird’s eye view’, therefore, we can see that Crowley:

- identified the attainment of the ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ with the performance of the ‘Great Work’;
- identified the attainment of the ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ with the revelation of the ‘True Will’; and
- adopted the term ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ as a deliberately ‘absurd’ convention, and intended for no philosophical or metaphysical significance to be placed upon it.

With these observations in mind, we may proceed to a more detailed discussion.

The ‘Subjective-Objective’ Debate

When the concept of the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ becomes a subject of discussion within the ‘magical’ or ‘occult’ communities, it is usually framed in terms of what we may call the ‘Subjective-Objective Debate’. It is often claimed that Aleister Crowley changed his mind on the matter of the Holy Guardian Angel throughout his life, sometimes describing it in a ‘subjective’ sense to refer to something purely within the consciousness of the individual, and sometimes describing it as an ‘objective individual’ in an entirely external sense. It is one of the goals of this essay to demonstrate that distinction to be something of a false dichotomy, and to show that Crowley’s representation was relatively consistent throughout his life, even if he didn’t always go out of his way to make that clear. Before we can do that, we must again begin by examining what the man actually said that gave rise to this view, and we will begin by looking at the ‘objective’ side.

The ‘Objective’ HGA

The bulk of the remarks held to support the ‘objective’ side of the debate come from *Magick Without Tears*, and it is often claimed that this work, being Crowley’s last, represents a more ‘mature’ presentation of his ideas on the HGA and therefore should take precedence and ‘overrule’ his previous works.¹⁴ This is a very superficial view, however, since as we shall later see¹⁵ he also continues to present the ‘subjective’ side of the debate in the very same work. But, we are getting ahead of ourselves; let’s look at the remarks in question first, and then consider them in the context of the debate.

The granddaddy of them all comes in a letter entitled ‘The Holy Guardian Angel is not the “Higher Self” but an Objective Individual’:

the Holy Guardian Angel... is something more than a man, possibly a being who has already passed through the stage of humanity, and his peculiarly intimate relationship with his client is that of friendship, of community, or brotherhood, or Fatherhood. He is not, let me say with emphasis, a mere abstraction from yourself; and that is why I have insisted rather heavily that the term ‘Higher Self’ implies ‘a damnable heresy and a dangerous delusion.’ If it were not so, there would be no point in The Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage. Apart

¹⁴It would be equally easy to argue that this one work is a dubious anomaly, that he was ‘losing it’ towards the end of his life, or that he was tailoring his message to a rank beginner, or that he was experimenting with a more ‘religious’ presentation after his earlier, more rational attempts at ‘Scientific Illuminism’ failed to attract a large number of adherents, but we have a duty to at least try to take Crowley at his word.

¹⁵See page 28.

from any theoretical speculation, my Sammasati¹⁶ and analytical work¹⁷ has never led to so much as a hint of the existence of the Guardian Angel. He is not to be found by any exploration of oneself.

There are three components of this comment which we will examine separately:

- the ‘Higher Self’ as a ‘damnable heresy’;
- the ‘point’ of *The Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage*; and
- the idea of an ‘objective individual’.

A Damnable Heresy

In seeking to understand what Crowley meant when he described the concept of the ‘Higher Self’ as ‘a damnable heresy and a dangerous delusion’ it will be useful to appeal to precedent, because this letter is not the first time he discussed it. Indeed, he spoke of it elsewhere in *Magick Without Tears*, in the immediately preceding letter titled ‘This “Self” Introversion’:

We may readily concur that the Augoëides, the ‘Genius’ of Socrates, and the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ of Abramelin the Mage, are identical. But we cannot include this ‘Higher Self’; for the Angel is an actual Individual with his own Universe, exactly as a man is; or, for the matter of that, a bluebottle. He is not a mere abstraction from, and exaltation of, one’s own favourite qualities, as the ‘Higher Self’ seems to be.

and also over twenty years earlier in his ‘new comment’ to AL I, 65 as we have already seen:

It is curious that this verse should be numbered 65, suggesting L.V.X., and Adonai, the Holy Guardian Angel. It seems that He is Hadit. I have never liked the term ‘Higher Self’; True Self is more the idea. For each Star is the husk of Hadit, unique and conqueror, sublime in His own virtue, independent of Hierarchy.

¹⁶The seventh element of the Buddhist ‘Noble Eightfold Path’, and referring to ‘mindfulness’, or awareness of one’s bodily functions, feelings, and the contents of one’s consciousness. Jeffrey Block described it as ‘*bare attention*, a detached observation of what is happening within us and around us in the present moment.’ Crowley’s implication here is that the Holy Guardian Angel — and the ‘True Self’ — does not consist of our thoughts, feelings or awareness, but exists somehow outside of that. We shall return to this idea later when we give deeper consideration to the idea of ‘independent intelligence’.

¹⁷i.e. ‘Vipassana’, referring to self-observation and introspection, again emphasising that the Holy Guardian Angel exists outside of the mind.

There are two important points to be gleaned from these extracts. The first is that it refutes the idea that Crowley's dismissal of the 'Higher Self' notion of the Holy Guardian Angel represents a change in his position on the subject, because we can clearly see that he was opposed to the use of the term as early as 1920 when the 'new comment' was written. There may be other evidence to suspect that Crowley changed his mind, and we shall examine this matter presently, but we note here that the remarks against the 'Higher Self' do not themselves support such a view.

The second is that by dismissing the idea of the Holy Guardian Angel as the 'Higher Self', it is evident that Crowley is *not* dismissing the 'internal' or 'subjective' idea of the Angel in its entirety. We will discuss the 'Augœides' and 'the "Genius" of Socrates' in more detail later in this essay, being content to remark here that they are definitely 'internal' concepts, and Crowley openly states — in *Magick Without Tears* itself, in the letter immediately preceding the one where he proposes the 'objective individual' idea — that they are 'identical' with the Holy Guardian Angel. Crowley's identification of the Angel with the 'True Self' is even more conclusive, since it would be nonsensical to suppose that our 'True Self' could be an entirely separate and external being. This also cements further the fact that Crowley did *not* 'change his mind' about the nature of the Holy Guardian Angel in *Magick Without Tears*, because in that work we can clearly see him defining the Angel in the same 'subjective' sense that he did many times earlier in his career, and which we will see later. At the most one could suggest that Crowley contradicted himself in that work, but *Magick Without Tears* cannot be used as evidence in favour of an argument that he 'changed his mind'.

Clearly, when Crowley railed against the use of the term 'Higher Self' in relation to the Holy Guardian Angel, he was not dismissing the 'subjective' view at all, but merely *one type* of 'subjective' view. He also tells us precisely which type of view he's talking about: 'a mere abstraction from, and exaltation of, one's own favourite qualities.'

The 'Higher Self' view of the Angel is one that is not uncommonly encountered. For instance, Will Parfitt suggests the following criteria for evaluating the veracity of encounters with the Angel:

Does the scene look right? Do you sense the rightness of the symbols involved? Is the expression of your Angel right?¹⁸

Similarly, a 2008 forum post on *LAShTAL.com* quoted the following from an online text called *The Principles of White Magic*:¹⁹

one of the most common questions posed by aspiring mystics and magicians is, 'But how do I know if this is real informa-

¹⁸ *The Living Qabalah*.

¹⁹ Located at <http://blazing-diamond.angelfire.com/101over.htm>, retrieved March 7, 2010, and presumably written by the author of the post referencing it.

tion? How do I know if the message is coming from my higher self or some advanced being, or is it simply a product of my wishful thinking and power of imagination? It could be that I am just kidding myself.’

and continued to give one answer:

if a message intuitively internally ‘rings true’ it should be accepted as being true

Both of these extracts exemplify the problem Crowley was talking about in equating the Holy Guardian Angel with ‘a mere abstraction from. . . one’s own favourite qualities’, as they both recommend evaluating the ‘communications’ from the Angel in terms of *what already ‘feels right’*, and *what already ‘rings true’*. In the same letter²⁰ from *Magick Without Tears*, Crowley says that:

one should insist on definite communication of knowledge (or what not) which is incontestably not one’s own. The fact that the self-begotten feelings are so eminently satisfactory — naturally, since there is nobody to oppose them — is damnably seductive. Once started on that road, one can easily develop self-deception to a fine art.

We have already seen that Crowley used the term Holy Guardian Angel in the context of a system of self-development, and the most obvious requirement of such a system is that it must not merely exalt that which we already know and feel; if any real development is to take place, then any suitable system must involve a definite departure from that. We have also already seen that Crowley identified the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel with the revelation of the ‘True Will’; the very idea that such a revelation could be necessary presupposes that we do not initially know what that ‘True Will’ is, and we may suppose that things will remain that way if we insist on accepting or rejecting communications from that will based on what we already think about ourselves, and on what we already think we value.

When the term ‘Higher Self’ is used in practice, it is presented as being the source from which one’s ‘higher’ values or qualities originate, while the regular old self is polluted with one’s so-called ‘lower’ or ‘baser’ values or qualities which prevent one’s ‘Higher Self’ from being the sole basis of conduct. In other words, the idea is that one already knows what one ‘should’ do, and the difficulty involved in ‘attaining’ boils down to consistently doing it. This is entirely consistent with the Christian view of ‘sin’ as described by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, 7:14–20:

²⁰i.e. ‘This “Self” Introversion’

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

This is diametrically opposed to the doctrines of Thelema, which hold that the essential ‘problem’ of attainment is not being unable to act in the way that is known to be ‘proper’, but being unaware of — or mistaken about — what is ‘proper’ in the first place. The introduction to *Magick in Theory and Practice* states that:

The most common cause of failure in life is ignorance of one’s own True Will... A man may think it is his duty to act in a certain way, through having made a fancy picture of himself, instead of investigating his actual nature. For example, a woman may make herself miserable for life by thinking that she prefers love to social consideration, or vice versa. One woman may stay with an unsympathetic husband when she would really be happy in an attic with a lover, while another may fool herself into a romantic elopement when her only pleasures are those of presiding over fashionable functions. Again, a boy’s instinct may tell him to go to sea, while his parents insist on his becoming a doctor. In such a case he will be both unsuccessful and unhappy in medicine.

If we are to discover this ‘True Will’ — which, again, Crowley identified with the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel — then it is of primary importance that we do *not* simply ‘[exalt]...one’s own favourite qualities’ since it is that collection of ‘favourite qualities’ — the ‘fancy picture’ we make for ourselves — which obscures the will from us in the first place, but this is exactly what happens when we seriously entertain the notion of a ‘Higher Self’. In reality, ‘higher’ almost inevitably boils down to ‘stuff I think is neat’, and ‘lower’ boils down to ‘stuff I don’t like much’. One’s conception of a ‘Higher Self’ will be comprised of those qualities which one already prefers, and if we aspire to that ‘Higher Self’ then we are doing nothing but aspiring to just the kind of ‘fancy picture’ Crowley warned against in *Magick in Theory and Practice*. In reality, the actual process of attaining to the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel reveals things

about the self that not only did we not suspect — i.e. that do not already ‘ring true’ — but which we would positively prefer *not* to be true. The practice of self-investigation²¹ routinely reveals uncomfortable and disconcerting truths about one’s own being which contradict the ‘fancy picture’ one has made for oneself and which one would often rather not confront, but which one *must* confront if any meaningful development is to take place.

Independent Intelligence

Indeed, this is exactly what Crowley was referring to when he said that, otherwise, ‘there would be no point in The Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage’, such point being that ‘one should insist on definite communication of knowledge (or what not) which is incontestably not one’s own’ as we have already seen. This was echoed years earlier in an appendix to *Magick in Theory and Practice* entitled ‘Notes on the nature of the “Astral Plane”’ (emphasis in the original):

Nothing is easier than to suggest visions, or to fashion phantasms to suit one’s ideas. It is obviously impossible to communicate with an independent intelligence — the one real object of astral research — if one allows one’s imagination to surround one with courtiers of one’s own creation. . .

The essence of the right sensation consists in recognition of the reality of the other Being. There will be as a rule some element of hostility,²² even when the reaction is sympathetic. One’s ‘soul-mate’ (even) is not thought of as oneself, at first contact.

One must therefore insist that any real appearance of the Astral Plane gives the sensation of meeting a stranger. One must accept it as independent, be it Archangel or Elf, and measure one’s own reaction to it. One must learn from it, though one despise it; and love it, however one loathe it.

One must realize, on writing up the record, that the meeting has effected a definite change in oneself. One must have known and felt something alien,²³ and not merely tried on a new dress.

²¹This does not contradict Crowley’s earlier statement that the Holy Guardian Angel ‘is not to be found by any exploration of oneself’, since Crowley is using the term ‘oneself’ to refer to what we might call the *conscious* ‘self’, or the contents of the mind, whereas we are using the term to refer to investigating the nature of the *true* self. This distinction is examined in more depth on page 27.

²²Again disputing the idea that communications from the Holy Guardian Angel can be evaluated against what ‘feels right’.

²³For the avoidance of doubt, ‘alien’ in this context means ‘strange’ or ‘foreign’, and does not imply ‘extraterrestrial’.

Before we examine the meaning of terms such as ‘independent intelligence’ in detail, we will first consider Aleister Crowley’s own words on the ‘reality’ of such ‘intelligences’.

In Chapter XVIII of *Magick in Theory and Practice*, Crowley made the following remarks about the ‘Body of Light’ and ‘astral travel’ (emphasis added):

It²⁴ is of course not ‘real’. . . . Before treating of clairvoyance one must briefly discuss this question of reality, for misapprehension on the subject has given rise to endless trouble.

There is the story of the American in the train who saw another American carrying a basket of unusual shape. His curiosity mastered him, and he leant across and said: ‘Say, stranger, what you got in that bag?’ The other, lantern-jawed and taciturn, replied: ‘mongoose’. The first man was rather baffled, as he had never heard of a mongoose. After a pause he pursued, at the risk of a rebuff: ‘But say, what is a Mongoose?’ ‘Mongoose eats snakes’, replied the other. This was another poser, but he pursued: ‘What in hell do you want a Mongoose for?’ ‘Well, you see’, said the second man (in a confidential whisper) ‘my brother sees snakes’. The first man was more puzzled than ever; but after a long think, he continued rather pathetically: ‘But say, them ain’t real snakes’. ‘Sure’, said the man with the basket, ‘but this Mongoose ain’t real either’.

This is a perfect parable of Magick.

and follows this up in ‘Notes on the nature of the “Astral Plane”’ with (emphasis in the original):

It is **more convenient** to assume the objective existence of an ‘Angel’ who gives us new knowledge. . .

The ‘reality’ or ‘objectivity’ of these symbols is not pertinent to the discussion. The ideas of X to the 4th power and square root of -1 have proved useful to the progress of mathematical advance toward Truth; it is no odds whether a Fourth Dimension ‘exists’, or whether square root of -1 has ‘meaning’ in the sense that square root of 4 has, the number of units in the side of a square of 4 units.

The Astral Plane — real or imaginary — is a danger to anybody who takes it without the grain of salt contained in the Wisdom of the above point of view. . .

We must not assert the ‘reality’ or ‘objectivity’ of an Astral Being on no better evidence than the subjective sensation of its independent existence. We must

²⁴i.e. the ‘Body of Light’.

insist on proof patent to all qualified observers if we are to establish the major premise of Religion: that there exists a Conscious Intelligence independent of brain and nerve as we know them.²⁵

Earlier in this essay²⁶ we saw that Crowley's dismissal of the term 'Higher Self' in *Magick Without Tears* could not be interpreted as a 'change in position' since he was equally dismissive of the same term over twenty years early in his 'new comment' to *The Book of the Law*. The above extracts show that the same can be said of 'objective' Angels; Crowley was putting forward the same ideas as far back as 1921 when 'Notes on the nature of the "Astral Plane"' was written.²⁷

More importantly we can see that in 'Notes on the nature of the "Astral Plane"', where Crowley talked very explicitly about 'independent intelligences', he repeatedly insists on the point that the "'reality" or "objectivity"' of such things as 'Angels' is 'not pertinent' — more than that, he admonishes that 'we must not assert the "reality" or "objectivity"' of such beings without 'proof patent to all qualified observers.' Indeed, he carries this idea of the irrelevance of the Angel's 'reality' right the way through to *Magick Without Tears* itself, saying in the letter 'Do Angels Ever Cut Themselves Shaving?':

Are we to conclude that the whole set of impressions is no more than symbolic? Is it all a part of oneself, like a daydream, but a daydream intensified and made 'real' because its crucial incidents turn out to be true, as much always occur during the testing of the genuineness of the vision?... It seems to me much simpler to say that these Angels are 'real' individuals, although living in a world whose laws we have no conception; and that, in order to communicate with us, they make use of the symbolic forms appropriate

stressing that the adoption of terminology such as 'Angel' is nothing more than a convenience, a position taken for simplicity.²⁸ Thus, while Crowley talks easily of 'objective individuals' and 'independent intelligences' he

²⁵Crowley then goes on to argue that *The Book of the Law* provides just such 'proof patent'. While this is certainly an assertion worthy of skeptical consideration, such consideration is beyond the scope of the present essay.

²⁶On page 10.

²⁷Although it wasn't published until 1929 when it appeared as an appendix to *Magick in Theory and Practice*.

²⁸For the sake of completeness, we should note that some in the 'objective' camp may take exception to our omission of two sentences from the middle of the above extract: 'I'm sorry, but I can't let it go at that! Some of my own experiences have been so confoundedly objective that it just won't work.' While not being good for appearances, the existence of these sentences does not change the fact that Crowley employed the 'much simpler' argument in the same paragraph. Indeed, immediately after the quoted extract he wrote to his correspondent: 'Ha! Ha! Ha! I suppose

goes out of his way in those same works to stress that one should not attempt to assert the ‘reality’ of such things. Thus we can conclude on the grounds of Crowley’s own words that his assertion that the Holy Guardian Angel is an ‘objective individual’ or an ‘independent intelligence’ need not imply an assertion that it is a wholly independent and external ‘being’ existing entirely separately from the individual having the ‘vision’.

As Crowley said in Chapter VII of *Magick in Theory and Practice*, ‘it would be childish to cling to the belief that Marius de Aquila²⁹ actually existed’, and it would be equally childish to cling to the belief that ‘Angels’ actually are honest-to-goodness ‘præternatural beings’. Yet the ideas of ‘objective individuals’ and ‘independent intelligences’ do reinforce the dangers we spoke of in the previous section in relation to the concept of the ‘Higher Self’, and Crowley did repeatedly refer to such ideas, so we cannot merely dismiss them. Having shown that Crowley was at least not asserting the existence of ‘real beings’,³⁰ we can turn our attention to what such concepts actually might mean. Before we can do that, though, we must consider the meaning of ‘objective individual’.

An Objective Individual

The ‘The Holy Guardian Angel is not the “Higher Self” but an Objective Individual’ letter in *Magick Without Tears* deals primarily with the question of what order of existence ‘angels’ belong to, and particularly ‘whether they are liable to accident, misfortune and the like.’

As soon as we reach the second paragraph of that letter we are instantly hit with the problem of understanding the distinction between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’. This distinction can have many shades of meaning, and it is important when dealing with this matter to not confuse those shades; in other words, to not take a statement couched in those terms in the context of one shade of meaning, and then inappropriately extend it to falsely cover others.

The infamous ‘objective individual’ paragraph from that letter can be seen in a very different light when we examine it in the context of the whole letter in which it appears. In that letter, Crowley says that:

for the purposes of this letter I propose to use the word ‘angel’
to include all sorts of disembodied beings, from demons to

you think you’ve caught me out in an evasion there!’ showing that even he wasn’t convinced by the strength of support for his ‘objective’ comments. He does go on to say ‘Not so, dear child, not so,’ but is forced to resort to comparisons with ‘What do I know of Therion’s mode of life?’ to argue that ‘reality’ is no different, which of course it is.

²⁹A Roman that Crowley claimed to have been in a ‘past life’.

³⁰In this context, at least. In other contexts, most notably when talking about Aiwass, he certainly did appear to assert this.

gods — in all cases, they are *objective*; a subjective ‘angel’ is different from a dream only in non-essentials.

Let us first not get too caught up in the term ‘disembodied’; particularly let us not make the mistake of thinking that this necessarily entails the existence of actual living beings without bodies in the sense that Christians believe their god to exist, for instance. For illustration, let us take the example of Zeus. Zeus fits the description ‘disembodied being’ — in the first place, he is known to be the King of the Gods in Greek mythology, who rules the sky, consorted with Hera, had at least two elder brothers, fathered children, and performed all manner of other individual acts consistent with being, well, a ‘being’. In the second place, he is clearly ‘disembodied’, if for no other reason than the obvious fact that he doesn’t actually exist in a physical sense.

So what means ‘objective’ in this sense? Simply that anybody so inclined can independently discover any number of qualities, characteristics and stories about Zeus by consulting a large body of literary and other sources. Regardless of the fact that he doesn’t physically exist, in this sense he has ‘known’ characteristics and there are relatively definite legends about some of his antics. The same can *not* be said of Crowley’s ‘subjective angel’ which is ‘different from a dream only in non-essentials’ and is accessible only to one particular individual.

This is important to grasp. ‘Objective’, in this sense, does not mean that one can grab hold of Zeus and give him a sharp slap to the back of the head. It simply indicates the presence of objective qualities which exist independently of any one given individual. If a given individual claimed that Zeus was not the King of the Gods, but rather a lowly cabinet maker from Nuneaton, that individual’s error could be relatively easily demonstrated. Yet with Crowley’s ‘subjective angel’ who is known only to one single perceiver this cannot be done. ‘Objective’ *can* mean something existing entirely separately from *anybody’s* consciousness, but *in this case it does not in fact mean that*. To take the above quotation and argue that Crowley was necessarily implying that some angels actually do exist entirely separately from anybody’s consciousness is to argue that the Book of Genesis doesn’t really describe the ‘Fall of Man’ because it contains no account of Adam stumbling over a rock and bruising his knee. Neither is it any escape to argue that Genesis does not describe the ‘Fall of Man’ because no such thing actually happened; Conan Doyle’s stories describe something of the life and times of Sherlock Holmes, and this statement loses none of its truth with the observation that Sherlock Holmes never actually lived. It is very easy to become confused over terms in such a manner, and one must constantly be on one’s guard against doing so.

With this in mind, Crowley continues to distinguish between ‘angels’ which are ‘microcosms’, and angels which are not. With regards to the first:

some angels are actually emanations of the elements, planets, or signs to which they are attributed. They are partial beings in very much the same way as are animals. They are not microcosms as are men and women. They are almost entirely composed of the planet (or whatever it is) to which they are attributed. . . In the above case, evidently his existence depends on that of the planet Venus; and one might suppose that, if that planet were stricken from the solar system, there would be no more Qedemel. But this is to judge too rashly; for Venus itself is only an emanation of the number 7, and is therefore indestructible. . . It is some such idea as the above which is at the back of the conventional idea that elementals are immortal, that they incur mortality when their ambition and devotion causes them to incarnate as human beings.

The ‘some such idea as the above’ to which Crowley is referring is the fact that these ‘non-microcosmic angels’ are merely representations of something else, and when that ‘something else’ is eternal, so are the ‘angels’ which are actually merely labels for them. Crowley says that there are ‘many Eastern stories of the destruction of dryads or Nats by the cutting down of the tree in which they have made their habitation’ — naturally, because the spirit in question is defined entirely as being the spirit of that tree, and when that tree is gone, it cannot have a spirit. On the other hand, a ‘spirit of thunder’ is going to be far less susceptible to harm, because although you can cut down as many trees as you like, you won’t be able to get rid of thunder so easily.

Thus, a ‘non-microcosmic angel’ can be ‘objective’ in the sense that it is a personification of a definite thing — such as thunder, or a specific tree — which qualities can be reliably detected by anyone who cares to look, and it can still be ‘objective’ even if there is no actual physical spirit, since it is merely a label for something that actually is physically ‘out there’. This is what is meant by ‘some angels are actually emanations of the elements, planets, or signs to which they are attributed’; they are actually ‘emanations’ of those things, because they are, in fact, nothing more than convenient labels for those things, or at least for particular aspects of those things. These spirits are inseparable from those aspects, because this is how they are defined.

Then, on the other hand, we have ‘microcosmic angels’, who:

are microcosms in exactly the same sense as men and women are. They are individuals who have picked up the elements of their composition as possibility and convenience dictates, exactly as we do ourselves. I want you to understand that a goddess like Astarte, Astaroth, Cotytto, Aphrodite, Hathoor, Venus, are not merely aspects of the planet; they are separate

individuals who have been identified with each other, and attributed to Venus merely because the salient feature in their character approximates to this ideal.

Zeus would be an example. Zeus is not just a personification of the sky, or of thunder — he is a definite individual with his own personality, foibles, tendencies, and characteristics, all of which are defined by legend, and this conglomeration of attributes is larger than any specific object or phenomenon with which he is associated. Once more, this description survives the observation that Zeus isn't 'real', in the same way that the statement 'Sherlock Holmes was a man' survives the observation that he wasn't 'real', either. Such imaginary individuals 'have picked up the elements of their composition as possibility and convenience dictates' because those elements are created over time by people, and over time these elements change, are added to, are blended with those of other mythological individuals, so as to make those personalities alter and grow over time, in exactly the same way that the personalities of real living individuals do.

The presentation of this type of 'disembodied being' as an 'objective individual' should, therefore, in no way be taken to mean that this type of angel is an actual existing being in the same way that the people walking the earth today are. This type of presentation is entirely consistent with a wholly imaginary being, and all that is required for the 'objectivity' that Crowley is talking about is that the characteristics of that imaginary being be more or less agreed-upon and determinable.³¹ To argue that Crowley actually thought that 'Astarte, Astaroth, Cotytto, Aphrodite, Hathoor [and] Venus' were real existing beings is wishful thinking in the extreme, especially when we have passages such as:

Thus, when we say that Nakhiel is the 'Intelligence' of the Sun, we do not mean that he lives in the Sun, but only that he has a certain rank and character; and although we can invoke him, we do not necessarily mean that he exists in the same sense of the word in which our butcher exists.

in *Magick in Theory and Practice* telling us what Crowley actually did mean.

* * *

Our examination of Crowley's comments on the 'objective' side of the debate have therefore revealed four important points:

³¹When talking about the Holy Guardian Angel, it is the very fact that these characteristics are 'determinable' — and are therefore not wholly invented by the aspirant's own mind, even if he were to be the only individual with the practical ability to observe and determine them — that allows the aspirant to have 'known and felt something alien, and not merely tried on a new dress'.

- Crowley's remarks in *Magick Without Tears* which are often held to exemplify a 'change in position' by Crowley on the subject of the 'reality' of the Holy Guardian Angel in fact do no such thing, since we can see that all the positions outlined in those remarks were also being outlined by Crowley at least twenty years earlier;
- Crowley's dismissal of the term 'Higher Self' as a description of the Holy Guardian Angel does not invalidate *any* 'internal' or 'subjective' view of the Angel, merely one view which consists of 'a mere abstraction from, and exaltation of, one's own favourite qualities';
- Crowley's use of the term 'objective individual', when read in the context of the entire letter in which that term appears, need not be — and is apparently not intended to be — understood as an assertion that the Holy Guardian Angel is a 'real, external being' wholly separate from the aspirant; and
- Crowley's concept of 'communicating' with something 'independent' is of critical importance to the attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel, since this is the only alternative to the 'Higher Self' view.

It is only this fourth and final point which gives any credence to the 'objective' side of the debate, and is therefore the only point we need to consider further. We will do so within the context of examining what Crowley said on the 'subjective' side of the debate, but before we do that we must address one additional matter related to the 'objective' side.

The Aiwass Problem

As well as making various sometimes confusing and apparently contradictory remarks about the Holy Guardian Angel in an 'objective' and 'subjective' sense, there is one additional and wholly separate sense in which Crowley talked about the 'Holy Guardian Angel'.

In *The Equinox of the Gods*, Crowley wrote that:

I lay claim to be the sole authority competent to decide disputed points with regard to the Book of the Law, seeing that its Author, Aiwaz, is none other than mine own Holy Guardian Angel, to Whose Knowledge and Conversation I have attained, so that I have exclusive access to Him.

and earlier, in his 'new comment' to AL III, 68:

And is not this Book the Word of Aiwaz, and is not He mine Holy Guardian Angel[?]

We saw in the previous section that comments Crowley made which are often used to support an ‘objective’ view of the Holy Guardian Angel do not, in fact, contradict the ‘subjective’ view at all. But the idea of Aiwaz being Crowley’s Holy Guardian Angel, if we entertain it seriously, creates a whole slew of contradictions.

Firstly, we can remark that in *One Star in Sight* Crowley said that:

It is impossible to lay down precise rules by which a man may attain to the knowledge and conversation of His Holy Guardian Angel; for that is the particular secret of each one of us; a secret not to be told or even divined by any other, whatever his grade. It is the Holy of Holies, whereof each man is his own High Priest, and none knoweth the Name of his brother’s God, or the Rite that invokes Him.

yet we know the ‘Name of [Crowley’s] God’ — indeed, we know two alternative spellings for it — as well as the ‘Rite that invokes Him’, since Crowley published it in 1929 as *Liber Samekh*. This is not, of course, a serious problem — there is no reason why someone should not disclose their method for invoking their Holy Guardian Angel nor any names they choose to give to it.

More serious is what — if we accept that Aiwaz was Crowley’s Holy Guardian Angel and that he achieved Knowledge and Conversation of him as he claims, in *The Equinox of the Gods* amongst other places, to have done in October, 1906 after ‘six months of Invocation’ — we are to make of the 1904 ‘reception’ legend of *The Book of the Law*. One would think that audible dictation — if we are to believe Crowley’s story — would qualify as ‘Knowledge and Conversation’,³² yet it occurred more than two and a half years before the KCHGA that Crowley actually described in *The Equinox of the Gods* itself.

Moreover, despite Crowley’s categorisation in *Magick in Theory and Practice* that one is ‘conscious of his own consecrated course, and confidently ready to run it’ once one has attained to the Knowledge and Conversation of one’s Holy Guardian Angel, in Crowley’s own words he rejected the message of Aiwass until he found the ‘missing’ manuscript of *The Book of the Law* in Boleskine House, in June of 1909.³³ In a letter dated April 25, 1938, Crowley wrote that ‘I fought against [the] forces [behind *The Book of the Law*] with the whole of my power for many years’, and in *Magick Without Tears* wrote that: ‘You disagree with Aiwass —

³²Although John Symonds draws a distinction between ‘conversation’ and ‘dictation’ in his introduction to *The Confessions*. Even so, Crowley claimed to have put questions to Aiwass and to have received answers. In *The Book of Thoth*, for instance, he claimed that ‘when he was writing down the *Book of the Law* from the dictation of the messenger of the Secret Chiefs, he seems to have put a mental question, suggested by the words in Chapter I, verse 57. . . there came an interpolated answer’.

³³See *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, Chapter 65.

so do all of us'. If we accept the notion that Aiwass was Crowley's Holy Guardian Angel, then whether we place his Knowledge and Conversation with Aiwass in 1904 or 1906, the fact that he rejected Aiwass's message, fought against that message 'with the whole of [his] power for many years' and still, even in 1945, 'disagree[d] with Aiwass', then the type of 'Holy Guardian Angel' that Aiwass is appears very, very different from the type of Holy Guardian Angel that Crowley consistently talked about throughout the rest of his corpus, regardless of whether the latter is 'subjective' or 'objective'.

A further problem arising from Crowley's statement that 'none knoweth the Name of his brother's God, or the Rite that invokes Him' is the fact that he consistently required the assistance of others to 'invoke' Aiwass. The 1904 'reception' began with Rose, not Aleister, Crowley receiving a 'communication' from Aiwass,³⁴ and in April, 1906 he 'decided to ask F.³⁵ to invoke Aiwass and converse with Him when invoked, and thereby to decide on the quality of that Magick'³⁶ which she then did, with 'Aiwass' apparently appearing. If the Holy Guardian Angel is the embodiment of the 'Great Work' and the 'True Will' that Crowley consistently described it as then it strains one's credulity to suppose that *someone else* could invoke one's 'Angel'.

In addition, in *Magick Without Tears* Crowley wrote of the way in which the 'Masters' — whom we may reasonably identify with 'the forces behind the Book' — contacted him:

the effort on my part was precisely nil, I resented Their interference with proud bitter angry disbelief. . . They chose me

This is entirely consistent with Crowley's assertion that he 'fought against those forces with the whole of [his] power', and makes clear the fact that his dealings with those forces — of whom Aiwass was at least their representative, if not one of them himself — was *not* the result of anything that Crowley did, but the result of something that was done *to* him. This also makes no sense at all in the context of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel being equivalent to achieving the 'Great Work', with the idea that KCHGA exists within the context of a system of personal development. If Aiwass is Crowley's 'Holy Guardian Angel', and his communications with Aiwass are reflective of his 'Knowledge and Conversation' with Aiwass, then once again he was a very different kind of 'Holy Guardian Angel' than the kind to which the entire development program of the A.'.A.'. was directed, 'objective' or otherwise.

³⁴In Chapter 6 of *The Equinox of the Gods*, Crowley asks: 'who, it may be asked, was Aiwass? It is the name given by W. to P. as that of her informant', 'W.' being Rose Crowley and 'P.' being Aleister.

³⁵i.e. Elaine Simpson

³⁶*The Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, chapter 58.

Further, the contexts in which the Aiwass assertions appear are themselves rather strange and contradictory. As we have already seen,³⁷ *The Equinox of the Gods* itself defines the Holy Guardian Angel as ‘our Secret Self — our Subconscious Ego’, but then says that:

they³⁸ are not My words, unless Aiwaz be taken to be no more than my subconscious self, or some part of it: in that case, my conscious self being ignorant of the Truth in the Book and hostile to most of the ethics and philosophy of the Book, Aiwaz is a severely suppressed part of me. Such a theory would further imply that I am, unknown to myself, possessed of all sorts of præternatural knowledge and power. The law of Parsimony of Thought (Sir W. Hamilton) appears in rebuttal.

appearing to flatly refute such a suggestion. In a single chapter, Crowley simultaneously claims that the Holy Guardian Angel is ‘our Secret Self — our Subconscious Ego’, that ‘Aiwaz is none other than [his] own Holy Guardian Angel’, and that Aiwaz should apparently not ‘be taken to be no more than [his] subconscious self’. The fact that all three of these statements — which appear in quick succession to each other — cannot simultaneously be true should lead us very strongly to suspect that when Crowley labeled Aiwass as his ‘Holy Guardian Angel’, he wasn’t using that term in the same sense that he usually was, and was generating confusion by using the same label to refer to two very different things.

Further still, *The Equinox of the Gods* also contains the following statement from Crowley:

I now incline to believe that Aiwass is not only the God or Demon or Devil once held holy in Sumer, and mine own Guardian Angel, but also a man as I am

and in the previous chapter he says that:

whether Aiwass is a spiritual being, or a man known to Fra. P., is a matter of the merest conjecture.

The idea of the Holy Guardian Angel being a ‘præternatural being’ is difficult enough, but the suggestion that one’s Holy Guardian Angel can actually be another human being walking the planet — as Crowley appears to assert that he is in the first quotation above, and appears to have no problems accepting in the second — pushes the definition past breaking point.

Crowley’s identification of Aiwass as his Holy Guardian Angel is an anomaly, therefore. It may be that he was merely seeking to bolster his

³⁷On page 6.

³⁸i.e. the words of *The Book of the Law*.

own position as a religious and world leader by creating a very personal link with the ‘præternatural author’ of *The Book of the Law* so that he could then claim — as he did — to ‘have exclusive access to Him’,³⁹ and therefore ‘to be the sole authority competent to decide disputed points with regard to the Book of the Law’. Whether this is the case or not, it is at least beyond reasonable doubt that when Crowley *did* refer to Aiwass as his ‘Holy Guardian Angel’, he was *not* using that term in the same sense as he consistently used it elsewhere in his works, because to do so would completely overturn and abrogate his entire philosophy and system of magical development, and the fact that he continued to promote this philosophy and system right the way through to *Magick Without Tears* demonstrates that he did not, in fact, consider it so abrogated. This being the case, the ‘Aiwass problem’ need trouble us no further, and we can continue with our investigation.

The Subjective HGA

We have previously looked at the question of whether the Holy Guardian Angel is or must be an ‘external individual’ — i.e. an honest-to-goodness external angel — or an ‘internal individual’ — i.e. a kind of ‘projection of the personality’ — and most discussions on the subject revolve around this question. It is, however, arguably far more interesting to look more closely at the idea that the HGA is any kind of individual at all.

The most simplistic interpretation of the concept of the ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ is that of an individual of some kind — either external or internal — that one goes to for ‘advice’, that one asks questions of, and that one obtains guidance from. Crowley himself said in *Magick Without Tears*:

Imagine for a moment that you are an orphan in the charge of a guardian, inconceivably learned from your point of view. Suppose therefore that you are puzzled by some problem suitable to your childish nature, your obvious and most simple way is to approach your guardian and ask him to enlighten you. It is clearly part of his function as guardian to do his best to help you. Very good, that is the first method, and a close parallel with what we understand by the word Magick.⁴⁰

³⁹ Although he clearly did not, since as we have seen Rose Crowley was apparently able to receive communications from him and Elaine Simpson was able to directly invoke him herself.

⁴⁰ As is often the case, it is enlightening to consider the context in which this comment was made. His correspondent asked ‘why [should I] devote so much of my valuable time to subjects like Magick and Yoga?’ to which he replied: ‘[Your time] certainly is not valuable unless the universe has a meaning, and what is more, unless you know what that meaning is — at least roughly — it is millions to one that you will find

Crowley famously said in *Magick Without Tears* that:

My observation of the Universe convinces me that there are beings of intelligence and power of a far higher quality than anything we can conceive of as human; that they are not necessarily based on the cerebral and nervous structures that we know; and that the one and only chance for mankind to advance as a whole is for individuals to make contact with such Beings.

and this was primarily responsible for kicking off the bizarre ‘extraterrestrial’ offshoot of ‘Thelema’. Those in the ‘objective’ camp tend to subscribe to the view that the HGA is just such an entity, despite the fact that this particular quote specifically talks about the chance for mankind to advance as a whole, rather than about any form of personal progress.⁴¹

But, for the sake of argument, let’s assume for a moment that such beings do exist, and that we have contacted one that we believe to be our ‘Holy Guardian Angel’, so we ask it questions in some way — whether verbalised or not — to obtain a form of guidance. If we are to accept on face value that the guidance we receive is guidance we should follow, we are making two implicit assumptions:

1. The entity knows what is ‘best for us’; and
2. The entity wants to communicate that to us.

These are not assumptions we should make without grave consideration. It is entirely possible that the entity in question may be mischievous, or positively malevolent. The fact that he is a ‘higher being’ cannot be relied upon to infer his good intentions. Humans, for instance, may reasonably be assumed⁴² to be a ‘higher form of beings’ than cows. Yet if cows

yourself barking up the wrong tree. First of all let us consider this question of the meaning of the universe. It is its own evidence to design, and that design intelligent design. . . there can be no possible doubt about the existence of some kind of intelligence, and that kind is far superior to anything of which we know as human.’ Crowley’s invocation of the argument from design is curious. As far as the evolution of life is concerned, Darwin and his successors — such as Richard Dawkins in *Climbing Mount Improbable* — have destroyed the argument by revealing natural selection as the only known mechanism capable of solving the problem of improbability and explaining the *appearance* of design; the postulation of an intelligent designer in fact only compounds that problem of improbability. Modern theories of cosmological inflation suggest that the observed structure and order in the universe arose from quantum fluctuations in the inflationary region ‘seeding’ the formation of discrete structures, which also speaks against the concept of a designer. If — as this extract appears to suggest — Crowley’s belief in ‘præternatural intelligences’ relies heavily on the argument from design, then it is a belief we should treat with a high degree of skepticism.

⁴¹And, in fact, Crowley never links ‘such Beings’ with the same ‘order’ of Beings to which he asserts the Holy Guardian Angel belongs in the ‘objective individual’ extract, but many Thelemites groundlessly make this connection anyway.

⁴²By other humans, at least.

ever managed to make a conscious link with humanity, just imagine the ‘wisdom’ they’d receive: ‘We’re going to fatten you up, then kill you and eat your flesh. Then we’re going to stick your children in little crates and do the same to them, too. Oh, and then we’re going to make really nice coats and shoes out of your skin. Have a good eternity!’ It’s quite possible that if these beings are so far advanced compared to us, then we are so low compared to them that they may not even notice us, let alone care about our wellbeing.

In any case, we are faced with the problem that we cannot accept the guidance from such an individual to be *a priori* worth following. This problem is not diminished by taking the ‘internal individual’ approach. Let’s assume that, instead, the HGA is a ‘projection of the personality’ as some claim,⁴³ and repeat the process by going to it for guidance. It is well known that the personality contains many conflicting and self-destructive elements. If it were not so, then the part of the personality we are thinking with wouldn’t need the guidance of another part. This then raises a similar question: how do we know the part of the personality we are speaking to is worth listening to? What if we are speaking to the ‘projection’ of a neurosis, or a conflict?

Under either approach, therefore, we are left with the problem of how to determine whether or not the guidance we receive is guidance we should be following, how to determine whether the ‘individual’ — whether internal or external — is an individual worth listening to.

This leaves us in a sticky bind. There are only two possible approaches. One is to simply have *faith* that the messages are genuine. This, for obvious reasons, is not a sensible approach. The other is to *assess* the ‘genuineness’ of the messages in some way. This raises an obvious question: if we are independently capable of assessing the genuineness of the messages from the ‘angel’, then why do we need to contact the ‘angel’ at all? If we already possess such a discriminatory faculty, why should such ‘Knowledge and Conversation’ be required, or even useful? If you go to your ‘angel’ for guidance, and filter the messages through your own discriminatory faculty, then you aren’t ‘listening to your angel’ at all — you’re picking and choosing the messages that best agree with what you already think.⁴⁴ Not only does this make ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ a nonsensical concept, but it makes it a non-existent one; an individual following this approach is simply engaged in no such thing.

The theory of the HGA as a separate individual — either an ‘objective’ or a ‘subjective’ one — that one individual is able to consciously converse with appears to be fundamentally self-contradictory and flawed, and even

⁴³And which Crowley denounces as ‘a damnable heresy and a dangerous delusion’ as we have already seen.

⁴⁴Compare this to our comments in relation to the ‘Higher Self’ on page 11.

when successful appears unable to do what it claims to.

There is a way to make this approach work, however, if we shift perspective slightly. We can say that the HGA *is* an individual, in the full sense of the word, if we define the HGA — as Crowley in fact did — as the *self*. This definition would require that we consider the conscious mind, the thoughts, the emotions, the self-image, everything we usually refer to as ‘ourselves’, to *not comprise a self at all*. With this perspective, the HGA is not the ‘Higher Self’; it is the *only* self. ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ would therefore consist not of one individual communicating with another individual, but of one ‘individual’ realising that it’s not an individual at all, and throwing its own ‘interests’ out of the window. In this case there is no need to ‘assess the genuineness’ of the guidance from the ‘angel’, because there is no longer any conflicting guidance arising from the consciousness, no longer any ‘self-interest’ that the ‘guidance’ needs to further.

And, in fact, when we look at how Crowley actually *described* KCHGA, this is exactly what we see. In *Liber Samekh* — ‘being the Ritual employed by the Beast 666 for the Attainment of the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel’ — Crowley writes that:

the Adept will be free to concentrate his deepest self, that part of him which unconsciously orders his true Will, upon the realization of his Holy Guardian Angel. The absence of his bodily, mental and astral consciousness is indeed cardinal to success, for it is their usurpation of his attention which has made him deaf to his Soul, and his preoccupation with their affairs that has prevented him from perceiving that Soul

and continues:

If the Adept is to be any wise conscious of his Angel it must be that some part of his mind is prepared to realise the rapture, and to express it to itself in one way or another. This involves the perfection of that part, its freedom from prejudice and the limitations of rationality so-called. For instance: one could not receive the illumination as to the nature of life which the doctrine of evolution should shed, if one is passionately persuaded that humanity is essentially not animal, or convinced that causality is repugnant to reason. The Adept must be ready for the utter destruction of his point of view on any subject, and even that of his innate conception of the forms and laws of thought.

Thus, the individual’s conscious mind must achieve ‘freedom from prejudice and the limitations of rationality so-called’ in order that its own activities do not influence or restrict the actions of the self, in order

that its own ‘preferences’ do not pull the self in any one direction or another from whither it would naturally tend to go. It must achieve silence in its own meanderings if it is to perceive accurately the nature of the self, and to become consciously aware of the will. It is indeed the ‘usurpation of his attention which has made him deaf to his Soul, and his preoccupation with their affairs that has prevented him from perceiving that Soul.’ The ‘Conversation’ with the Angel comes when the aspirant has become sufficiently practiced in seeing past the contents of his own mind that he can perceive his ‘True Self’ within, his Holy Guardian Angel, and the source of his ‘True Will’. It is this ‘True Self’ which is ‘independent’ of the mind and ‘external’ to it, and it is by appealing to this ‘True Self’ that we obtain the benefits of communicating with an ‘independent intelligence’ as opposed to the mere contents and distorted reflections of our own conscious minds.

This idea runs through substantially *all* of Crowley’s published technical prose, even in his final work, *Magick Without Tears*, echoing his statement from *Magick in Theory and Practice* over twenty years earlier⁴⁵ which we have already quoted:⁴⁶

We may readily concur that the Augœides, the ‘Genius’ of Socrates, and the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ of Abramelin the Mage, are identical.

and later in that same work, when talking of:

Initiation, which implies the liberation and development of the genius latent in us all (is not one of the names of the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ the Genius?)

‘Augœides’ is an obscure term. Thomas Taylor, the English Neoplatonist, wrote, when commenting on the Greek philosopher Porphyry, that:

a long period, when the revolving orb of time has perfected its circulation, frees the soul from its concrete stains, and leaves the ethereal sense pure, together with the fire (or splendour) of simple ether. For here he evidently conjoins the rational soul, or the ethereal sense, with its splendid vehicle, or the fire of simple ether; since it is well known that this vehicle, according to Plato, is rendered by proper purgation ‘augœides’, or luciform, and divine.

describing the term in relation to a purification or liberation of the ‘soul’, just as Crowley talked of ‘the liberation and development of the genius

⁴⁵And also echoing his letter in *The Temple of Solomon the King*, almost forty years earlier: ‘Abramelin calls him Holy Guardian Angel. . . Theosophists call him the Higher Self, Silent Watcher. . . The Golden Dawn calls him the Genius. . . The Augœides invocation is the whole thing.’

⁴⁶On page 6.

latent in us all'. The ‘“Genius” of Socrates’ has been discussed by French philosopher Sarah Kofman:

if we are to understand that nature of the Socratic ‘genius’ appropriately, without mistaking it, as some do, for a sort of guardian angel, the anthropological analogy must be retained. . . we recognize that Socrates’ genius is nothing other than his personal oracle; it functions as an internal replacement for the earlier decision-making agency, the external oracle.⁴⁷

making a very explicit link with the idea of the Holy Guardian Angel as a kind of ‘internal’ advisor rather than an actual, honest-to-goodness ‘guardian angel’ which Crowley describes as ‘patently absurd’. Thus, even in his last work — which, as we have seen, is the work primarily responsible for starting the whole ‘objective’ side of the debate — Crowley continues to describe the Holy Guardian Angel in terms of ‘liberating’ something already latent within us — i.e. unleashing the ‘True Self’ from the veils of the mind which surround it — as opposed to ‘contacting’ an external being.

In the ‘new comment’ to AL I, 8–9, Crowley writes that:

We are not to regard ourselves as base beings, without whose sphere is Light or ‘God’. Our minds and bodies are veils of the Light within. The uninitiate is a ‘dark star,’ and the Great Work for him is to make his veils transparent by ‘purifying’ them. This ‘purification’ is really ‘simplification’; it is not that the veil is dirty, but that the complexity of its folds make it opaque. The Great Work therefore consists principally in the solution of complexes. Everything in itself is perfect, but when things are muddled they become ‘evil’. The Doctrine is evidently of supreme importance, from its position as the first ‘revelation’ of Aiwass. . .

We are to pay attention to this Inmost Light. . . It is the ‘veils’ mentioned previously in this comment that obstruct the relation between Nuit and Hadit.

We are not to worship the Khu, to fall in love with our Magical Image. To do this — we have all done it — is to forget our Truth. If we adore Form, it becomes opaque to Being, and may soon prove false to itself. The Khu in each of us includes the Cosmos as he knows it. To me, even another Khabs is only part of my Khu. Our own Khabs is our one sole Truth.

⁴⁷ *Socrates: fictions of a philosopher.*

Crowley rightly labels this doctrine as being ‘of supreme importance’, since it is the fundamental idea underlying the Thelemic approach to self-development. The ‘Light within’ of the Khabs — the ‘True Self’ or ‘Secret Self’ of which Crowley so often spoke, and which he identified with the ‘Genius’, and ‘Augœides’ and the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ — is ‘veiled’ by the ‘folds’ of the Khu, by ‘our minds and bodies’, and the essence of personal attainment — the essence of attaining to the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel — is to ‘make [one’s] veils transparent’, to clear through the ‘muddle’ of the mind.

This is the language used in *Liber Samekh* which we have already seen: ‘The absence of his bodily, mental and astral consciousness is indeed cardinal to success, for it is their usurpation of his attention which has made him deaf to his Soul, and his preoccupation with their affairs that has prevented him from perceiving that Soul’. Of the mechanism underlying the *Liber Samekh* ritual itself, he states in the rubric to that ritual that ‘the effect of the Ritual has been (a) to keep them⁴⁸ so busy with their own work that they cease to distract him; (b) to separate them so completely that his soul is stripped of its sheaths’.

The notion of a ‘Silent Self’ — or ‘Soul’, or ‘Genius’ — being surrounded by veils of ‘complexes’ also appears in Crowley’s *Confessions*, where he explains to J.W.N. Sullivan that:

You, being a man, are therefore a star. The soul of a star is what we call genius. You are a genius. This fact is obscured by moral complexes which enmesh it, or lack of adequate machinery to express it in terms of action.

The idea comes up as early as *Book 4* in 1911, where Crowley writes:

The main idea is that the Infinite, the Absolute, God,⁴⁹ the Over-soul, or whatever you may prefer to call it,⁵⁰ is always present; but veiled or masked by the thoughts of the mind, just as one cannot hear a heart-beat in a noisy city. . . to obtain knowledge of That, it is only necessary to still all thoughts.

This extract again speaks to the doctrine of the Khabs being ‘veiled or masked by. . . the mind’, and the solution being to ‘still all thoughts’ in order to ‘make [one’s] veils transparent by “purifying” them’, much as the dirt in a disturbed pool will settle to the bottom and leave the water clear, if only the water is stilled for long enough to allow that to happen.

⁴⁸i.e. ‘his bodily, mental and astral consciousness’.

⁴⁹See page 6 for an example of Crowley using ‘God’ to refer to the ‘Next Step’, and identifying it with the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’, and page 5 for an example of him using the word ‘Adonai’ — which means the same thing — in the same way.

⁵⁰Per the preceding footnote, we may add ‘Genius’, ‘Augœides’ and ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ to this list.

The idea is repeated in solar terms in *De Lege Libellum*, published in the third volume of *The Equinox* in 1919:

Behold! the Kingdom of God is within you, even as the Sun standeth eternal in the heavens, equal at midnight and at noon. He riseth not: he setteth not: it is but the shadow of the earth which concealeth him, or the clouds upon her face.⁵¹

Indeed, the idea is presented even earlier, in one of the Thelemic ‘Holy Books’ themselves, namely *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente* — an ‘account of the relations of the Aspirant with his Holy Guardian Angel’ — which was written in 1907. LXV II, 59–60 says:

But I have called unto Thee, and I have journeyed unto Thee, and it availed me not. I waited patiently, and Thou wast with me from the beginning.

while LXV III, 29 continues:

Yet all the while Thou was hidden therein, as the Lord of Silence is hidden in the buds of the lotus.

and LXV IV, 39 repeats:

Before I saw Thee Thou wast already with me.

Throughout the book, the theme of the Holy Guardian Angel — its primary subject — as being something which exists within the individual, and which must only be attended to for communion to occur is repeatedly found: ‘Many things I beheld mediate and immediate; but, beholding them no more, I beheld Thee.’⁵² This last quotation echoes the statement from *Liber Samekh* that ‘the absence of his bodily, mental and astral consciousness is indeed cardinal to success, for it is their usurpation of his attention which has made him deaf to his Soul, and his preoccupation with their affairs that has prevented him from perceiving that Soul’. *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente* says ‘Many things I beheld mediate and immediate’, corresponding to the ‘usurpation’ of the aspirant’s attention of his ‘bodily, mental and astral consciousness’. Once the aspirant succeeds in attaining to the ‘absence’ of that consciousness — i.e. when he ‘behold[s] them no more’ — then the Knowledge and Conversation of his Angel ensues: ‘I beheld Thee.’ The aspirant’s Angel was ‘with [him] from the beginning’, and ‘journey[ing]’ to the Angel — i.e. pursuing a path of external attainment, seeking ‘God’ outside of one’s own consciousness, ‘worship[ing] the Khu’ and ‘fall[ing] in love with [his] Magical Image’ —

⁵¹This connection with the Sun is expanded on by C.S. Jones in his essay *Stepping out of the Old Aeon into the New*, also published in the ‘Blue Equinox’.

⁵²LXV III, 32

‘availed [him] not’. The Khabs — the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ — is ‘hidden therein’, and he must simply bring about the silence of his ‘bodily, mental and astral consciousness’ in order to enter into communion with it.

Crowley also talks to this idea in his ‘new comment’ to AL III, 60–62 (emphasis added):

Thus he will assimilate the Law,⁵³ and make it the norm of his conscious being; this by itself will suffice to initiate him, **to dissolve his complexes, to unveil himself to himself**; and so shall he attain the Knowledge and Conversation of his Holy Guardian Angel. . .

We have seen that Ra-Hoor-Khuit is in one sense the Silent Self in a man, a Name of his Khabs, not so impersonal as Hadit, but the first and least untrue formulation of the Ego. We are to reverse this self in us, then, not to suppress it and subordinate it. Nor are we to evade it, but to come to it.

Again we see the idea of the ‘unveil[ing]’ of the Khabs — the ‘Silent Self’ — through the dissolution of ‘complexes’ that Crowley described earlier in his ‘new comment’. By ‘com[ing] to. . . this self in us’ — by ‘Worship[ing]. . . the Khabs’⁵⁴ — and making transparent the veils around it, we ‘attain the Knowledge and Conversation of [our] Holy Guardian Angel’.

In *Little Essays Toward Truth*,⁵⁵ Crowley writes that (emphasis added):

Here the great obstacles are these; firstly, the misunderstanding of Self; and secondly, the resistance of the rational mind against its own conclusions. Men must cast off these two restrictions; **they must begin to realise that Self is hidden behind, and independent of, the mental and material instrument in which they apprehend their Point-of-View**⁵⁶

and in *Magick Without Tears* that:

As you travel inward, you become able to perceive all the layers which surround the ‘Self’ from within⁵⁷

⁵³The fact that this commentary is on AL III, 60, ‘There is no law beyond Do what thou wilt’, provides further evidence of Crowley’s identification of the Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel with the revelation of the ‘True Will’.

⁵⁴AL I, 9

⁵⁵Published in 1938.

⁵⁶Or, as the chapter ‘Steeped Horsehair’ in *The Book of Lies* puts it, ‘mind, never at ease, creaketh “I” . . . man [is] only himself when lost to himself in The Charioting.’

⁵⁷Again demonstrating that Crowley had not, even in *Magick Without Tears*, abandoned this same idea of attaining to self-knowledge by perceiving through the ‘veils’ of the mind that he had been consistently expressing over the preceding forty years, notwithstanding the ‘objective individual’ comments in another letter.

Finally, Crowley recounts an incident in his *Confessions* involving Frank Bennett:

One afternoon we went off bathing with the Ape.⁵⁸ I prattled as we walked quite pointlessly and just as we reached the edge of the cliff above the bay I made some casual remark which proved a winning shot. He stopped short and gasped; his eyes starting from his head. . . I was mildly surprised to see him dash down the path like a young goat, tear off his clothes, and sprint into the sea like an alarmed seal. He never spoke a word till after the swim and the return to the the road. He then said with a pale face and in awed accents, 'Please tell me again what you said just now?'. . . He asked me to discuss the subject more fully, which I did, after which he relapsed into silence. Directly he reached the abbey,⁵⁹ he passed into a state of trance which lasted three whole days without a break. He then came to me looking like an incarnation of pure joy and told me what had happened. . . One minute facet of truth unveiled from the matrix by the wheel of my word had let in the light. In three days he had achieved the critical initiation which had baffled him for nearly thirty years.

As John Symonds and Kenneth Grant explain in the footnotes to their edition of *The Confessions*:

We know from Frank Bennett's diary what Crowley said to him on this occasion. 'Progradior,⁶⁰ I want to explain to you fully, and in a few words, what initiation means, and what is meant when we talk of the Real Self,⁶¹ and what the Real Self is.' And there and then Crowley told him that it was all a matter of getting the subconscious mind to work; and when this subconscious mind was allowed full sway, without interference from the conscious mind, then illumination could be said to have begun; for the subconscious mind was our Holy Guardian Angel. Crowley illustrated the point thus: everything is experienced in the subconscious mind, and it (the subconscious) is constantly urging its will⁶² on consciousness, and when the inner desires are restricted or suppressed, evil of all kinds is the result.

⁵⁸i.e. the 'Ape of Thoth', Leah Hirsig.

⁵⁹i.e. the 'Abbey of Thelema' in Cefalù, Sicily.

⁶⁰'Progradior', roughly translating to 'I advance', was Frank Bennett's 'magical motto' in the A.'.A.'.

⁶¹i.e. the 'True Self', or the 'Silent Self'.

⁶²Here Crowley is identifying the 'True Will' with the will of the 'subconscious mind', with the will of the 'Holy Guardian Angel'.

Here, in clear and straightforward psychological terms, Crowley identifies the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ with the ‘subconscious’, the ‘True Self’, and the ‘Khab’s’, and states that ‘initiation’ is nothing other than the process of clearing away the ‘restriction’ and ‘suppression’ of the ‘conscious mind’ which interferes with the expression of the ‘inner desires’, or the ‘True Will’. The method is to ‘allow’ the self to have ‘full sway, without interference from the conscious mind.’ As he said in *Liber Aleph*:

Give Ear, give Ear attentively; the Will is not lost; though it be buried beneath a life-old midden of Repressions, for it persisteth vital within thee (is it not the true Motion of thine inmost Being?)

and in *Little Essays Toward Truth*:

We must learn to live without the murderous consciousness that every breath we draw swells the sails which bear our frail vessels to the Port of the Grave. . . This state is, in fact, a necessary condition of any proper contemplation of what we are accustomed to consider the first task of the Aspirant, the solution of the question, ‘What is my True Will?’ For until we become innocent, we are certain to try to judge our Will by some Canon of what seems ‘right’ or ‘wrong’; in other words, we are apt to criticise our Will from the outside, whereas True Will should spring, a fountain of Light, from within,⁶³ and flow unchecked, seething with Love, into the Ocean of Life. This is the true idea of Silence;⁶⁴ it is our Will which issues, perfectly elastic, sublimely Protean, to fill every interstice of the Universe of Manifestation which it meets in its course.

Thus, we can see that Crowley’s presentation of this idea of the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ is remarkably consistent, from *Liber Cordis Cincti Serpente* in 1907, through *Book 4* in 1911, through *Liber Aleph*, his ‘new comment’ and *The Confessions* around the beginning of the 1920s, through *Magick in Theory and Practice* at the end of the 1920s,⁶⁵ through *Little Essays Toward Truth* towards the end of the 1930s, all the way to *Magick Without Tears* shortly before the end of his life. Moreover, this concept is inextricably woven into — in fact, defined in terms of — the revelation of the ‘True Will’ which is the single most fundamental aspect of practical Thelema and the central concept of *The Book of the Law* whose promulgation Crowley made his life. If we accept that the attainment of the

⁶³Since it is ‘the true Motion of thine inmost Being’ and ‘but the dynamic aspect of the self’.

⁶⁴i.e. the ‘absence of his bodily, mental and astral consciousness’ described in *Liber Samekh*.

⁶⁵That is, *Magick in Theory and Practice* was published in 1929. Much of it was written considerably earlier.

‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ is the primary concern of Crowley’s system of magical training and self-development, and we accept that that system takes place within the wider context of Thelema, then we are compelled to also accept that this notion, as we have described above, is what Crowley truly meant when he talked about the HGA. To suppose that it means something else — whether communication with extra-terrestrial aliens, or with ‘projections of the personality’ — is unavoidably to make a mockery both of Crowley’s system of training and of Thelema itself, since the three concepts go hand-in-hand.

Summary

After conducting a thorough and comprehensive review of Crowley’s writings on the subject of the Holy Guardian Angel, a number of inescapable conclusions emerge. Most fundamentally, as we have seen, Crowley identified the attainment of the ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ with the ‘Great Work’ and with the revelation of the ‘True Will’. Since Crowley consistently talked about the ‘True Will’ in terms of the ‘inner desires’ of the self which is veiled behind the distorting influences of the conscious mind, then we are clearly led to the realisation that the ‘Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel’ is nothing other than the making transparent of these veils, and that the ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ is, in fact, the individual’s ‘True Self’.

The comments used to advance a view that Crowley really meant an honest-to-goodness ‘external Being’ when he used the term are seen to not hold water. His admonition against the term ‘Higher Self’ merely refers to the dangers of worshipping those veils themselves, instead of getting to the ‘Real Self’ behind them, and his usage of the term ‘objective individual’ is revealed by the very letter in which that term appears to not refer to ‘external Beings’ at all. Other than the anomalous ‘Aiwass problem’ which we can justifiably put aside, the only such comments really requiring explanation are those which deal with the idea of ‘independent intelligence’, and when we realise that the thing that intelligence needs to be independent *from* is our own conscious mind, then the identification of the Holy Guardian Angel with the ‘True Self’ — an identification Crowley repeatedly made throughout the whole of his published works — becomes incontrovertible. That Crowley believed in the existence of ‘præternatural beings’ and that he considered making contact with them to be ‘the one and only chance for mankind to advance as a whole’ seems beyond reasonable dispute, but this belief of Crowley’s is something that exists wholly apart from the system of personal attainment and development that he presented — i.e. to enable *individuals* to ‘advance’ — and wholly apart from his usage of the term ‘Holy Guardian Angel’ to refer to the object of that system, and should not be confused with them.

The 'Knowledge and Conversation of the Holy Guardian Angel', and the discovery of the 'True Will', are entirely equivalent, and all Crowley's writings on the subject of the Holy Guardian Angel can only be rendered comprehensible in this context.

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