

On The Mystery Of The Loving Gaze

Alice Spurlock · 1 June 2026

Let us begin with the words of the prophet, for whatever else the man Crowley was, he was the instrument by which the Class A texts came to us.

From *Liber AL vel Legis* 1:26–31 comes a set of verses that most will recognize intimately.

1. Then saith the prophet and slave of the beauteous one: Who am I, and what shall be the sign? So she answered him, bending down, a lambent flame of blue, all-touching, all penetrant, her lovely hands upon the black earth, & her lithe body arched for love, and her soft feet not hurting the little flowers: Thou knowest! And the sign shall be my ecstasy, the consciousness of the continuity of existence, the omnipresence of my body.
2. Then the priest answered & said unto the Queen of Space, kissing her lovely brows, and the dew of her light bathing his whole body in a sweet-smelling perfume of sweat: O Nuit, continuous one of Heaven, let it be ever thus; that men speak not of Thee as One but as None; and let them speak not of thee at all, since thou art continuous!
3. None, breathed the light, faint & faery, of the stars, and two.
4. For I am divided for love's sake, for the chance of union.
5. This is the creation of the world, that the pain of division is as nothing, and the joy of dissolution all.
6. For these fools of men and their woes care not thou at all! They feel little; what is, is balanced by weak joys; but ye are my chosen ones.

But Crowley was also one of the most important mages of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. He was both brilliant and powerful on multiple levels and excelled in multiple fields. And, for all his many human flaws, he reached through his humanity and beyond it to touch something divine. He reached out to the gods, and the gods reached back. From that work, we have the Class A and A-B documents. As the records of acts of mysticism, they confront us with two paradoxical experiences at once: strangeness and intimacy. They speak to our minds as language and to our hearts as symbols that blaze with pure meaning. People confronted in this way by a holy text either resonate like a guitar string to a tuning fork or, alas, they don't.

In this essay, I would like to first argue that love, properly understood as one of the four Thelemic virtues of Light, Life, Love, and Liberty, functions as a type of vision and organizing principle for experience, as a sense that reveals ethical beauty even in the darkest of places. Second, I wish to argue that love can redeem that which has fallen not only into evil—a charged word which I use in all seriousness but with appropriately bated breath—but into a deeper sin: banality. Finally, I wish to argue that the ontological weight of the relations between the two modalities of existence understood within Thelemic metaphysics as 0 and 2 can only be borne by love and only be properly revealed by the “loving gaze.”

Now a word from Søren Kierkegaard in “Love Covers A Multitude Of Sins”:

“When love dwells in the heart, then a man comprehends slowly, and does not hear at all the hasty word and does not understand its repetition, because he ascribes to it a good intention and a good meaning; does not understand the long, angry or derisive speech, because he still expects one word which will give meaning to the speech. When fear dwells in the heart, then a man easily discovers the multiplicity of sin—weakness and deceit and faithlessness and scheming, so that every heart is like a trap, every rogue like a child, every promise but a shadow.”

Section 1: Love As Organizing Principle

In my first quote cited above from *Liber AL*, I see the first laying out of the Thelemic spiritual manifesto. We see Nuit, the fundamental No-Thing, the pregnant absence that contains endless possibility and the true source of existence, reveal Herself as also, somehow, a person or, at the very least, *personal*. Nuit speaks of Herself as “I” and is narrated as “she” and “her.” We do not read mystical and revelatory verses about matter and energy, forces and dimensions. This is not a mere song of gravity and electromagnetism, although those, too, are contained within Nuit. Instead we read about *ecstasy*. We read about a *lithe body* that has *soft feet*. Nuit is revealed as both all that is and all that could be, but also as Herself. And by Herself, She is potential being. She is not even alone, for to be alone is to have an absence of potential relationships, and before time, before Hadit, Nuit has no possibility of being in relationship. To be fulfilled, She divides, for love’s sake and for the chance of union. She comes to be in relationship, and we are told that, despite how it seems, despite the suffering we all endure, that it is truly joy. That in each moment, every particle of existence and cell of life is actually singing, not weeping.

Now, this passage is, in my opinion, often misread as panglossian. It is not that suffering does not exist in a properly Thelemic understanding of the world. Suffering clearly exists and any spiritual tradition that cannot stomach (and metabolize) suffering is doomed to fail in this aching world. This is the weakness of so much of the “New Age” movement and its enterprising luminaries who have turned spiritual pabulum into an industry. It is, at best, harmless watered milk for children with weak stomachs, but at some point we have to grow up and start eating solid food. We are adults and we do not require a theology for children. We suffer. It is a fact. Some of us suffer a great deal. But our suffering is not meaningless by the Thelemic view. It is, instead, part of an epic love story between the “I and Thou” of Martin Buber. It is a love poem written into the fabric of existence that reveals pain, separation, and loneliness as ultimately joyful.

I know that may seem troubling. One could argue that suffering is merely suffering and can have no meaning. It is hard to process atrocities such as genocide as ultimately joyful. I would also like to be wary of a sort of Thelemic theodicy that merely reproduces the absurdities of the last aeon. It is ridiculous to say that a

Divine that tortures us actually loves us. It is an insult to both our intelligence and our worth as stars.

But that is not what I believe *Liber AL* teaches at all. *Liber AL* does not say that there is the Divine and then there is us and that the Divine loves us the way a parent loves a child or I love my wife. Instead Liber AL teaches that *we* are the loving ones *and* the beloved. That we are always deeply in relationship, one with another and each with ourselves, and that this relationship can only be *truthfully* characterized as love.

Love is not just one of many potential experiences or relationships in a Thelemic world. It is the Law, and the Law is for all. The startling claim at the heart of *Liber AL* is that love is the basis for the forces of both physics and psychology. Love is, properly understood, the fundamental organizing principle of the universe.

It is this full, true notion of love that I wish to speak of here.

Section 2: The Concept Of Ethical Beauty

Now that I have established this proposition, I must establish the first true thesis of my argument. Here I wish to argue that the aesthetic notion of beauty applies to ethical concepts and that through this we sometimes see blameworthy actions and attitudes redeemed into praiseworthy ones by an act of love. I will use a common example from literature to ground my argument.

In the novel *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo, there is an example of love as a transcendental ethical value, a value that, once it enters into the ethical calculus, supersedes all others. The protagonist, Jean Valjean, was sent to prison for the crime of stealing bread to feed his sister's starving children. He has served a long sentence due to bad behavior and escape attempts and has now been released and sent out into the world to find his way. His passport marks him as a former convict and, because of this, he is unable to find a place to sleep for the night. The Bishop Myriel takes him in, allowing him to sleep in his home. Jean Valjean, as so many ex-convicts before and since, is immediately tempted by both desperation and resentment at the injustice of his situation and robs the bishop of most of his

silverware. The chronically unlucky Jean then flees into the night and is promptly caught by the police, who take him back to the bishop to get his side of the story.

It is at this moment that something remarkable happens.

Rather than take back his silver and send Jean Valjean back to prison, Bishop Myriel *lies* for him. He tells the police that he gave Jean the silver and, to drive the point home, urges upon him two silver candlesticks, saying that Jean had forgotten them. The police leave and the two men, Bishop Myriel and Jean Valjean, are left alone. The bishop says the following words:

“Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I buy from you; I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God.”

A powerful spell, indeed.

Now, the good Bishop Myriel has here committed an undeniable crime by the laws of the land of which he is a citizen and a sin by the laws of the church to which he is sworn as clergy. He has lied, and lied to duly appointed officers of the law. He has concealed a crime. He did not merely give Jean the silver, he also told the police that he had already given it to him. The intent of this lie was specifically to prevent the police—again, officers of the law possessing legitimate authority—from doing their sworn duty by sending a guilty recidivist criminal back to prison. And, rather than reclaiming his property, the bishop gives Jean what he stole and more as a gift. According to the normal rules of ethics, the bishop has committed a sin and a crime in one act, and he has also rewarded sin and crime in another person, thus also failing in his pastoral duties. By all of the rules that apply to him on every level, Bishop Myriel is blameworthy.

Yet that is not what we usually see when we read this passage. Only the sternest deontological ethicist might find fault here, and I don’t actually think any *real* deontologist would assign blame. Real deontological ethicists are more nuanced than that.

In any case, we generally do not see the bishop as blameworthy. We do not see him as a liar, criminal, sinner, and failure as a bishop...we see him as wondrous. Transcendent. His mercy and love for a pitiful criminal are beyond the codes of law and church, beyond the rules of society, beyond even the actual criminal intent of Jean Valjean. We do not see the bishop's lie as a sin or a crime.

We see it as beautiful.

The bishop's act expresses the principle of *Ἀγάπη* (Agape), a love that sees Jean as intrinsically worthy of care despite any acts or accidents of the mere world. The bishop wishes to do right by Jean, to see Jean truly, and to help Jean become the man—the good man—that he knows Jean can become. The bishop asserts with his act that they lay in relationship and that this relationship is *love*.

But something else is made clear by the bishop's words. Bishop Myriel does not pretend that the theft did not happen or that there is not a debt here. A duty has been created by the bishop's act of love. Love does not erase the sin...it covers it. Transfigures it. Love transforms it from a mere act of theft and betrayal into an opportunity for a thief to become something greater. The bishop's work of love does not erase the wrong, it works alchemy upon it. The theft of that night, the past crimes of Jean Valjean, and the man himself are taken as the First Matter and, over the course of the rest of the novel, we see the Great Work that is done to transform Jean Valjean and his crimes into a life that equally expresses ethical beauty. Ethical beauty is created (or perhaps revealed) by the loving gaze that sees the other person truly as the star that they are. Through this revelation, a blameworthy act can become praiseworthy.

Section 3: Love As Redeemer

Now, having argued for the notion that the loving gaze creates or reveals ethical beauty by transforming even blameworthy acts into praiseworthy acts, I wish to argue that the loving gaze can also redeem the banal.

First, why is banality blameworthy? For the same reason that goodness is beautiful. The Ethical is bound up with the Aesthetic, as Kierkegaard showed in

"Either/Or." They are like chiral images of each other, meeting like the two hands of the same person. Where the Ethical has duty and prohibition, virtue and vice, and utility and disutility, the Aesthetic has authentic and inauthentic, skillful and clumsy, and beautiful and ugly. Different systems of value, different dimensions of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness, but when we are tracking the one, we also tend to track the other. It was this commonality, this tendency to track the ontology of each phenomenon in the same way, that led Plato and his heirs to define the divine properties as the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, and to this formulation I would like to offer the fourth divine property of "the Loving."

Taken in this way, I think the banal in the Aesthetic is the equivalent of "bad faith" in the Ethical. It is the ad that tries to suck you in with pretty art that means nothing and is the product of no inspiration beyond the need to earn revenue. It is AI-generated "music." Look how I am almost *forced* to use scare quotes because even the most mathematically perfect combination of words and notes possible still lacks the one thing that makes art meaningful: the interiority of the artist. Their own unique perspective that comes from being in relationship with others in the world, with the world as a whole, and with themselves. Without authenticity, without the revelation of interiority, without the necessarily idiosyncratic perspective granted by life and experience, music is mere sound, painting mere color, and literature mere letters. They just hang there, no-hearted and empty, a gesture made by no one that means nothing to anyone.

Thus the banal is blameworthy in exactly the same way that the beautiful is praiseworthy. It is empty of meaning in exactly the same way that beauty is full of meaning, and it harms, it cheapens, it collapses, all that with which it comes into contact. Banality is the Nothing from "The Neverending Story." It is a caustic and cynical anti-meaning that tarnishes and rots what it touches.

But behold, when gazed upon with love, the endless drudgery of a menial job making fake vomit can become the beautiful tale of a life spent in devotion and care when we hear about the family that waits at home at the end of each day's work. Tears can well in our eyes when we watch an ad for gas medicine because it makes us think of our late father's after-dinner symphonies. A cartoon cynically

made to sell toys to children (the source of my middle name) can become a call to champion others. The loving gaze reads the cheap comic book full of unlikely heroes and villains with garish costumes and ridiculous names and sees within them the tales of the gods.

Thus it is my conclusion that the banal can be redeemed from its caustic and tainting effects by the loving gaze that sees meaning despite even the most cynical and empty intent by the creators. Under the loving gaze, meaning is brought to bear even in the unlikeliest of places.

Conclusion: Love As Ontological Principle

I now wish to conclude by arguing that by functioning in the ways that I have described here, love holds together the lived experience of the subject in their relationships with objects and other subjects.

What I have called here the “loving gaze” is an organizing principle for experience. The subject is situated. Thus they are forced by their nature and their situation into relationships with the world and the subjects and objects within it, and forced by those relationships into forming beliefs, desires, intentions, interiority, plans, and projects. In each of these centers of action within the self, the loving gaze redeems through reorganization and reinterpretation. The loving gaze orients the subject towards others and thus calls them into loving relationships. Under the loving gaze, even the most lost can be called back. Even the most damned can be saved. Even the most difficult sacrifices can be made. Under the loving gaze, the threadbare stuffed animal becomes a friend, the cracked McDonald’s cup becomes the token of a treasured memory, and the flawed human just trying their best becomes the beloved.

Thus the loving gaze is what allows for 0, the potential, the No-Thing that is Every-Thing, the world in its potent and pregnant absence, to become 2, the lover and beloved in relation, the world in its actuality and being. Nuit didn’t divide like a cell. She was instead reflected, as in a black mirror, into relationship with Herself, and from this existence was born. Before time, Nuit gazed not, but then She turned

the loving gaze upon Herself and beheld the beloved. From that loving encounter comes all of this, all of us...all of everything.

And from this grows a Thelemic theodicy that is *honest*. The wrong is committed. The harm is done. And I'm not going to make any pretense: sometimes it is time for the war-engine (AL 3:7) to right that wrong. But even in war, the loving gaze looks to the enemy and sees the beloved. The loving gaze tries to do right by all involved, even the enemy. And what more, honestly, can be hoped for?

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