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Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry**

THE MODERN AND PERFECTING RITE OF SYMBOLIC MASONRY



**My Masonic Works in Honor and in the Service of
the Illuminati Grand Master and Grand Master of the
Dignity Order
The Most Eminent Brother Prof. Giuliano Di Bernardo**



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A Statement about this Publication

I wrote and presented this series of lectures during 2019–2023 in Newcastle upon Tyne, England, and in Athens, Greece, in the context of the labors of the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry (A.O.M.P.R.S.M.), of which I am the founder and facilitator. The A.O.M.P.R.S.M. is a Masonic institution that I created and run in order to teach, practice, and promote Symbolic Masonry and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite according to the esoteric master plan of the Illuminati Grand Master the M.E. Bro. Giuliano Di Bernardo, who is the founding Grand Master of the Dignity Order and the Accademia degli Illuminati as well as a Past Grand Master of Italian Freemasonry. I am herewith officially stating that I personally maintain exclusive international copyright on the entire material contained in this publication (for every language).

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***Above:** The Illuminati Grand Master and Grand Master of the Dignity Order Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo (on the left) with Nicolas Laos (on the right) at a convocation of the Knights of Dignity in Sardinia, 2023. Nicolas Laos runs the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry as a Masonic institution of men and women based on and in the service of the esoteric education and awareness that he has obtained in the Dignity Order and the Illuminati under Giuliano Di Bernardo's initiatory sword.*

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Introduction

I have created a special, exclusive Masonic association, called the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, and I manage it in line with the multi-dimensional tasks and authorities that have been assigned to me by the Illuminati Grand Master the M.E. Brother Giuliano Di Bernardo.

The first objective of our work (as a Masonic Order) is to mold the “organs” associated with the following three functions: firstly, mental homeostasis, or the ability to maintain a relatively stable mental state that persists despite changes in the external world; secondly, the communication between conscious beings; thirdly, humanity’s adaptation to environment. Which are these organs? Personality, character, and behavior. Personality is the set of all psychosomatic properties and functions by means of which a human being interacts with oneself and with one’s environment. Intimately related to the term “personality” is the term “soul,” because soul is the personal way in which one manifests the force of life. Character is the expressive organ of personality. Behavior is the executive organ of personality, and it consists of impulses and learning. By the term “impulse,” we mean a sudden and compelling urge or desire to act. By the term “learning,” we mean a function that enables a person to utilize experience and training and to acquire new types of behavior in order to ultimately supplement and expand one’s innate capacity for adaptation and creativity.

The second objective of our work (as a Masonic Order) is to mold and, indeed, create history. What is history? History is a series of acts through which consciousness controls and manages regions of the world. In other words, history is a series of interventions of consciousness in the space-time continuum, which underpin the distinction between the notion of before and the notion of after. The fact that the integration of beings into the world underpins their organization, which, in turn, underpins the completion and the integration of their presence, does not imply that the presence of beings is passive or that the study of beings as agents is of secondary significance vis-à-vis the study of beings as organisms of the world. Being as agency is best understood as dynamical intentionality. The reality of a being as an agent is manifested through the discarding of those possibilities which do not comply with the given being’s nature or with its program of development, as well as through the identification and the embracing of those elements which are akin to the given being’s nature and reinforce it. In other words, being as agency is manifested through self-affirmation. In the context of their integration into the world, beings

are structurally interrelated and interdependent; they affirm themselves within each other, but the nature of each being is not altered by this interaction. The constitutive elements of being, or the categories of being, interact with the constitutive elements of the reality of the world. Therefore, apart from being modes of being, they become modes of enhanced being. The intentionality of the structure of a being, or the character of a being's intentionality, is manifested through the dynamization of the existential conditions of that being by that being. Therefore, consciousness restructures both the world and itself in a way that ontologically upgrades the corresponding being into an enhanced, superior version of itself, so that its organic integration does not bring about its substantive alteration.

My aforementioned Masonic initiative is part of my broader activities in the realm of esotericism. Intimately related to my approach to esotericism in general and initiatory societies in particular is the problem of happiness, which has been highlighted by the distinguished philosopher and Freemason Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo in his compelling book *Il futuro di Homo sapiens* (which was originally published by Marsilio in 2020, and, in 2021, it was published in English under the title *The Future of Homo Sapiens*). Humans seek happiness through religions (especially through the most spiritually elevated forms of religion), ideologies, and initiatory societies. In fact, according to Giuliano Di Bernardo, religions, ideologies, and initiatory societies are the three basic spiritual aspects of social reality—more specifically, they are ways of addressing and tackling real existential problems which, in turn, arise from economic and political conditions and challenges. However, we must have a broad understanding of the concept of a historical structure.

A historical structure consists of three mutually interacting categories of forces:

- i. *Material capabilities*: they are productive and distributive potentials, which are manifested as technological and organizational capabilities.
- ii. *Ideas*: they are of two kinds. One kind consists of intersubjective meanings—that is, shared notions of the nature of social relations that tend to perpetuate habits and expectations of behavior (see: Charles Taylor, “Hermeneutics and Politics,” in Paul Connerton, ed., *Critical Sociology*, Harmondsworth: Middlesex: Penguin, 1965, Chapter VI). The other kind of ideas consists of collective images of social order held by different social groups. The term “ideology” was first formulated by the French aristocrat

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and philosopher Destutt de Tracy in 1796, to denote a systematic critical and (intellectually) therapeutic (or corrective) study of the sensory bases of ideas. Ideas underpin religions and ideologies. Religions are religious anthropologies, that is, anthropologies based on the idea of God and on beliefs about the relations between the deity and the humanity, whereas, ideologies are secular anthropologies. In the most general way, we can define “ideology” as a pattern (recurring module) of symbolically invested beliefs and expressions that determine the way in which consciousness perceives, interprets, and evaluates the world in order, according to its intentionality, to formulate, mobilize, direct, organize, and justify specific ways or guiding axes of action and to reject others. In this light, ideology provides a coherent system of ideas that forms the basis of the historical action of the bearer of the corresponding ideology. Therefore, ideology prevents intellectual squinting and ensures the stability of the strategic orientation of thought and action. Furthermore, the ideological way of thinking underpins rigorous political critique, because a genuine ideologue criticizes systems themselves instead of merely linking political criticism to particular political actors, such as particular politicians, particular businesspersons, particular state bureaucrats, etc. On the other hand, ideology may not always function as a coherent system of ideas that ensures the stability of the strategic orientation of thought and action, but it may degenerate into a system of ideas that overemphasizes, in an obsessive and arbitrary way, their importance in the constitution and transformation of reality. In particular, in its degenerate version, the term “ideology” denotes a deficit of realism that results from self-delusion or the interest of the ideologue—in this case, the representative of a prejudiced social type or collective subject acting as a propagandist (whether or not one is aware of this situation). Hence, the degenerate version of ideology can be called obsession, which is a psychiatric condition, or “false consciousness” in Karl Marx’s terminology.

- iii. *Institutions*: they are particular mixtures of ideas and material power which, in turn, influence the further

development of ideas and material power. In particular, institutions are a means of stabilizing and perpetuating a particular order, and they provide ways of dealing with conflicts. The transition from the natural sciences to the social sciences is an upward-moving process known as “emergentism.” The specific nature of sociology clearly emerges when we examine it from an ontological point of view. In his book *Le Regole dell’Azione Sociale*, Giuliano Di Bernardo (specifically, in the chapter entitled “La fondazione del sociale”) shows that social reality is constructed by humanity through “constitutive rules.” In particular, Di Bernardo (*ibid*) maintains that, based on constitutive rules, language, and the collective self, social reality has a dual ontology: one that is “visible,” observable, made up of objects from the external world, such as houses, monuments, and money; the other is “invisible,” made up, for instance, of housing regulations, the aesthetics of monuments, and the significance of money.



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I. Freemasonry

Initiatory institutions consist of initiatory concepts and profane concepts. By the term “initiatory concepts,” we mean those concepts whose knowledge presupposes an initiation, that is, whose meaning is not accessible to anyone. By the term “profane concepts,” we mean those concepts whose knowledge does not presuppose any initiation.

One of the most important initiatory institutions is Freemasonry. For instance, the concept of a “Masonic secret” is the central initiatory concept of Freemasonry, since its meaning is known only to Masons, whereas the concepts of “Freedom,” “Tolerance,” and “Fraternity” are basic profane concepts of Freemasonry, since their meaning is understandable even to non-Masons.

By the term “Freemasonry,” or “Symbolic Masonry,” I mean an initiatory organization that uses symbols, allegories, and dramas related to and inspired by ancient and medieval Operative Masonry in order to dramatize philosophical ideas, cultivate intellect, mold consciousness, teach a moral system, and forge fraternal relations between its members (the spirituality of Symbolic Masonry is enshrined in building terminology). The three degrees of pure, ancient Symbolic Masonry are those of an Entered Apprentice, a Fellow Craft, and a Master Mason. However, gradually, in the history of Freemasonry, new Masonic degrees were fabricated and organized into different “Rites.” The thirty-three degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (A.A.S.R.) are the following: (1°) Entered Apprentice, (2°) Fellow Craft, (3°) Master Mason, (4°) Secret Master, (5°) Perfect Master, (6°) Intimate Secretary, (7°) Provost and Judge, (8°) Intendant of the Buildings, (9°) Elect of Nine, (10°) Elect of Fifteen, (11°) Sublime Elect, (12°) Grand Master Architect, (13°) Royal Arch of Enoch, (14°) Scotch Knight of Perfection (or Grand Elect Perfect and Sublime Mason), (15°) Knight of the East or of the Sword, (16°) Prince of Jerusalem, (17°) Knight of the East and West, (18°) Knight of the Pelican and Eagle and Sovereign Prince Rose Croix of Heredom (or simply Knight Rose Croix), (19°) Grand Pontiff, (20°) Venerable Grand Master of the Symbolic Lodges, or Master ad Vitam, (21°) Patriarch Noachite or Prussian Knight, (22°) Prince of Libanus, (23°) Chief of the Tabernacle, (24°) Prince of the Tabernacle, (25°) Knight of the Brazen Serpent, (26°) Prince of Mercy, (27°) Commander of the Temple, (28°) Knight of the Sun, (29°) Knight of Saint Andrew, (30°) Grand Elected Knight Kadosh or Knight of the White and Black Eagle, (31°) Grand Inspector Inquisitor Commander, (32°) Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret, and (33°) Sovereign Grand Inspector General. The degrees 4th–33rd that the

Scottish Rite superimposed on the three degrees of Symbolic Masonry are a system of didactic narratives, allegories, and symbols designated to help Master Masons who follow the English tradition of Symbolic Masonry, which is centered on the building of King Solomon's Temple and on the Hiramic Legend, perfect themselves as human beings and Freemasons.

The exact origin of the term "Freemasonry" is not known. In 1391, at Oxford, there is reference to a "master of free stones," and there are also Masons called "mason layers." The term "Freemason" is known to have been in use in 1374. The prefix "free" was used to describe those who worked in and sculptured and carved free stone, which was a fine-grained sandstone or limestone lending itself to easy carving and sculpturing and suitable for window and door frames, vaultings, capitals, and other ornamentation used largely in Gothic Architecture. Moreover, the prefix "free" was used to indicate a free man, especially in Scotland. This was meant to refer to a man who had completed his indentures and was free to work on his own. The first recorded use of the word Lodge in a Masonic context can be traced back to the building of a Cistercian Monastery at Vale Royal near Chester in 1278. In that period of the history of Masonry, the Lodge was a hut in which Masons conversed, organized their work, took their midday meals, and, on certain occasions, they could even sleep. By the mid-fourteenth century C.E., there were elaborate rules governing the behavior of Masons of the Lodge attached to York Minster.

In ancient times, Masonry became a true science and art by the Greeks. In 1940, C. F. C. Hawkes, assistant Keeper of Antiquities in the British Museum, published his seminal book entitled *The Prehistoric Foundations of Europe to the Mycenaean Age*, in which he argued that the megalithic architecture, the use of copper, the building of walls around cities, and the erection of ancient edifices are ancient Greek achievements. The distinguished and highly influential American Freemason, researcher, and historiographer Manly P. Hall, in his seminal book entitled *The Secret Teachings of All Ages: An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic and Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy*, originally published in 1928, argues that the "Dionysian Architects" constituted an ancient secret society whose principles and doctrines were similar to those of modern Freemasonry. According to Hall, the Dionysian Architects constituted an organization of builders bound together by their secret knowledge of the relationship between the exoteric and the esoteric aspects of architecture. They were supposedly employed by King Solomon in the building of the Temple of Jerusalem, although they were not Jews, and they were followers of Bacchus and Dionysus. Moreover, according to Hall, the Dionysian Architects erected many of the great monuments of

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Antiquity, possessed a secret code for communicating among themselves and for marking their stones, had special convocations and sacred feasts, and Hiram Abiff, the Architect of King Solomon's Temple, was an initiate of this society.

At this point, it is useful to make a brief reference to the interactions between the civilizations of the ancient Greeks and the ancient Jews. In particular, the Jewish way of worshiping God was influenced by Greek philosophy, since it included not only chants and readings from the Bible but also interpretations of (i.e., reflections on) the Jewish religious texts—that is, a philosophical task. Greek culture influenced the Bible itself: the expressions “God the Most High” and “I am that I am” are indications of Platonic influences on the Bible. Moreover, the epithets “Lord of the Powers” and “Almighty” (in Greek: “Pantocrator”), which were adopted by Hellenized Jews, were originally applied to Hermes. Moreover, the Greek translation of the books of the Old Testament that was produced in 271 B.C.E. by seventy Jewish interpreters by orders of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, King of Ptolemaic Egypt, is characterized by a linguistic attempt to imitate Greek anthropomorphism. As a result of their contact with and influence by Greek philosophy, the Jews' old tradition of prayer to a silent God, which underpins pure mysticism, was gradually supplemented with philosophy—specifically with discourse about God, which underpins the development of theology. The Jews of Egypt developed a highly Hellenized literature. The historiographer Demetrius, a Jewish courtier of Ptolemy IV, wrote an exposition of the Jewish religion following a philosophical style, which indicates the Greek spiritual influence on the Jews of Egypt. Artapanus of Alexandria, another famous Hellenized Jew, wrote an allegorical novel in which Moses is presented as the founder of the Orphic Mysteries. The Orphic cult was one of the most ancient Greek monotheistic religious systems. According to the initiates of the Orphic Mysteries, there is only one divine King-Lord. He is self-caused, everything that has been created has been created by Him (the One), and all the different gods of the ancient Greek pantheon are different manifestations of the omnipotent One. A Jew named Ezekiel composed a Greek tragedy on the theme of the Exodus. Philo the Elder wrote the epic *On Jerusalem* in Homeric hexameters. The Jewish epic poet Theodotus wrote an epic *On Shechem*, connecting the name of Shechem, an Israelite city of the tribe of Manasseh, with Sikimios, the son of the Greek god Hermes. The Jewish philosopher Aristobulus of Paneas coined the theory that Pythagoras and Plato knew the Bible.

In the eighteenth century, the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster was formed under the direction of the Rev. Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers, who emerged as one of the most prominent pedagogues of Hanoverian England. In the 1720s, the Rev. Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers began the English Masonic tradition of treating Hiram Abiff as the major Freemasonic symbol of devotion to duty. In 1 Kings 7:13–14, Hiram is described as the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali who was the son of a Tyrian bronze worker, contracted by Solomon to cast the bronze furnishings and ornate decorations for the Jerusalem Temple. In the original Hebrew version of 2 Chronicles 2:13, the name “Hiram Abi” is mentioned. The Masonic term “Hiram Abiff” derives from the Hebrew term “Hiram Abi,” and the term “Abi” or “Abiff” is a Hebrew term of respect literally meaning “father,” and, in the English Freemasonic context, it means “master craftsman.”

The motif that is known as the Seal of Solomon, or Hexalpha (two interlaced equilateral triangles), was also one of the Dionysian Architects’ symbols. The “Hexalpha” probably emerged as a symbol of harmonious duality and, particularly, of the ten primary contrasting qualities of Pythagoras: the limited and unlimited, odd and even, male and female, one and the many, right and left, rest and motion, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, as well as the square and the oblong. In the context of Pythagorean philosophy, the Hexalpha and the Icosahedron represent the union of complementary forces.

With regard to the ancient Roman Colleges, in his aforementioned book, Manly P. Hall argues that the Roman *Collegia* of skilled architects were a subdivision of the greater Ionian body, and that it is most likely that the Dionysian Architects exerted profound influence on early Islamic culture, too. Indeed, it is a historical fact that ancient Roman art was derived from and relied heavily on ancient Greek art. According to M. P. Hall, during their expeditions in the East, the medieval Knights Templar came in touch with the architectural heritage of the Dionysian Artificers and introduced many of the Dionysian Artificers’ symbols and doctrines into medieval Europe.

Sir David Brewster, in his book *The History of Freemasonry*, published in 1804, argues that the Masons sent to King Solomon from Tyre were members of the Dionysian fraternity. In the eleventh century B.C.E., the inhabitants of the ancient Greek city of Athens thought that their country was too small and the soil of poor quality. They sailed to Asia Minor and drove out the inhabitants of a piece of land that they called Ionia, and where they built many towns. They took with them their knowledge of the

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sciences and arts, and they introduced the original Mysteries of Pallas and Dionysus, the Roman Bacchus, into Ionia.

John A. Weisse, M.D., in his book *The Obelisk and Freemasonry*, published in 1880, argues that the Dionysian Artificers made their appearance no later than 1000 B.C.E. They enjoyed particular privileges and immunities, possessed secret means of recognition, and were bound together by special secret ties. In his previous book, Weisse argues that it has been claimed that King Solomon of Israel, at the instance of King Hiram of Tyre, employed the Dionysian Artificers at the Jerusalem Temple and Palace, and that they were also employed at the construction of the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. Additionally, according to Weisse (*ibid*), from the Dionysian Artificers sprang the guilds of the travelling Masons known in the Middle Ages.

In medieval times, Freemasonry was a closed Trade Guild. In those years, the Masters of the Craft were in possession of secret knowledge about the weights of various types of stone per solid cubit, their capacity, the effects of grains, the methods used to raise stones to their required setting, the construction of machines to achieve this, and many other matters connected with the Craft of Masonry. Thus, in the Middle Ages, a Master of the Craft was justified in claiming that he was a Master of Arts and Sciences. With the decay of the Guilds, this knowledge ceased to retain its secret nature, and it became more generally available through the textbooks and tables of the Architectural and Engineering Professions, which have now taken the place of the Guild of Masons. However, the journey of the stones has provided a symbolism of the advance of the men who wrought the stones. In the context of Symbolic Masonry, the stone and its worker became identified in the Lodge symbolic ceremonies. In all the different rites of Symbolic Masonry, the candidate represents a “living stone” that is being wrought from the rough, in which it is received from the Quarry to a state of perfection. Thus, even though there are various different Freemasonic Rites practiced around the world, the most general definition of Symbolic Masonry is that it is a system of spiritual and social development based on the symbolic use of Operative Masons’ tools, habits, methods of work, and structures of organization.

Historians are now certain that Scottish operative Lodges began to admit non-operative members as “Accepted” in the seventeenth century—that is, honorary or gentlemen, Masons—and that the Accepted Masons had gained the ascendancy by the eighteenth century. The Lodges in which the Accepted Masons had gained the ascendancy became symbolic, or “speculative,” Lodges, while others continued practicing Operative

Masonry. In addition, historical researchers have found several references to the Scottish stonemasons' Lodges having a Mason's Word and secret modes of recognition, thus establishing a system of mutual trust among travelling Operative Masons.

In an enumeration of the guilds entitled to representation in the Common Council of London in 1370, guild No. 17 was the "Company of Freemasons," and guild No. 34 was the "Company of Masons." The Company of Masons appears to have been of greater numerical strength than the Company of Freemasons since it had four representatives, as opposed to two for the other. Albert Mackey's *History of Freemasonry* suggests that the Freemasons formed a smaller and more select society, but this is pure speculation because there are no historical facts about the special social status of Freemasons. However, the previous list establishes the existence of two separate guilds. Ultimately, these two guilds were merged, taking a coat of arms which displayed three white castles with black doors and windows on a black field, together with a silver or scalloped chevron and on it a black pair of compasses. Furthermore, town mason guilds frequently united with, or formed parts of, guilds of other workers employed in the building trades, and the rules laid down for practical guidance of members of the Craft corresponded in the main with similar rules laid down in other craft guilds of that period.

In the British Museum, there is an old document from around 1390 C.E. that gives some rules and regulations, or, as they are known among Freemasons, "Charges." This document is called the *Regius Poem*, and it is admitted to be the oldest genuine record of the Craft of Masonry known. The aforementioned Charges indicate that Freemasonry was not only a technical activity, but also an organization that safeguarded and promoted a specific ethos. Thus, from the outset, Freemasonry has also been a cultural, particularly, moral institution. The fact that Freemasonry has a cultural, particularly, moral core, which transcends the technical activities of Operative Masons, enabled and encouraged the survival of Freemasonry as a symbolic system, and, indeed, a cultural phenomenon, after the decay of the guild system.

In order to understand the transition from Operative Masonry to Symbolic Masonry, you must realize that Symbolic Masons do not intend to build any material, stone temple, but they try to erect a symbolic temple whose major pillars are Freedom, Reason, Justice, and Love. Therefore, Freemasonry is a peculiar system of intellectual and moral rectitude veiled in initiatory rituals and illustrated by symbols. My decision to create and manage a new, distinct Masonic Order, namely, the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, is underpinned by

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my attempt to interpret and practice Freemasonry, specifically, the three degrees of Symbolic Masonry and the thirty-three degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, in accordance with my philosophy, which is based on my esoteric training by the Illuminati Grand Master Giuliano Di Bernardo; and, therefore, through the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, I provide and promote a totally dereligionized way of practicing Freemasonry, and, as I have already mentioned, I follow a concrete system of philosophical anthropology.

My conception of Freemasonry is inextricably linked to the ethos of the Renaissance, and, in fact, I maintain that the cultural roots of Freemasonry must be sought in the Renaissance. The Renaissance led European civilization to modernity, combining elements of the medieval civilization and new findings. The term “Renaissance” was coined by the French historian Jules Michelet (1798–1874), who used it in his seminal book *Histoire de France* (vol. 7) in order to describe the historical period that roughly covers the time from 1400 to 1600 as “the discovery of the world, the discovery of man.” The Renaissance was guided by the idea of reviving classical Antiquity, but it attempted to do so in a creative and unique way that was underpinned by the post-medieval human being’s self-confidence and humanistic spirit. Hence, the Renaissance is associated with the following events:

- the founding of Italian republics;
- the development of political science by the Italian diplomat, political philosopher, and writer Niccolò Machiavelli;
- the placing of emphasis on the principle of harmony (methodically studied by the Spanish mathematician, music theorist, and composer Bartolomé Ramos de Pareja, as well as by the Italian music theorists and composers Franchinus Gaffurius, Giovanni Spataro, and Pietro Aaron);
- the development of the idea that the universe is infinite (proposed by the Italian Dominican friar, philosopher, and mathematician Giordano Bruno);
- the invention of the mechanical movable type printing press (by the German goldsmith and printer Johannes Gutenberg);
- the manufacturing of high-quality gunpowder and firearms;
- the construction and the systematic use of the nautical (magnetic) compass;
- the achievement of important advances in machinery, mining, and chemistry (as exemplified in Georg Bauer’s treatise *De Re Metallica*, published in 1556);

- the rigorous formulation of Heliocentrism (i.e., the astronomical model in which the Earth and other planets revolve around the Sun at the center of the solar system; this astronomical model was originally proposed by the ancient Greek astronomer and mathematician Aristarchus of Samos, and it was reformulated in a scientifically more rigorous way by the Polish mathematician and astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus);
- the Lutheran Reformation (despite his theological excesses, especially in relation to his three “Sola,” Martin Luther attempted to liberate Western Christians from a feeling of guilt that was deliberately cultivated by particular authoritarian clerical elites, and he emphasized the belief that, in the person of Christ, the deity serves the humanity);
- the synthesis between Neplatonism and Christianity by the Italian scholar Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who introduced the Kabbalah (also spelled Qabalah) to the emerging Renaissance Neoplatonists and presented his seventy-two Kabbalistic *Conclusiones* as a way of confirming the Christian religion starting with the fundamentals of the Hebrew spirituality (the Kabbalah of the Jews is a synthesis of Pythagoreanism, Neoplatonism, and biblical mysticism);
- and the mastering of perspective space and perspective drawing (Renaissance artists replaced the extra-temporal and extra-spatial symbolism of medieval painting with the subject’s own logical way of seeing the world).

In the context of the Renaissance, humanism, as a cultural movement, was based on classical ancient literature in order to teach trust in education, art, and science, to defend rational thinking and its link to action, to propose the use of a scholarly advanced language in contradistinction to “common speech,” and to highlight personal expression. Thus, Dante Alighieri’s poetry was largely displaced by Francesco Petrarca’s poetry, whose lyricism expresses the sensitivity of the emerging individual.

II. A Historical Note

Prior to 1717, Symbolic Masonry was organized in the form of “cells,” and, thus, every Lodge organized itself with its own workers and guiding Master, or Masters. The building craft was a main regulatory body for its own domain. Even though Freemasonry already existed before the eighteenth century, the year 1717 signals the commencement of a new

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system of Freemasonic organization and government, namely, the “Grand Lodge” system. In particular, the “Grand Lodge of London and Westminster,” also known as the “Premier Grand Lodge of England,” was conceived and established in 1717, by the following four Symbolic Lodges:

1. The Goose and Gridiron, St. Paul’s Churchyard, established 1691;
2. Crown Ale House Lodge, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, established 1712;
3. The Apple Tree Tavern, Covent Garden, now known as the Lodge of Fortitude and Old Cumberland;
4. The Rummer and Grapes, Channel Row, Westminster, later known as Horn Lodge.

From the year 1717 onward, we can identify various conditions, rules, and general types of behavior characterizing the Lodges that followed the model of the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster, and those that existed prior to that year or followed alternative paths of development. The point is that secrecy was maintained for a long period of time, especially regarding the Rituals. The Rituals were kept secret, Masons were prohibited from writing them down, and they were orally transmitted in private chambers, Temples, or working Lodges. Secrecy is inherent in the tradition of Freemasonry (like the Egyptian Sphinx’s folded wings, which symbolized silence) in order to keep the profane, the cowans, and those who are not duly tyled away from the sacred space of the initiatory labors.



On the left: Nicolas Laos with Fra John Baron Dudley von Sydow von Hoff on his left, in a chivalric gathering, in 2008. Fra John Baron Dudley von Sydow von Hoff (1937–2016) was a permanent, professional member of the staff of the Grand Secretary’s Office at the Mark

Masons’ Hall, in London. The Mark Masons’ Hall is the administrative headquarters of several appendant Freemasonic Orders (including Masonic chivalric degrees) affiliated with the United Grand Lodge of England. Nicolas Laos had several in-depth Masonic discussions with Baron von Hoff, and the latter, being the Master-General of the English Branch of the Hospitaller Order of Saint Lazarus of Jerusalem, installed Nicolas Laos as a Knight of Saint Lazarus, in a ceremony that took place in the City of London in 2008.

Irrespective of the causes of the events that took place in 1717, the new stage was created, signaling the transition from “operative” Masonry to “speculative” Masonry and a shift from a highly secretive way of transmitting knowledge to broader initiatory networks and later to global ones. These developments originated from the decision of particular Masonic groups to organize themselves and, generally, Freemasonry in a different way, namely, the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster. The fundamental reasons for this historical change may be analyzed from several perspectives, but, eventually, this historical change brought about a tremendous increase in the influence of the British Empire over all other existing countries and their newly disclosed and manifested Freemasonries. Even though Freemasonry existed in many other regions of Europe, the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster and, subsequently, the United Grand Lodge of England grabbed the banner of Freemasonry and proclaimed that the United Grand Lodge of England is the “Mother Grand Lodge of the world.” This is a purely political, economic, and administrative decision, overruling the authorities and the decisions of smaller or alternatively structured Masonic groups. The history of this development is well documented, and we can learn a lot from it.

The condition of Freemasonry three hundred years later—namely, at the dawn of the twenty-first century—is a product of human decisions pertaining to the organization and the reorganization of Freemasonry and to the interpretation of the authentic Masonic tradition, and they are influenced by social, cultural, moral, economic, and political forces. Hence, the history of Freemasonry is not only intertwined with symbolisms, philosophies, and models of organization, but also with various other historical forces. For instance, for a basic investigation of Freemasonic geopolitics, see François Thual’s book *Géopolitique de la franc-maçonnerie*.

In previous centuries, many Masonic Rites and Rituals were formed (and they were mostly characterized by considerable moral and esoteric significance). Today, there still exist several “streams” of Masonic Orders and Rites, and, usually, they operate as branches attached to the trunk of the Grand Lodge of Symbolic Masonry. Thus, today, we have the Scottish Rite, the York Rite, the Emulation Rite, the French Rite, the Schröder Rite, the Egyptian Rite, the Swedish Rite, and other similar Rites (not so widely practiced).

As we know, the Rites and the Rituals of the Masonic Lodges were secret both prior to 1717 and throughout the eighteenth century. Moreover, during the formation of the first Grand Lodges and the drafting of the first

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Masonic Constitutions (usually based on “landmarks” and preserved Manuscripts), significant developments took place in the fields of scholarly research and symbology. The development of standardized models of Freemasonic organization gave rise to the standardization of Masonic Rituals, mainly by the dominant Grand Lodges.

The Rites, the Rituals, and the Orders that emerged in the previous centuries were not instituted as dogmas, but they were developed, reformed, rewritten, and applied in different ways in the context of their acceptance by different Masonic groups.

The Rites and the Orders that were previously mentioned did not emerge as crystallized, unchangeable institutions, but they have gone through multiple fermentations. We have to thank several intelligent scholars and wise persons inspired by the Enlightenment who preserved the cultural heritage of operative Masonry, and composed Masonic Rituals for use by modern people. For instance, we know that, in the eighteenth-century England, the Moderns’ Grand Lodge (officially known as the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster) and the Ancients’ Grand Lodge (officially called the “Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of England according to the Old Constitutions”) used different Rites and Rituals, which were ultimately fused into the Emulation Rite as a result of the union between the two aforementioned English Grand Lodges that took place in 1813 (giving birth to the United Grand Lodge of England). We can watch the history of every Rite and its governing “Order” by analyzing its development. Thus, for instance, we know that the prominent German Masonic leader Friedrich Ludwig Schröder rewrote the Ritual of Symbolic Masonry, and that the fact that several German Grand Lodges and individual Lodges adopted Schröder’s revision of the Ritual of Symbolic Masonry set the stage for the establishment of a great German and international Masonic Alliance.

Regarding the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, it should be mentioned that, while some of its degrees may have had an earlier origin, the Rite as such appears to have germinated in France around the early 1760s when a system of twenty-five degrees was drawn up, several of which were in name only. While there were various rival Bodies controlling Rites of so-called “Scottish degrees,” it was the Grand Lodge of France in conjunction with a Masonic Order called the Council of Knights of the East who deputed Stephen Morin, a member of a French-American Huguenot family, to promulgate their Masonic system in the West Indies, and, from his labors, Scottish Rite Masonry in America took its footing. Thus, by about 1765, a Rite of Perfection of twenty-five degrees was being

practiced both in Continental Europe and the Americas, and, towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Rite was increased to thirty-three degrees. Even though the mythological narrative and the key symbols of each of the thirty-three degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite remain, *grosso modo*, constant, different Supreme Councils of the 33rd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite around the world have revised the Rituals of this Masonic Rite and the interpretation of its content according to each Supreme Council's particular approach to Freemasonry.

Consequently, the Rites of Freemasonry develop through the development of human understanding regarding both Masonic knowledge and the dynamics of civilization. Now, in the twenty-first century, which is marked by "liquid modernity," "postmodern" attitudes, and the "deconstruction" of earlier standards, we see the disintegration of Grand Lodges as a consequence of a multitude of problems that have emerged from the very standards that were set to be practical but subsequently evolved into dogmatic and restrictive rules. In this context, and being deeply aware of the history and the structural problems of Freemasonry, I created a new Masonic Rite, namely, the "Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry." Furthermore, I should emphasize that my approach to Freemasonry is inextricably linked to sociology, politology, philosophical anthropology, the history of philosophy, and the philosophy of history.

III. A Theory of the Elites

My inquiries into politics and history have led me to the conclusion that societies are always dominated by a minority, often referred to as the "elite," which makes the major decisions within the society and which concentrates power in its own hands. The literal and original meaning of the term "elite" is the "elect" or the best. In fact, this is the way in which the term is used in ordinary speech when policies are sometimes defended, particularly in education, as "elitist," meaning that they are intended to produce the best or most skillfully crafted. In political theory, "elitism" has a more technical reference to certain modes of explanation deriving from the works of the Italian political sociologists Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto.

Mosca was a professor of constitutional law at the University of Turin from 1895 to 1923 and then a professor of public law at the University of Rome until 1933. In his book entitled *The Ruling Class* (translated and edited by A. Livingston, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), Mosca argues that, in every society, there are two basic classes of people: a class that rules and a class that is ruled. According to Mosca, the ruling class

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monopolizes power, enjoys the advantages of power, and it uses both legal and arbitrary, even criminal, methods in order to sustain its domination. Each ruling group possesses some resource or attribute that is esteemed or influential in the corresponding society and that it exploits in order to advance its own power or advantage. This might be the ownership of the means of production, military force, priestly status, or administrative expertise. Moreover, Mosca has argued that elites rule by violence, manipulation, ideology, and psychological operations. In particular, Mosca contends, collective “illusions,” including religious or nationalist sentiments and manipulated perceptions of public order and security, hold societies together and degrade the prevailing democratic formula into a false belief.

Mosca has explained political and social change as a result of conflict between ruling classes seeking to hold on to power and new social forces, led by minorities (alternative elites) striving to displace them. Thus, according to Mosca, elites often lose power because they fail to assimilate new social forces, either by opening ranks to new claimants for power and privileges or by adapting their policies and/or ideas. An elite that is excessively introverted and inflexible gradually loses its political and ideological hold on society, and, especially if it lacks efficient social feedback mechanisms, it may itself be overthrown.

Pareto, who was originally trained as an engineer and worked in business from 1870, published his seminal book entitled *Trattato di Sociologia Generale* (translated as *The Mind and Society*) in 1916 (V. Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, translated by A. Livingston and A. Bongiorno, 4 vols., New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935). According to Pareto, societies are divided into the elite which leads, and those who are led. The elite comprises a governing and a non-governing element: the governing elite maintains its power through a combination of coercion and manipulated consent. Pareto has pointed out that government requires an effective and rational synthesis between two opposed psychological types—specifically, Class I or “foxes” and Class II or “lions.” The “foxes” correspond to and are excellent in manifesting the qualities of flexibility, cunning action, and persuasiveness, thus generating consent through manoeuvres. The “lions” correspond to and are excellent in manifesting violence in order to suppress opposition, thus employing coercion in organized fashion. If a governing elite is excessively characterized by Class I attributes and is seriously deficient of Class II attributes, then it will be overthrown by a counter-elite that has strong Class II attributes and is ready to act decisively. However, “lions” tend to become excessively conservative,

stultified, and remote from the population. Therefore, sooner or later, they require the assistance from those with strong Class I attributes, who, in turn, gradually infiltrate and transform the established elite system. Apart from the analysis of the pattern of circulation between the two aforementioned psychological types, another important problem in the theory of the elite and the methodology of power is the analysis of the teleology of an elite's policy.

My teleological approach to elitism is based on Immanuel Kant's argument that morality and politics must be related, because, as Kant contends in his essay entitled *Perpetual Peace*, "a true system of politics cannot take a single step without first paying tribute to morality" (Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," in *Kant: Political Writings*, edited by H. Reiss, second edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 125). However, Kant drew a clear distinction between moral motives, acting from good will or respect for the moral law, and legal motives. In his essay entitled *The Conflict of the Faculties*, he argued that moral and legal incentives must never be collapsed into each other. In particular, according to Kant, morality and public justice must be related in such a way that morality molds politics, even though it is not the motive of politics, given that politics cannot hope for "good will."

Given the aforementioned tension between a moral system and a system of public legal justice, which must be related to each other while simultaneously remaining distinct from each other, Kant concludes that the notion of "ends" can serve as a bridge between the moral realm and the political-legal realm, since public law upholds some moral ends, such as "non-murder," even though that law must content itself with a legal motive. Indeed, if "good will," in the moral realm, could mean never universalizing a maxim of action that would fail to respect persons as ends in themselves, then the realm of morality and the realm of politics and law could be connected through Kantian teleology. If every person had good will, then everyone would respect everyone else as an end, and then all humans would constitute a "kingdom of ends." However, although it ought to, this does not actually happen due to the pathological fact that humanity is radically evil.

Good will means respect for persons as ends in themselves, and public legal justice sees to it that some moral ends, such as "non-murder," get observed, if not respected. Therefore, according to Kant, public legal justice is the partial realization of what could happen if all wills were good, and law creates a kind of environment for good will. Kant's whole position on politics as the legal realization of moral ends is best summed

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up in the following two passages: the first from his *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*:

Man in the system of nature . . . is of little significance and, along with the other animals, considered as products of the earth, has an ordinary value But man as a person, i.e. as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above all price. For as such a one (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of other people, or even to his own ends, but is to be prized as an end in himself (Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Principles of Virtue*, p. 96–7).

In *The Conflict of the Faculties*, Kant explained the political significance of the aforementioned passage as follows:

In the face of omnipotence of nature, or rather its supreme first cause which is inaccessible to us, the human being is, in his turn, but a trifle. But for the sovereigns of his own species also to consider and treat him as such, whether by burdening him as an animal, regarding him as a mere tool of their designs, or exposing him in their conflicts with one another in order to have him massacred—this is no trifle, but a subversion of the ultimate purpose of creation itself (Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings*, p. 185).

Furthermore, my teleological approach to elitism is guided by Plato’s aristocratic vision, delineated in his *Republic*. *Gorgias* is the first of Plato’s political dialogues in which the authentic art of politics—which, according to Socrates’s definition, cares for the good—is contrasted with that which merely imitates it and deals only with the question of enforcement and the management of vested interests. Thus, in line with Plato’s political thought, I propose a fundamental distinction between philosophical political systems and counter-philosophical political systems: the former are genuinely interested in fundamental philosophical questions, and they are explicitly guided by a concrete philosophical system, whereas the latter are concerned only with settling practical issues simply and only according to the logic of historical necessity, conventional “thin” values, and the existing distribution of power. Philosophical political systems reflect humanity’s attempt to transcend its ape origins towards a superior mode of being, whereas counter-philosophical political systems reflect and manage the ape origins and the ape-like traits of humanity.

Knowledge and wisdom give particular persons the authority to govern. Those who exercise this authority must be articulate, charismatic, rational,

persuasive, and far-sighted, and they must have a Project that will guide humanity towards wellbeing and happiness. Additionally, authority requires the necessary power so that the Project can be realized and protected against its enemies. The success of human enterprise is guaranteed where power is exercised wisely.

In order to obtain a full understanding of the notion of power, one must study political philosophy, which is concerned with the deeper issues that underlie the phenomena that we see in human social interactions. In his *Statesman*, Plato maintains that the real acquisition of real political power requires a deep awareness of historical becoming, which, in turn, requires a deep awareness of the teleology of historical action. According to Plato, a real statesman is one who is aware that, even though one has to act in the context of historical becoming, one has to transcend the logic of historical becoming itself since, according to Plato, the purpose of a real statesman is “poïesis” (genuine creation) and not merely managerial tasks. Thus, in his *Statesman* (261a–b), Plato poses the following question: “Take the case of all those whom we conceive of as rulers who give commands: shall we not find that they all issue commands for the sake of producing something?”

Real statesmen and, generally, real and worthy leaders, act within a world marked by necessities and constraints, but the ultimate purpose of their historical activity is the actualization of a strategic vision, which transcends the corresponding historical context and, according to Plato, they should be guided by values and ideas that transcend the logic of one’s historical conditions. Moreover, the end of “poïesis” is known prior to action (in Greek “praxis”), and, therefore, it is characterized by a mode of disclosing what Aristotle has called “tēchne” (art proper), which can be construed as “authoritative knowledge” or “expertise.”

In view of the foregoing, my social vision is a pyramid, with the tip pointing upward, which reflects Plato’s political ideal. This pyramid should reflect government by the highest (noblest) intellectual, moral, and aesthetic values and principles, and the role of the state should be to endow these values and principles with the historical weight that they deserve, and it should underpin and safeguard their historical objectification and imposition.

IV. Basic Principles of Politology

The term “State” has two connatural meanings. The first meaning refers to any organized society that has its own distinct government. From this perspective, people tend to believe that they belong to a State and to identify themselves with said State. The second meaning refers to the operational center, “apparatus,” or mechanism which exerts power. This

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mechanism is a specialized organization. In particular, it performs a service called “command.” The members of this mechanism manage power to varying degrees. Moreover, the power of the State is a distinct type of power, because it is considered to be legitimate. It goes without saying that the State’s commands are essentially based on coercion. This is a necessary attribute of the State’s commands. Nonetheless, it is not the only one, because even a gang can coerce and enforce its will, but it cannot claim to be a State. In the case of a State, coercion goes hand in hand with legitimacy—more specifically, coercion goes hand in hand with the citizens’ belief in the legitimacy of the State’s commands. Moreover, there is a belief in the benevolent character of the State, and in the significance and the superiority of the purposes pursued by the State. In modern societies, the aforementioned belief in the benevolent character of the State leads to the identification of the citizen with the State. The identification of the citizen with the State, the belief in the legitimacy of the State’s commands, and the awareness that the State is capable of enforcing its commands all give rise to, and consolidate, the citizen’s obedience and, indeed, submission to the State.

Of the aforementioned three motivations that determine the citizen’s obedience to the State’s commands, the belief in legitimacy is the most subtle one, since it has a mythological background. In other words, the belief in the legitimacy of the State’s commands requires the creation of an appropriate myth. Historically, there have been two kinds of such myths—however, both of them have been based on the idea of sovereignty. In one case, God is the supreme authority. In the other case, the supreme authority is society itself. Therefore, the State is considered to be the trustee of the corresponding supreme authority and is bound by rules.

According to the myth of divine sovereignty, the State must act in harmony with God’s will, which is represented on earth by some religious authority. According to the myth of popular sovereignty, the State must function according to the commands of the People’s representatives (or, according to the commands of the Parliament). In both cases, there is a fundamental contradiction between the principal and the trustee. For instance, the political history of medieval Europe is marked by the conflict between the Church and the Monarchy; and the political history of modern Europe is marked by the conflict between the executive and the legislative branches of government. In medieval Europe, the Monarchy was ultimately imposed on the Church; in modern Europe, the executive branch of government was ultimately imposed on the legislative one.

In the context of modernity, the fading of the myth of divine sovereignty and its subsequent replacement by the myth of popular sovereignty gave rise to the modern idea of the nation-state. This event caused a new change in the idea of sovereignty. As a result of the institution of the modern nation-state, popular sovereignty mingled with national sovereignty. From this perspective, the legitimacy of the State's commands derives from the fact that the State has become the trustee of the nation, and the benevolent character of the State is evaluated with regard to the interests of the corresponding nation. The interests and, generally, the purposes of the modern nation are determined by a privileged minority, which has a monopoly of knowledge and understanding regarding the determination of the national interest because of the fact that it holds the seat of State power.

A fourth motivation for the citizen's obedience to the State is the manipulation of power by the State. In his famous book entitled *The New Industrial State*, the Canadian-American economist, diplomat, and public official John Kenneth Galbraith argued that, in the context of an organization, adaptation is inextricably linked to an impulse to acquire power. In state affairs, this motivation is very strong in political opportunists, and it encapsulates their profession.

Political authority is the capacity or the power to directly or indirectly influence the decisions that the National Assembly, the Cabinet, and the bureaucracy—meaning the agents and the organizations that constitute the state mechanism—make, derived from their officially instituted roles and functions within the State. This power can be either *de facto* or *de jure*. *De facto* political authority is the actual ability of a political subject to rule and to win the consent of those over whom one rules. *De jure* or normative political authority is the moral power, or right, of a political subject to claim obedience to one's laws and to enforce them.

The methods of influencing the political process are inextricably linked to the value system and the technology of the corresponding society. The influence of the political process is the central issue in the study of political authority, which often does not flow according to the channels of the formal institutional system. Indeed, in the twentieth century, it became amply clear that the classical notion of parliamentary democracy—according to which the citizens are supposed to have equal power, or to be equally powerless, like the firms and the consumers under perfect competition, and they are represented in political affairs by elected representatives—is not even a caricature of the actual state of affairs.

Modern societies, like the previous ones, are pluralistic, in the sense that they comprise distinct departments of power, or, in other words, distinct

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power oligopolies. In modern capitalist societies, old “social authorities” were replaced by “private authorities.” However, because of the prevalence of the concepts of popular sovereignty and national interest, which are supposedly served by the State, it became difficult for the aforementioned private authorities to defend partial interests against the overwhelming power of the State without obstruction.

As a consequence of the monopolization of legitimate power by the State, and as a consequence of the elimination of old social authorities, the major socio-political conflicts are centered on the exercise of direct or indirect influence over the organs or the institutions that constitute the State, these being the parliaments, governments, and bureaucracies. These power enclaves constitute the ruling social coalition, or, in other words, the social establishment.

My mindset is deeply and firmly rooted in classical Greek philosophy and the Italian Renaissance combined with the modern “school” of structuralism (pioneered by Saussure and Durkheim), cybernetics, and various aspects of modern cosmopolitan thought (pioneered by Kant, Bentham, and Marx). Rejecting the rule of a merchant-usurious elite, which underpins liberal democracy and various other oligarchic models, I counterargue that the economic realm should be subordinated to and systematically controlled by the political realm, and that the political realm must be modeled and organized according to an aristocratic ideal (in the Platonic sense of the term “aristocracy”), meaning that the political realm should be based on a vision of scientific totalitarianism, and, in particular, the supreme ruling elite, the capstone of the social pyramid, should consist of a *philosophical* elite equipped with sound skills in policy analysis. Philosophy is not a particular scientific discipline, but a reflection on science in general, and its key branches, namely, ontology, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics, cover and elucidate every significant aspect of human life at the highest level of abstraction; and policy analysis is the methodology of identifying, examining, and evaluating potential policy options that could address a given problem and then comparing those options to choose the optimal one.

As it is based on Plato’s philosophy, modern structuralism, and cybernetics, my aristocratic socio-political ideal is completely different from (and not to be confused with) the medieval feudal hierarchy, defunct models of arbitrary tyranny, romantic accounts of chivalry, and any mythico-political-social scheme (irrespective of whether it is based on Judaism, Christianity, American Neoconservatism, Islam, Oriental mysticism, or New Religious Movements). By contrast, the political

model that prevailed in the modern world during the nineteenth and the twentieth century as well as during the beginning of the third millennium is deeply and explicitly counter-philosophical, and it represents a deep degradation of the art of politics.

The socio-political reality that characterizes counter-philosophical political systems can be metaphorically described as a series of theatrical plays in the following way: A theater is a building or an outdoor area in which dramas are performed. Additionally, every theater has a backstage, which is the resource for actors, movers, and shakers in the performing arts. In this metaphor, the theater allegorizes the mainstream social and political sphere and the overt historical becoming. First of all, the spectators of a theatrical performance have to buy a ticket in order to enter the theater. After entering the theater, they sit in a seat. In front of them is the theater stage, where the play will be performed. The spectators who sit in the theater are the popular masses that are acculturated to the established system; hence, they have bought a “ticket” to the “mainstream,” whereas, the “others” are the “pariahs.” There are four main forms of drama (namely, states of historical becoming): comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, and melodrama. For instance, crises and wars are tragic plays; the consumer society and the welfare state fall under the category of comedy; petty-bourgeois behaviors fall under the category of tragicomedy; and the phenomena of social climbing, political contestation, patriotism, and piety fall under the category of melodrama. In order for a theatrical performance to be played, first of all, there must be a scriptwriter who has written the play. The “scriptwriters” (of the theatrical plays that the popular masses see and perceive as historical reality) are the members of the supreme economic elite. Every theatrical performance also needs a stage director. The “stage directors” are the state intelligence agencies and national security agencies, and they have assistant stage directors. The “assistant stage directors” are the diplomats, the members of the diplomatic corps of the various nation-states and international organizations. Furthermore, in order for a theatrical performance to be played, we need actors, who will take on different roles. The “actors who have leading roles” are the politicians. The “actors who have supporting roles” are the journalists. The “background actors” are the members of the judiciary, the police, and the armed forces, as well as the establishment’s technocrats. Theatrical productions usually have sponsors. The “sponsors” are the businesspeople, who are members of an economic hierarchy at whose top stand the “scriptwriters” (the supreme economic rulers). Of course, just as actors in the entertainment industry try to obtain more benefits from the investors in the entertainment industry, so do politicians in a counter-philosophical

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political system try to protect their signature power and, thus, increase their utility for their sponsors in order to preserve themselves (and their roles), and, thus (paraphrasing Trotsky), they become “dried preserves.” Finally, theaters have stage managers, who provide technical and organizational support to the director, the actors, the designers, the stage crew, and the technicians throughout the production process. The “stage managers” are the various religious leaders, the establishment’s religious teachers, and the facilitators of various subcultures and esoteric societies. The aforementioned metaphor describes the actual state of affairs in any counter-philosophical political system.

A counter-philosophical political system can and must be substantively and structurally changed and become a philosophical political system, by restoring the social pyramid to its proper position in accordance with Plato’s political thought. As a long line of philosophers from Plato to the present day have explained, the ethos and the strategic vision of a philosophical political system (as understood in the context of our Platonic philosophical heritage) are different from those of a counter-philosophical political system.

V. The Meaning of Esotericism and the Specific Nature of Freemasonry

The term “esotericism” derives from the Greek root “eso-,” which means inner. Plato, in his dialogue *Alcibiades*, uses the expression “ta ēso,” meaning “the inner things,” and, in his dialogue *Theaetetus*, he uses the expression “ta ēxo,” meaning “the outer things.” The Greek adjective “esoterikōs” (esoteric) was coined by the rhetorician and satirist Lucian of Samosata (second century C.E.) in his book *The Auction of Lives* (paragraph 26). The term “esoteric” first appeared in English in Thomas Stanley’s *History of Philosophy*, which was published in 1701. Thomas Stanley used the term “esoteric” in order to describe the mystery-school of Pythagoras, since the Pythagoreans were divided into the exoteric circle (under training) and the esoteric circle (admitted into the “inner” circle). The corresponding noun “esotericism” was coined by the French philosopher and historian Jacques Matter in his book *Histoire Critique du Gnosticisme* (1828), and it was popularized in nineteenth-century.

I am interested in esotericism *without* subscribing to any particular religious approach to esotericism and *without* subscribing to mysticism either. Therefore, my approach to esotericism is based on philosophical anthropology, and not on religious or mystical faith systems (Jewish, Christian, Gnostic, Islamic, “New Age,” and so on).

According to mysticism, a Freemason and, generally, an aspirant esotericist, having been properly initiated, start a journey on the Initiatory Path, which they follow, according to their subjective capabilities. In particular, according to mysticism, the Initiatory Path is given by *subjective experience*, and the purpose of Freemasonry and of any other esoteric school is to teach their members how to follow the Initiatory Path, that is, to teach them a set of *methodological directions*. Therefore, from the perspective of mysticism, Freemasonry is a *method* and not a philosophy. Indeed, as Freemasonry contains didactic dramas (rituality), it is based on experience, and experience is not a philosophy (since philosophy is *reflection* on experience); but, if we approach Freemasonry and, generally, esotericism in terms of philosophical anthropology, then we must extricate ourselves from the shackles of mysticism. Philosophical anthropology, as a scholarly discipline, is the attempt to unify various ways of understanding human behavior by studying humans as both creatures of their social environments (immediate physical and social settings in which people live or events take place) and creators of their own values (proscriptive and prescriptive beliefs). Whereas mystical experience is ultimately ineffable and incommunicable, philosophical anthropology and *Freemasonry-as-a-philosophical-anthropology* require and presuppose discourse (communication of thought by words).

The fact that Freemasonry uses its own symbolic language does not mean that Freemasonry must be understood in the terms of the mystics. Philosophical anthropology deals with the systematic study of symbolic thought and symbolic systems without, of course, being a form of mysticism, since it is a branch of philosophy and, therefore, by definition, something different from mysticism. In fact, the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, one of the most important founders of the field of philosophical anthropology, described and studied man as a “symbolic animal.” Hence, I argue that the clear distinction of Freemasonry from mysticism and the interpretation of Freemasonry as a philosophical anthropology are not only possible but imperative if Freemasonry is to be culturally meaningful and historically significant.

In general, esotericism (including Freemasonry) should be studied as a cultural phenomenon and, specifically, as a methodic expression of one’s attempt to know oneself, to discern oneself from the world, and to change reality according to one’s intentionality. From my perspective, esotericism, or rather the essence of esotericism (irrespective of the differences between particular esoteric institutions), consists of bearing witness to the reality of the human being and, particularly, to the autonomy of humanity, by focusing on the power of the intentionality of

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human consciousness and on the submissiveness of external reality to the intentionality of human consciousness. Hence, *I interpret esotericism as a program of personality creation and spiritual emancipation and as a manifestation of inner rectitude.* My approach to esotericism emanates from the argument that every object of consciousness exists not only *in itself* but also *for someone*, in the sense that it is united with the *meaning* that is assigned to it by consciousness. Every manipulation of the meanings that are assigned to beings and things, making the world meaningful, is equivalent to a manipulation of the reality of the world by consciousness. This is the main underlying “secret” of esotericism. Furthermore, inherent in my previous argument is a powerful political message, since the intellectual and moral autonomy that is achieved through and underpinned by my interpretation of esotericism signifies a high level of personal and social autonomy, highlighting humanity as the creator and manager of its destiny.

The above ideas and values underpin and guide my involvement in Freemasonry, which is one of the most important institutions of Western esotericism. I was made an Entered Apprentice, a Fellow Craft, and a Master Mason in England (1997–98) under the auspices of the United Grand Lodge of England (during the administration of Grand Master Prince Edward the Duke of Kent), I was awarded the 33rd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite by the Supreme Council 33° that is affiliated to the Ordine Massonico Tradizionale Italiano (in 2020 during the administration of Grand Master Luigi Pruneti and Sovereign Grand Commander Giovanni Constanti), and I was nominated as an honorary 97th-degree member of the Sovereign Italian Sanctuary of the Egyptian Rite of Misraim (in 2020 by the National Grand Hierophant of Italy Luigi Pruneti). *However, as I have already mentioned, I understand and use esotericism in a philosophically rigorous context, I am inspired by the classical Greek spirit, and I advocate classical education; and, therefore, even though I am academically interested in comparative cultural anthropology, my practical work and initiatives in the realm of esoteric societies are not based on the mystical traditions of either Western Asia or Eastern Asia, which, of course, have played an important role in the development of several esoteric currents.*

Already on 26 August 2008, I officially established a group for the reformation of Freemasonry along the lines that I explain in these lectures. That group, gradually, with methodic work and perseverance, evolved into the “Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry.” This is the “primum mobile” of my esoteric network and

esoteric initiatives; and my key mentor in esotericism in general and in Freemasonry in particular is the Grand Master Mason and philosopher Giuliano Di Bernardo, who was the Grand Master of the Grande Oriente d'Italia during 1990–93.

Giuliano Di Bernardo defines Freemasonry as a “philosophical anthropology,” and he maintains that Freemasonry is a conception of man that is inspired by universal ethical principles, and, in particular, these universal ethical principles are freedom, tolerance, fraternity, transcendence, and the initiatory secret: the first four principles Freemasonry shares with other conceptions of man, and the fifth, the initiatory secret, is its *specific* one that makes it unique and different from all others (Giuliano Di Bernardo, *Freemasonry: Splendor and Decadence*; and Giuliano Di Bernardo, *La Mia Vita in Massoneria*).

Moreover, the definition of Freemasonry as a philosophical anthropology enables us to clearly distinguish Freemasonry not only from mysticism but also from religion. In line with Giuliano Di Bernardo’s philosophy of Freemasonry, I maintain that what Freemasons call and describe as the “Great Architect of the Universe” must be interpreted as a symbol of humanity’s moral perfection, as a moral ideal (neither as any particular divine being nor as a syncretistic reference to the gods of different religions). Endorsing Giuliano Di Bernardo’s conception of “regulativist Freemasonry,” I maintain that the Great Architect of the Universe (G.A.O.T.U.) is a Masonic code name and a symbol of an ideal of humanity’s perfection, without any ontological claim (i.e., the G.A.O.T.U. is not a being, nor a type of religious syncretism, but a symbol of Masonic transcendence, which refers to man’s moral perfection). In line with Giuliano Di Bernardo’s philosophy of Freemasonry, I have clearly separated my Masonic initiative from all those Freemasonries which are based on religion and/or mysticism.

Having said the above, like Giuliano Di Bernardo, I have found that most Freemasonries internationally are confused and profoundly misguided regarding the above philosophical issues and the fundamental identity issues of Freemasonry itself. Although Freemasons have most elements of Masonic ritual and symbolism in common, they do not even agree on the fundamental way of understanding and interpreting Freemasonry. Finally, it should be mentioned that Giuliano Di Bernardo has thoroughly analyzed and condemned the massive infiltration of many Freemasonries (internationally) by spiritually insignificant and misguided persons and by mafias, for which reason he decided to resign from his position as the Grand Master of the Grande Oriente d'Italia (in 1993) and to focus his esoteric work on the Dignity Order (legally founded by Di Bernardo in

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Vienna, Austria, 4 July 2012) and the Accademia degli Illuminati (legally
founded by Di Bernardo in Rome, Italy, 11 July 2002).

The supreme initiatory experiences and authorities that I have received as
well as my guiding esoteric principles are my elevation to a Knight of
Dignity and my investiture with the powers and privileges of the Illuminati
by the Grand Master of the Dignity Order and of the Accademia degli
Illuminati the Most Eminent Brother Giuliano Di Bernardo. My
spirituality is deeply and firmly rooted in classical Greek thought and
Greco-Roman civilization, and, therefore, for me, “transcendence,” not
only does it not mean a denial of the material world and a demand for an
exit from historicity, but it means a moral and intellectual improvement of
the historical subject as well as a radical and creative affirmation of the
material world and historical action.

Based on the aforementioned arguments regarding esotericism in general
and Freemasonry in particular, and, according to the esoteric education,
honors, and directions that I have received from Giuliano Di Bernardo in
the context of the Dignity Order and the Accademia degli Illuminati, of
which Giuliano Di Bernardo is the founding Grand Master, I manage a
unique and exclusive Freemasonic institution that practices Symbolic
Masonry and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite according to the
aforementioned principles. Hence, my Masonic initiative, which I have
officially called the “Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry,”
operates within the realm of Freemasonry (as a “Masonic Order”) in order
to promote, and in the service of, the ethos that was instilled into me in the
context of Giuliano Di Bernardo’s Dignity Order and Illuminati, which are
not Masonic Orders themselves. I act as the Grand Master and Sovereign
Grand Commander 33° of Symbolic Masonry and the Ancient and
Accepted Scottish Rite for the “Autonomous Order of the Modern and
Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry” (A.O.M.P.R.S.M.) in the service of
the solemn obligations that I have undertaken in the context of the Dignity
Order and the Accademia degli Illuminati. In other words, the Masonic
institution (namely, the A.O.M.P.R.S.M.) which I have created and run is
a guild of literati uniting men and women who want to practice
Freemasonry (Symbolic Masonry and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish
Rite) in a new, philosophically rigorous way, and according to the esoteric
expertise and knowledge that I acquired in the context of Giuliano Di
Bernardo’s Dignity Order and Illuminati.



On the left: *Giuliano Di Bernardo (on the right) and Nicolas Laos (on the left) with their 33rd-degree collars of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, 2023.*

Giuliano Di Bernardo was installed as the Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy (Grande Oriente d'Italia) in 1990. After three years, Di Bernardo resigned and founded the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy

(Gran Loggia Regolare d'Italia), which was immediately recognized by the English Freemasonry. In 2002, having decided that he had completed his work in conventional, regular Freemasonry, Giuliano Di Bernardo founded the Order of the Illuminati (Ordine degli Illuminati), not as a passive and atavistic imitation of Adam Weishaupt's Bavarian Illuminati, but as an updated and philosophically informed initiatory society of "the Invisibles who plan the material and moral development of humanity."

A necessary clarifying statement: When we have to talk about the "Illuminati," we primarily think of the "Illuminati" of Bavaria. That secret society was founded in 1776 by Adam Weishaupt, Professor of Law at the University of Ingolstadt in Bavaria. Some people connect the Bavarian Illuminati with the Spanish mystical Christian association of the "Alumbrados" ("Illuminated") of the sixteenth century, or the French "Société des Illuminés d'Avignon" ("Society of the Illuminati of Avignon"), which was founded around 1784 by Dom Antoine-Joseph Pernety and a Polish Count called Tadeusz Leszczyc-Grabianka. This argument is not correct; the name was similar, but nothing else. In fact, there are several varieties of "Illuminati" movements. In addition, it is hard to prove that all of the ideological assumptions and arguments of the Bavarian Illuminati were originally formulated and proclaimed by the Czech philosopher, pedagogue, and theologian Comenius (1592–1670), who addressed the first formal scientists as "illuminati," and by other Renaissance scholars and mystics, as some researchers maintain. The truth

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is that the secret society that was created by Law Professor Adam Weishaupt was originally called the “Order of the Perfectibilists,” and it was only later that it was called the “Order of the Illuminati (of Bavaria).” Having said the above, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the “Illuminati” in the era of advanced modernity, as Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo and I understand this term. In particular, Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo has explicitly argued as follows: “The difference between the Illuminati of the past and those of today is that, whereas the former wanted to animate a closed and stable world almost entirely dominated by the Jesuits, the latter instead want to give stability and openness to a world that seems excessively changeable.” Moreover, Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo has wisely clarified the meaning of the initiatory bond as follows: whereas, in religious societies, the associative bond consists of faith in a God and divine revelation, the associative bond in secular esoteric societies, such as ours, “consists of the sharing of ethical principles: the members of such societies are siblings because they are children of the same vision of the world, of life, and of man.” The revival of the Illuminati by Giuliano Di Bernardo consists of a system of three initiatory degrees, namely, those of a Minor Illuminatus, a Major Illuminatus, and a Master Illuminatus, and the purpose of these three degrees is to convey an updated, historically relevant illuminist teaching in the era of advanced modernity.



Above: The Coat of Arms of the Dignity Order, which was founded by Giuliano Di Bernardo as the operational sector of his Illuminati Order, and in which Nicolas Laos’s approach to Freemasonry was chiseled.



Above: The Illuminati certificate granted to Nicolas Laos by the Illuminati Grand Master Giuliano Di Bernardo, authorizing Nicolas Laos to act as a Master Illuminatus and establish the Order's National Headquarters in Greece. In this context, in line with the Illuminati Grand Master Giuliano Di Bernardo's teachings and esoteric guidelines, I work for the development, promotion, and imposition of a variety of Enlightened Totalitarianism against both liberal democracy and any unworthy and arbitrary form of authoritarianism.

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On the left: *The Dignity Order certificate granted to Nicolas Laos by the Grand Master of the Dignity Order the M.E. Bro. Giuliano Di Bernardo, authorizing Nicolas Laos to act as a formally invested and installed Knight of Dignity and as the Grand Prior of the Dignity Order in Greece. In 1992, in Switzerland, Giuliano Di Bernardo, in collaboration with distinguished international*

personalities (such as: Spencer Compton the 7th Marquess of Northampton, Member of the House of Lords of the United Kingdom, who was then the Assistant Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England; Hans Rudolf Meyer, lawyer and Mayor of Lucerne; Walter Hess, Professor of Surgery at the University of Basel; Giorgio Cavallo, Professor of Microbiology at the University of Turin; Vittorio Mathieu, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Turin; Mario Conde, president of the Spanish bank Banco Español de Crédito; Felix Ruben, commodity trader; and Joseph Guggenheim, Zurich lawyer), founded the Dignity Foundation, which has evolved into the Dignity Order, which is something much higher and deeper philosophically (compared to the original Dignity Foundation) and expresses the deeper ethos of Giuliano Di Bernardo. The Dignity Order is an international esoteric and initiatory fraternity for the defense of human dignity with Giuliano Di Bernardo as

its founding president (the first general assembly of the Dignity Foundation took place at Ashby Castle, Lord Northampton's second residence, on 31 January 1993). The Dignity Order was structured by Giuliano Di Bernardo as the operational apparatus of Di Bernardo's Illuminati system.



On the left: Athens, 2023: Nicolas Laos with his regalia as the Grand Master of Symbolic Masonry and the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council 33° of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry (A.O.M.P.R.S.M.), which is a Masonic Order founded on the philosophical and scientific work of Nicolas Laos and in line with the special esoteric knowledge and initiatory authorities granted to him by the Illuminati Grand Master Giuliano Di Bernardo. Genuine nobility is the existential state or quality of being intellectually and morally good, and, according to Nicolas Laos's Masonic initiative (i.e., the

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A.O.M.P.R.S.M.), genuine nobility is semantically equivalent to dignity. Pico della Mirandola, in his 1486 Oratio de hominis dignitate (Oration on the Dignity of Man), argued that humans could ascend the “chain of being” (a hierarchical structure of all matter and life) through the exercise of their intellectual capacities, thus endorsing the dignity of human existence in this earthly life.

Far from being committed to the erection of (or to a special reverence for) any material, stone religious Temple, and irrespective of one’s attitude towards religion and mysticism, pure Symbolic Masonry, as understood by our Order, aims to build a symbolic Temple, which represents a better man within a better society, and the “Royal Secret” explicitly communicated to the members of the 32nd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite enables a rational Freemason to understand the details of this symbolic “building project” by explaining that the pillars of the symbolic Temple that Freemasons try to erect are Freedom, Justice, Reason, and Love, and that, in the hands of a Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret, a Crusader’s sword becomes a symbol of the sword of reason and illumination. Thus, I completely endorse and strictly follow Giuliano Di Bernardo’s theory of “regulativist Masonry,” according to which, Freemasonry *per se* should be focused only on practical philosophy and ethics, that is, it should be limited to a particular anthropology, without any religious or mystical presumptions. Fundamentally, Freemasonry is a symbolic system of practical philosophy and ethics, but religious Masons and mystics try to drag it into other realms by projecting their belief systems onto Freemasonry.

I have called my philosophy the “dialectic of rational dynamicity,” and it represents a synthesis of philosophical realism and philosophical idealism. You can find a synopsis of my philosophy in my *Lectures on Pure and Applied Mathematics and Epistemology*, which are available on my official website (you can download and read them), and were originally published as an electronic book by the Dignity Order (<https://www.giulianodibernardo.com/nicolas-laos/lectures/>).

I use and understand “Freemasonry” as a generic term referring to a symbolic “construction company” that constructs minds and societies, and, therefore, I have founded and manage a particular Masonic current that works exclusively according to a concrete architectural plan and according to concrete principles of social engineering, which I have clearly formulated in my auctorial work. With the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, we leverage our global,

multi-layered network of men and women to deliver enlightened thinking and drive wisely crafted change based on classical education. In particular, according to the teachings and initiations that I have received, and following the example and the advice of Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo, I act as the Grand Master and Sovereign Grand Commander 33° of the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry (A.O.M.P.R.S.M.) in order to defend humanity against injustice, irrational passions, ignorance, and counter-philosophical regimes, and I grant myself the “luxury” of living according to a philosophical way of life, which determines who can be with me and who is outside of me.

The fight against “barbarism” is an arduous task and a heroic project. The Greek term “barbarism” means the absence of historical creativity; and one is genuinely historically creative if, and to the extent that, one can raise oneself above the logic of natural and historical necessities and pragmatism in order to intensify the presence of humanity in the world, and, thus, enlighten the world with reason and make it meaningful. Barbarism gives primacy to the adaptation of humanity to given conditions over the authentic intelligent creativity of consciousness. Barbarism leads to a closed society, that is, a society based on passivity and automatism and incapable of answering logically why it operates according to a certain set of institutions and not according to another. For example, in a theocratic regime, there is no point in having a serious, logical discussion about the legal system, since the established law is supposed to have been given by God. Likewise, in a system where capitalism and its internal logic have been autonomized from human consciousness and turned into a social automatism and a political taboo, there can be no serious, logical discussion of political economy and of the imposition of science *per se* on the economic market. By contrast, under an enlightened regime, the fundamental issues of social life are essentially contested, and reality is approached with reference to reason and a dialectical conception of history, and the fundamental issues of social organization are subjected to rational analysis and assessment. Enlightened leadership, as opposed to barbarism, leads humanity from the darkness of a closed society and chaos to the light of a world of meanings and beauty. A clear-cut distinction between civilization and barbarism is the keystone of genuine and significant politics.

The Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry consists of rituals and labors a part of which is publishable and another part of which is secret, and the exact rituals *actually* used in the meetings of this Order are strictly an internal document of this Order. However, from time to time and in various ways, our Order publishes texts

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concerning our fundamental principles and teachings because, as this Order is based on a totalitarian ideal, it wishes to have as its members only suitable men and women, both in terms of formal qualifications and in terms of ideology and ethics.

VI. Ethics: A Theme in Need of a Focus

When I speak of building a better man within a better society in the context of Freemasonry, I speak of the cultivation of our innate particles of being, lying inert within our human collective consciousness, waiting to be transformed into our fullest potential. This Masonic project concerns both the consciousness of existence, which refers to a state of vigilance and awareness, and moral consciousness, which is the consciousness of existence itself when it operates not only as a witness-observer but also as a judge.

A scientifically rigorous study of the history of civilization in general, and of the history of politics in particular, enables one to identify and analyze progressive patterns of development of moral consciousness. As Michele Moody-Adams has pointed out, “moral progress in belief involves deepening our grasp of existing moral concepts, while moral progress in practices involves realizing deepened moral understandings in behavior or social institutions” (Michele M. Moody-Adams, “The Idea of Moral Progress,” pp. 168–85). Allen Buchanan’s and Russell Powell’s typology of moral progress is particularly helpful in order to identify and analyze progressive patterns of development of moral consciousness (A. Buchanan and R. Powell, *The Evolution of Moral Progress*).

As regards moral concepts themselves, the understanding of the virtues, moral reasoning, and moral motivation, world history exhibits the following progressive patterns: (i) an increasing *specification* of morality, in the sense that moral rules tend to be increasingly differentiated from religion and law; (ii) an increasing *internalization* of morality, in the sense that, as Immanuel Kant has pointedly argued, moral consciousness evaluates actions not only on the basis of their consequences, but also on the basis of the agent’s motives; (iii) an increasing *individualization* of morality, in the sense that, in addition to group rights, individual rights are increasingly emphasized, esteemed, and protected, especially as people mature psycho-spiritually; (iv) an increasing *expansion* of morality, in the sense that human rights (namely, “rights we have simply because we exist as human beings—they are not granted by any state,” according to the United Nations’ basic definition of “human rights”) are increasingly

emphasized, esteemed, and protected, especially as modernity is consolidated and develops further.

As regards the understanding of moral standing, moral statuses, and justice, world history exhibits the following progressive pattern: humanity's increasing desire and efforts to create and impose new institutions in order to achieve higher levels of justice. The abolition of slavery and the development of international law on the basis of the International Bill of Human Rights are two characteristic cases in point.

As regards the proper moralization of humanity and the understanding of the nature of morality, world history exhibits the following progressive pattern: several manifestations of inhuman and degrading treatment that were considered to be normal in previous societies (for instance, child abuse, torture, gender discrimination, various forms of political and spiritual despotism, etc.) are unacceptable to and morally condemned by the modern human being. Even though, in the contemporary world, human rights abuses continue to take place, the authorities that are responsible for or involved in such types of immoral behavior try to find justifications for them, and they usually do not dare to commit human rights abuses in a blatant way.

However, the identification of the above progressive patterns of development of moral consciousness can only partially refute the arguments of moral skepticism. The history of humanity is characterized by both cases of moral progress and cases of moral setback. In fact, one can discern whole segments of historical space-time that are overwhelmed by morally negative and unacceptable situations, such as those caused by capitalist oligarchies during the "Long Depression" (1873–96) and the "Great Depression" (1929–39), the twentieth-century fascist/Nazi regimes, the twentieth-century regimes of bureaucratic socialism (state capitalism), etc. Therefore, neither the viewpoint that is focused on progressive patterns of development of moral consciousness nor the viewpoint that is focused on the instability of moral consciousness and on cases of moral setback can lead to a comprehensive and rigorous way of understanding the dynamics of moral consciousness.

In order to obtain a comprehensive and rigorous way of understanding the dynamics of moral consciousness, one must extricate oneself from both the intellectual shackles of moral progressivism (specifically the viewpoint that is focused on progressive patterns of development of moral consciousness) and the intellectual shackles of moral skepticism (specifically the viewpoint that is focused on the instability of moral consciousness and on cases of moral setback), and search for those structural elements of moral consciousness that enable one to argue that

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moral consciousness is characterized by structural stability. By maintaining that one should inquire into the structural stability of the operation of moral consciousness, I mean that one should inquire into the qualitative features of moral consciousness that are recurrent. In particular, if we inquire into the contents of moral values, then we realize that, in different segments of historical space-time, different values were placed at the apex of the corresponding “moral pyramid.”

For instance, as regards the prevailing moral criterion, the study of the history of the European and the modern American civilizations implies the following: in early Antiquity, the prevailing moral criterion was bravery, and the corresponding anthropological ideal was a hero; in classical Antiquity, the prevailing moral criterion was education, and the corresponding anthropological ideal was a wise person or a philosopher (which underpins a particular notion of spiritual universalism exemplified by Socrates, who called himself “a citizen of the world,” that is, of a transcendent world order, which reflects a rational vision of perfection and, of course, should not be confused with the modern neoliberals’ and neoconservatives’ conceptions of globalization); in late Antiquity, the prevailing moral criterion was sanctity (in the sense of psychic beauty); in the Middle Ages, the prevailing moral criterion was chivalry (with its integrated religious, moral, and social code); in seventeenth-century French society, the prevailing moral criterion was honesty (and it indirectly paved the way for the conception of the modern nation-state as the social space in which “honesty” is manifested and becomes meaningful, and, in this way, it indirectly underpinned nationalism and the French notion of the “human of the State” (“*homme d’État*”)); in nineteenth-century British society, the prevailing moral criterion was social success, and the corresponding anthropological ideal was a person who complies with the Victorian model of social discipline and control (underpinning Great Britain’s capitalist system and imperialist policy); in nineteenth-century American society, the prevailing moral criterion was individual success—namely, success that originates from and is based on an individual’s own actions, thoughts, and will—and the corresponding anthropological ideal was a “self-made individual” (in particular, the phrase “self-made man” was coined on 2 February 1842 by Henry Clay Sr. in the United States Senate to describe individuals whose success was an entirely individual achievement, and, by the mid-1950s, “success” in the U.S.A. generally implied “business success,” underpinning the United States’ capitalist system and neo-imperialist policy).

Additionally, nationalism has significantly contributed to the relativization of many people's perceptions of morality and rationality. The age of nationalism in its most precise sense is usually dated from the eighteenth century, and it is intimately related to the American and the French revolutions. However, the European system of nation-states had already emerged from the European wars of religion, which began in the sixteenth century (after the Protestant Reformation). In particular, the aforementioned system was a system of sovereign princes whose cultural rivalries were kept in check by the principle "whosoever's territory, his religion" ("cuius regio eius religio"), and whose political rivalries were kept in check by a system that is known as the "balance of power" (for instance, see: T. L. Knutsen, *A History of International Relations Theory*). The system of the balance of power was weakened but not destroyed by the revolutions that broke out in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, and it was restored by the so-called Holy Alliance after the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1815. Nationalism and its states-system were internationalized in the aftermath of the First World War. In the context of *Realpolitik*, the principles of national sovereignty and national self-determination have been systematically used and invoked by nationalists in order to counter classical ontology and, especially, its quest for universal values and principles, as well as in order to equip national bourgeois elites and state bureaucracies with ultimate authority on moral questions and with powerful means for the conduct of psychological operations (for instance, the rhetoric about "patriotism" and "national security" has often served as a pretext for the violation of human rights and liberties by national governments and for the development of the industry of war).

Even though different values were placed at the apex of the corresponding "moral pyramid" in different segments of historical space-time, certain values, such as "veracity," "uprightness," "accountability," "strength," and "perseverance" seem to have been exerting indisputable moral authority over humanity throughout its known history, irrespective of the particular ways in which they are interpreted by different human communities. In addition, if we inquire into the forms of moral values, and if we approach morality in a formalist way, then we realize that humanity makes a fundamental distinction between "good" (perceived as moral positivity) and "evil" (perceived as moral negativity) in every segment of historical space-time. Therefore, by inquiring into the contents of moral values and into the forms through which moral values are manifested, we realize that moral consciousness has some recurrent qualitative features (meaning that it is characterized by structural stability).

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It goes without saying that the social system exerts *significant influence* over moral consciousness, and the latter internalizes and reflects social values. But the social system *does not create* moral consciousness itself, and moral consciousness can always judge and change the established system of values instead of passively conforming to it. Hence, moral consciousness seems to be an innate attribute of the human being. In particular, through a combination of sentiments, volition, and reason, moral consciousness obtains a conception of “goodness,” and it determines the conditions under which goodness can be historically objectified and, thus, become historically meaningful.

The traditional English Freemasonry officially teaches that “Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality,” thus, highlighting the central and, indeed, foundational role of ethics in Freemasonry. However, without a rigorous philosophical context and without a firm leadership by philosophers, Freemasonic institutions, gradually, become trapped in various crises, and they cannot properly address important theoretical and practical issues. For instance, already in 1872, the distinguished and highly influential English Freemason and author John Yarker, in his book entitled *Notes on the Scientific and Religious Mysteries of Antiquity* (pages 157 to 158), had already argued that, “as the Masonic fraternity is now governed, the Craft is fast becoming the paradise of the *bon vivant*; of the ‘charitable’ hypocrite . . . the manufacturer of paltry Masonic tinsel; the rascally merchant . . . and the masonic ‘Emperors’ and other charlatans,” and he proposed “the appointment of a higher (not pecuniary) standard of membership and morality, with exclusion from the ‘purple’ of all who inculcate frauds, sham, historical degrees, and other immoral abuses.” This kind of crisis and degeneration was exacerbated after the Second World War, when, in exchange for its contribution to the defeat of Nazism, the U.S.A. imposed itself geostrategically on Europe and methodically altered and dismantled traditional European institutions, including Freemasonry. Indeed, in contrast to its old, traditional elitist ethos and model of governance, post-war Freemasonry was subordinated to the American model of democracy and to the American practices and methods of marketing and public relations.

Also, as Giuliano Di Bernardo has rightly pointed out, the philosophical deficit that characterizes the organization and administration of modern Freemasonry has led to a terrible contradiction regarding the question of the relationship between Freemasonry and religion. On the one hand, the “Declaration” issued on 21 June 1985 by the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE), entitled “Freemasonry and Religion,” states in no

uncertain terms that Freemasonry is not a religion. On the other hand, the Ritual of the United Grand Lodge of England was taken from the Bible, the Holy Order of the Royal Arch of Jerusalem (which, according to the UGLE is the supreme rank of “pure, ancient Masonry”) is based on Biblical narratives, and it combines Judeo-Christian mysticism with British Protestant ethics; and, according to the statement of the basic principles for Grand Lodge recognition that was drawn up in 1929 by the United Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and the Grand Lodge of Ireland, in order for a Masonic Grand Lodge to be deemed as “regular,” it must maintain that a belief in the Supreme Being, referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe, and His “revealed” will are essential preconditions for membership, and all initiates must take their obligations on or in full view of the Volume of the Sacred Law, this being the major “Holy Book” of each one’s religion, such as the Bible for Christians, the Torah for Jews, and the Quran for Muslims. In other words, the British Freemasonry correctly declares that Freemasonry is not a religion, but, at the same time, it uses religious rituals and makes claims of a religious nature. In this way, Freemasonry is trapped in a contradiction, and is vulnerable to the criticism of the Fathers of the Catholic Church, according to whom Freemasonry represents, and is underpinned by, a peculiar type of religiosity or religious syncretism. This serious identity problem of Freemasonry could be resolved definitively and clearly if Freemasonry were run by philosophers who, like Giuliano Di Bernardo, would explain very simply that Freemasonry is a secular philosophical anthropology in the context of which the “Great Architect of the Universe” is only a regulative ideal, without any ontological claims, and, therefore, the “Great Architect of the Universe” is a symbol of the moral perfection that the Masons seek. Following Di Bernardo’s theory of “regulativist Freemasonry” (as opposed to the beliefs of religious Freemasons and mystics), I maintain that practical philosophy (centered on values, attitudes to life, and norms of behavior) must explicitly replace every religious or quasi-religious aspect of Freemasonry, and the Masonic conception of transcendence must be understood as a universal ethics and not as an ontological reality.

In general, all Squares, Levels, and Perpendiculars are the truest and most proper Signs by means of which genuine Freemasons can identify each other. The Square is a symbol of reason and morality. The Pair of Compasses, enabling one with accuracy and precision to ascertain and determine the limits and the proportions of the different parts of a building, is a symbol of justice. The symbol consisting of a Square and a Pair of Compasses joined is the most identifiable emblem of Freemasonry.

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The Square is to test and regulate our actions, the Pair of Compasses is to keep us in due bounds with humanity in general and our Order in particular.

Freemasonry is a fascinating and useful symbolic technology for building persons and societies. However, as I have already explained, there are different conceptions of Freemasonry. Among the different Freemasonries, I represent, defend, and promote only the conception of Freemasonry that I have delineated in these lectures, and this variety of Freemasonry is practiced by the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry. In fact, I have created and run the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry exactly in order to organize, interpret, and practice Freemasonry in the way that I have explained in these lectures and as a specific Masonic apparatus of Giuliano Di Bernardo's illuminist philosophy and esoteric system.

I understand myself first and foremost as an "initiate" of classical education and the Platonic view of aristocracy (as a philosophical, humanistic, secular, and rational alternative to feudalism, the power of capital, liberal democracy, and any unworthy and arbitrary form of authoritarianism), as well as an admirer of the Roman Empire, and this self-consciousness absolutely determines the way in which I act in the field of esoteric societies and especially in Freemasonry.

VII. A Synoptic Exposition and Interpretation of the Masonic Degrees 1st–33rd

Now, I shall synoptically set out how I have determined that the content of the three degrees of Symbolic Masonry and the thirty-three degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite must be taught and interpreted in the context of the Masonic Order that I have created and run, namely, in the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry. Firstly, an initiatory ritual is the product of its composer, who seeks to get the candidate from a point A to a point B according to a specific process; and, secondly, an initiatory ritual is a product of action. More specifically, it is a product of the act of initiation by a trained initiate, charged with the duty of conducting the candidate through a ceremony in such a way that a receptive candidate will experience the intended inner alteration and personal growth.

The Masonic Lodge symbolizes the world, and the central part of the floor of the Lodge is adorned with a Mosaic Pavement, which is a carpet comprising black and white squares (like a chessboard). The Mosaic Pavement, by reason of its being variegated and checkered, points out that

the sensuous world and history are characterized by contradictions and diversity. The Mason symbolizes human consciousness. Therefore, initiation into Freemasonry symbolizes the integration of consciousness into the reality of the world.

The 1st degree (Entered Apprentice) represents the preparatory stage of a creative life. According to my work on the philosophy of Freemasonry, and, in general, according to our Order's methodical attempt to historicize Freemasonry (that is, to interpret Freemasonry as a product of historical development), we need a deep understanding of the philosophy of history. According to the Darwinian theory of "natural selection," species survive by changing or adapting their genes to their environment. For example, bears survived in the Arctic regions. Living there, their fur became increasingly white so that they could not be distinguished from the snow. For many generations, the light-colored bears survived and reproduced, so that today all polar bears have white fur. In this way, bears have adapted their genes to their white snowy environment. Darwin called this process evolution by "natural selection." This process of adapting genes to the environment has been going on since life appeared on planet Earth. This explains, according to Darwin's theory, the emergence of many types of plant and animal life over millions of years. Those individuals that were best adapted to their environment managed to survive, multiply, and become the dominant variety. In other words, from the beginning of life, it was the genes that were always adapted to the environment. Then came the revolutionary human species. It was a revolutionary species, because it reversed the process of "natural selection"; it was the first species to adapt the environment to its genes rather than its genes to the environment. It succeeded because it had a superior mind and used it, making the environment more comfortable and more conducive to the development of life.

Homo sapiens played a key role in this revolutionary achievement by using three main ways to change the environment that other animals, having less developed brains, could not imitate: (1) reason, which includes logic and language, (2) tool making and use, and (3) the use of fire. This combination of reason and the use of tools and fire gave humans powerful new technology that no other animal possessed. Technology affected all aspects of human life and enabled humans to become the masters of their environment rather than its servants. While the animals' preeminent mode of existence is adaptation to reality, the preeminent mode of existence of the human being is the reconstruction of reality according to the intentionality of consciousness and, therefore, the production of history, which is the most authentic expression of the creativity of the human

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being. Hence, the human being, among all biological species living on planet Earth, has the exclusive privilege of living not in physical space-time but in historical space-time.

Religious Freemasons and mystics, who play a preeminent role in several dilapidated and actually philosophically insignificant Freemasonries, fail to understand the significance of history, and they orient neophytes towards absurd conceptions of eternity, mystical conceptions of time, and even a state of delirium. By contrast, I maintain that the 1st degree of Freemasonry should cultivate in the neophyte an awareness of historicity and the active role of consciousness in shaping historical events. It is the correct knowledge of the philosophy of history that will make man the real builder of one's existential constitution and, therefore, a worthy Symbolic Mason.

The working tools of an Entered Apprentice are the 24-inch Gauge, the common Gavel, and the Chisel. The 24-inch Gauge is a measurement tool that refers us to the twenty-four hours of the day, which we should use wisely. The common Gavel symbolizes the force of moral consciousness. The Chisel is a symbol of the advantages of education, which underpin true nobility.

The 2nd degree (Fellow Craft) represents the constructive stage. In the 2nd degree, the attention of the candidate is directed towards the two magnificent pillars that were erected at the porchway or entrance of King Solomon's Temple. The prominent Scottish author, editor, and Freemason William Preston, in his book entitled *Illustrations of Masonry*, originally published in 1772, highlights the significance of the two magnificent pillars that were erected at the porchway or entrance of the Temple at Jerusalem, which was completed by King Solomon. Those Pillars were made of molten brass, and the superintendent of the casting was Hiram Abiff. That on the left was called Boaz, which denotes "in strength"; that on the right Jachin, which denotes "to establish"; when conjoined, they denote "stability". Therefore, according to the rituals of the United Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and the Grand Lodge of Ireland, the pillar that stands on the north side of the door of a Masonic Lodge is called Boaz, and the pillar that stands on the south side of the door of a Masonic Lodge is called Jachin.

The working tools of a Fellow Craft are the Square, which teaches morality, the Level, which teaches equality, and the Plumb Rule, which teaches justness and uprightness of life and actions.

The 3rd degree (Master Mason) represents the "wonderful," and, in particular, the transition, through a symbolic death, from a lower mode of

existence to a higher mode of existence, expressing the Masonic ideal of humanity's perfection. Based on actual biblical references about the construction of King Solomon's Temple and on his Calvinist ethics, the Rev. Dr. John Theophilus Desaguliers, a French-born Huguenot clergyman closely aligned with the Hanoverian dynasty, fabricated the following didactic story in order to become the major allegorical theme of the Third Degree within the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster: being knowledgeable in architecture and in metallurgy, Hiram Abiff was sent by Hiram King of Tyre to Solomon King of Israel, to direct the construction of the Temple at Jerusalem, which the Israelites intended to erect to the glory of the Great Architect of the Universe. Hiram Abiff divided his workmen into three groups: Apprentices, Companions, and Masters. To be able to distinguish and recognize each group, he gave it its own set of secrets, precisely, a Word, a Sign, and a Grip. The works drawing to their close, three impious Companions ("ruffians"), having been unable to obtain the secrets of a Master, decided to extract the Sign, the Word, and the Grip of a Master from Hiram Abiff by any means. When Hiram Abiff finished his devotions, he moved towards the South entrance of the Temple, where he was opposed by the first impious Companion, who was armed with a heavy Plumb Rule and demanded the secrets of a Master, warning Hiram Abiff that he would die if he refused to comply with those impious and unworthy Masons' request. Hiram Abiff refused to divulge the secrets of a Master Mason without the consent and co-operation of Solomon King of Israel and Hiram King of Tyre, and he added that patience and industry would, in due time, entitle every worthy Mason to a participation of the secrets of a Master Mason. The impious Companion struck Hiram Abiff a violent blow on the right temple. When Hiram Abiff recovered from the shock, he moved towards the North entrance of the Temple, where he was opposed by the second impious Companion, who was armed with a Level. After Hiram Abiff gave a similar answer to the second impious Companion, the latter struck him a violent blow on the left temple. Hiram Abiff, "faint and bleeding," moved towards the East entrance of the Temple, where he was opposed by the third impious Companion, who was armed with a Maul. After Hiram Abiff gave a similar answer to the third impious Companion, the latter struck him a violent blow on the forehead, which was fatal.

In the 3rd degree, the candidate represents Hiram Abiff, the Architect of the Temple, and the didactic tale that Desaguliers devised about the murder of Hiram Abiff is intended to teach that the meaning of life, the ideal of perfection, is higher than mere survival. It is also worth pointing out that the Temple represents the vision of building a better human being

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within a better society, and, in particular, King Solomon's Temple was used as a Masonic symbol because it is the most important building mentioned in the Bible, and, in the eighteenth century, as most Masons had very limited to insignificant philosophical education, it was convenient to teach basic lessons in ethics through the Bible, which was a commonly known book throughout Western Europe.

God is the name that consciousness gives to the positive void that consciousness conceives and recognizes as the ultimate source of the meaning of the beings and things that exist in the world. Moreover, Immanuel Kant, in his book entitled *A New Elucidation of the First Principles of Metaphysical Cognition*, argues that, by the term "God," we should refer to the ground of all real possibility (*Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 1:395). Within the mythological core of every spiritualized, elevated religious system, one can discern and understand the power and structural stability of moral consciousness, and it is the structural stability of moral consciousness that is of primary interest to us, the regulativist Freemasons.

The working tools of a Master Mason are the Skirret, the Pencil, and the Pair of Compasses. The Skirret is a measure that ensures that the foundation of a building is straight by laying down a string as a marker. Therefore, the Skirret symbolizes the foundation of the way of life that we have to follow as Freemasons, as laid down to us in our Ritual. The Pencil is a symbol of intellectual rigor and moral accountability. The Pair of Compasses, enabling one with accuracy and precision to ascertain and determine the limits and the proportions of the different parts of a building, is a symbol of justice.

The Lodge of Perfection: The Degrees 4th–14th

The 4th degree (Secret Master) teaches that the Secret Masters are partakers of the Holy Truth, truth-as-correctness, and that they can convey their virtue only through devotion and service to the world—more specifically, through historical action. In particular, according to the symbolic teachings of the 4th degree, there was only one entrance to the Holy of Holies of the First Temple of Jerusalem, in the East, and it was called "Ziza," a Hebrew word meaning "brightness." Hence, the emblem of the 4th degree is a key on which the letter Z is engraved. According to the symbolic content of the 4th degree, the Freemason acquires the symbolic key with which one can open the door of Ziza and cross it, thus entering the realm of pure truth, symbolized by the Holy of Holies of the

First Temple of Jerusalem, after one's soul has overcome the obstacles posed by passions, prejudices, and illusions.

The 4th degree, using symbolic language inspired by biblical narratives, cultivates sensitivity to, and interest in, real truth. However, for religious Jews, truth may mean "true religious doctrine," but, for us, namely, regulativist, speculative Masons, "truth" means logical consistency and a relationship of correspondence. Consciousness has a set of beliefs, which may be true or false, and there is the reality of the world, which is independent of one's beliefs, in the sense that there are facts or states of affairs in the world. Hence, whether a belief is true or false depends on whether or not it corresponds to a fact, which exists in the world; otherwise, it is a false belief. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, "truth" is this correspondence relation, and, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein explains the correspondence theory of truth by talking about how the grooves on a record correspond to the sound that a record makes when it plays. In fact, we have two different phenomena, namely, a solid physical object (a record) and a sound, but the grooves on the record correspond to the sound waves, and, thus, Wittgenstein took that fact as an analogy between our beliefs, which are one kind of thing, and facts in the world, which are a different kind of thing. Hence, "truth" refers to the structural similarity between the concepts that make up one's beliefs and the things in the world that make up the facts. However, the formulation of true theories requires logical consistency, coherence, too. Hence, "truth" also refers to "coherence" (as emphasized by F. H. Bradley and H. H. Joachim). In order to formulate a true belief, it must belong to a maximally coherent set of beliefs. Consequently, truth means, firstly, logical consistency (absence of contradictions) in reasoning, i.e., coherence, and, secondly, correspondence with facts in the world.

The 5th degree (Perfect Master) teaches that, for the Perfect Masters, age is not measured by units of time but by deeds, and that the monument of the Work of a person who has worked hard, sincerely, and wisely shines and feeds him/her with the life force of the Creator.

The 6th degree (Intimate Secretary) teaches that our duty is to act with the best intentions and to judge fairly and honestly.

The 7th degree (Provost and Judge) teaches that we have intellect, feelings, instincts, strength, abilities, and commitment, and that we cannot achieve anything significant with these qualities if they are not properly coordinated—that is, if they are not governed by a higher law or principle. In his *Republic* (443d–e), Plato argues that one has cured his soul if he has "attained to self-mastery and beautiful order within himself, and . . .

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harmonized these three principles [the three parts of the soul, namely, reason, the emotions, and the appetites] . . . linked and bound all three together and made himself a unit, one man instead of many, self-controlled and in unison.”

The 8th degree (Intendant of the Buildings) teaches that progress cannot be achieved without learning and improvement, that important endeavors can be carried out with the help of others, and that knowledge can be lost if not preserved and passed on to others.

The “Elect” degrees—the 9th, the 10th, and the 11th degrees (i.e., Elect of Nine, Elect of Fifteen, and Sublime Elect)—recount the legendary mode of the arrest and the punishment of the assassins of Hiram Abiff by special task forces organized by Solomon, King of Israel. According to the didactic story of the 9th degree, a task force composed of nine Master Masons found one of the assassins of Hiram Abiff, and the most ardent of the nine killed him. This Master Mason severed the head from the body, and taking it in one hand and his dagger in the other, returned to Jerusalem with the eight fellow Masons. According to the didactic story of the 10th degree, fifteen Master Masons, among whom were the nine Master Masons mentioned in the 9th degree, found the other villains, seized them, and, binding them in chains, conducted them to Jerusalem, where they were sentenced to death and executed. According to the didactic story of the 11th degree, King Solomon instituted this degree, both as a recompense for the zeal and constancy of the Elect of Fifteen and in order to honor other deserving Masons, who excel in science and in social and moral virtues. In brief, the “Elect” degrees teach that arbitrary ambition, fanaticism, and social oppression should be overthrown and dispelled by the sword of justice and freedom, that true and faithful Freemasons are earnest, honest, and sincere, and they protect the people against illegal impositions and exactions.

The 12th degree (Grand Master Architect) is alleged to have been established as a school of instruction for the more advanced Craftsmen in order to ensure uniformity in work and vigor in its prosecution, and to prepare Master Masons for promotion to the 13th degree, which is the main focal point of the Lodge of Perfection.

The 13th degree—the Royal Arch of Enoch—is devoted to the correct pronunciation of the name of the Absolute Being, the deity. According to the 13th degree, Enoch, an ancient Patriarch of knowledge and civilization prior to Noah’s flood, had a divinely inspired vision in which he contemplated the Ineffable Name of God. This was, specifically, the Holy Tetragrammaton, which consists of four Hebrew letters: Yod–Heh–Vav–

Heh (YHVH). It corresponds to the Sefira (level of reality) of Chokhmah (Wisdom), whereas the Hebrew divine name that corresponds to the Sefira of Kether (Crown) is Ehyeh, and the Hebrew divine name that corresponds to the Sefira of Binah (Understanding) is YHVH Elohim.

The Holy Tetragrammaton:

Hebrew	Letter name
י	Yod
ה	Heh
ו	Vav
ה	Heh

Etymologists teach that the Holy Tetragrammaton—that is, the name “Yehovah” (or “Jehovah”)—means “the One who I am.” That explanation is in accordance with the Volume of the Sacred Law, which attributes the words “I am that I am” to God, as we read in the book of Exodus, 3:14. It is, in fact, the only name that we can give to the Absolute Being whenever we refer to the Absolute Being’s essence, which is totally transcendent. In the case of the Absolute Being, the essence of being is identified with the presence of being. Additionally, according to the 13th degree, the Holy Tetragrammaton contains the following Trinitarian formula: by uniting Yod with the first Heh, we obtain a name of the deity that means Generator; by uniting the first Heh with Vav, we obtain a name of the deity that means Creative Word; and, by uniting Vav with another Heh, a third divine name appears, which continues from the first and the second, so that, when they are all united in one Big Name, we can find Three in One. In view of my previous arguments regarding the interpretation of Freemasonry, the Holy Tetragrammaton is a symbol of the active and creative role that consciousness can play in the world, and it implies that, under certain conditions, enlightened consciousness can restructure reality according to the intentionality of consciousness.

Those Masons who have studied and understood the aforementioned secrets are ultimately proclaimed Grand Elect Perfect and Sublime Masons through being awarded the 14th degree.

The Chapter of Rose Croix: The Degrees 15th–18th

The 15th to the 18th degrees all constitute the Chapter of Rose Croix, and they are usually conferred together in one ceremony. The 15th degree (Knight of the East or of the Sword) is devoted to the exercise of freedom, and its characteristic symbol is the acronym L.D.P. This stands for both

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“Liberté De Penser,” meaning “freedom of thought,” and “Liberté De Passer,” meaning “freedom to pass.” The 16th degree (Prince of Jerusalem) is focused on the reward due to bravery, constancy, and perseverance. The 17th degree (Knight of the East and West) reminds us of the amalgamation of different European nations in the context of the Order of the Knights of Malta during the Second Crusade. According to the 17th degree, Freemasonry conducts its own Crusades, which, in contrast to the medieval Crusades, are aimed at combating bigotry and superstition.

The 18th degree (Knight of the Pelican and Eagle and Sovereign Prince Rose Croix of Heredom) teaches that the Rose symbolizes secrecy and silence as well as Him who is the “Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the Valley,” since, in the Song of Solomon, we find a reference to the Savior under the mystical title of the “Rose of Sharon.” The cross represents the Cross of Calvary, red with the holy blood. The pelican symbolizes the Savior who shed his blood for the salvation of humanity, and, therefore, it symbolizes Jesus of Nazareth in his mediatorial character, while the eagle is a symbol of Jesus of Nazareth in his divine character. Philosophically, the combination of the symbols of a pelican and an eagle implies the combination between Matter and Logos, that is, the presence of reason within the material world and history. According to the 18th degree Ritual, the candidate is symbolically admitted in a Chapter of Princes Rose Croix of Heredom “at the ninth hour of the day,” when the earth quakes, the rocks are rent, the veil of the Temple is rent in twain, and darkness overspreads the earth, highlighting the Passion Narrative in Matthew’s Gospel (27:50–51). Philosophically, this narrative refers to humanity’s ultimate limit situations, from which a highly evolved self can emerge, unless one is destroyed by such situations. Opportunities exist within existential crises, but not everyone who goes through an existential crisis becomes wise as a result. The 18th degree refers to the figurative passage of man through the depths of darkness and the Valley of the Shadow of Death to the Mansions of Light, accompanied and sustained by the three theological virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity, which are symbolically found by symbolically searching in and about the Pillars in the North, the South, and the West for the lost Word. Faith, corresponding to the North, supports the aspirant when tempted to despair; Hope, corresponding to the South, cheers the aspirant on his/her road; Charity, corresponding to the West, sustains the aspirant in every trial, until, having travelled through the abyss of darkness, he/she arrives at the Mansions of Light, corresponding to the East. The 18th degree teaches that, assisted by these

three virtues, the candidate will succeed in attaining the Rosicrucians' ultimate goal, which is that Word on which the eternal salvation of humanity depends. In this degree, the aspirant arrives at the Eastern part of the Lodge, where he/she discovers the Lost Word as Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." The Sacred Word of the 18th degree is I.N.R.I., the initials of the Latin sentence that was placed upon the Cross of Jesus of Nazareth: "Jesus Nazarenus Rex Judaeorum" (as we read in Matthew 27:37, Mark 15:26, Luke 23:38, and John 19:19–20). In fact, they used the letter I instead of the letter J because there was no letter J in the Roman, the Hebrew, and the Greek alphabets (and the letter J first came into use when the Gospel stories were translated into German). Moreover, the Rosicrucians interpret I.N.R.I. as the initials of the Hermetic (that is, alchemical) principles "Igne Natura Renovatur Integra" (meaning "by fire nature is perfectly renewed") and "Igne Nitrum Roris Invenitur" (meaning "by fire the nitre of the dew is discovered"), and as the initials of the Hebrew names of the ancient elements: "Iaminim" (water), "Nour" (fire), "Ruach" (air), and "Iebshah" (earth).

During the Renaissance, Rosicrucianism played a very important role in the attempt to cultivate and promote a humanistic approach to religion and substitute religious mentality with spiritual mentality. In essence, Rosicrucianism is not a particular Order, but a spiritual and cultural movement. The legendary history of the Rosicrucians goes back to medieval Germany. The earliest public notice of the Fratres of the Rose and Cross appeared in 1614 in a pamphlet printed at Kassel in Germany, entitled *Fama Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis* (meaning *The Fame of the Fraternity of the Rose and Cross*). In 1615, a new edition of the previous pamphlet appeared, to which was added *Confessio Fraternitatis* (meaning *The Confession of the Fraternity*), giving great promises about future revelations. The following year saw the publication of a new Rosicrucian manifesto entitled the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, whose authorship is attributed to Johann Valentin Andreae, a Lutheran theologian from Tübingen, and it describes the path to salvation through ecstasy and enlightenment. Andreae's work immediately attracted the attention of alchemists, theosophists, doctors, and astrologers, who founded Rosicrucian fraternities not only in Germany but also in France, Austria, England, and the Netherlands. In 1652, the Welsh mystical philosopher and alchemist Thomas Vaughan, who was writing under the pseudonym of Eugenius Philalethes, translated the aforementioned Rosicrucian pamphlets into English.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* starts as follows:

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Seeing the only Wise and Merciful God in these latter days hath poured out so richly his mercy and goodness to Mankind, whereby we do attain more and more to the perfect knowledge of his Son Jesus Christ and Nature, that justly we may boast of the happy time, wherein there is not only discovered unto us the half part of the World, which was heretofore unknown and hidden, but he hath also made manifest unto us many wonderful, and never heretofore seen, Works and Creatures of Nature, and moreover hath raised men endued with great Wisdom, which might partly renew and reduce all Arts (in this our Age spotted and imperfect) to perfection; so that finally Man might thereby understand his own Nobleness and Worth, and why he is called *Microcosmus*, and how far his knowledge extendeth in Nature.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* announced the existence of a discreet fraternity founded in the late Middle Ages by a German nobleman, the “pious, spiritual, and highly-illuminated Father” Fr. C.R. (Christian Rosenkreutz). According to the *Fama*, dissatisfied with monastic life, the young C.R. travelled with a Father P.A.L. to the East in search of knowledge, and he reached Cyprus, where his friend died in 1393. Brother C.R. then went on to Damascus, where he conducted further studies, and subsequently went to Egypt, where he remained for a long time. He journeyed along the Mediterranean Sea and visited Fez, where he studied the accumulated scientific and philosophical knowledge as well as the magic—that is, the alchemical treatises—of the Arabs.

In the study of alchemy, practice and experiment are necessary, thus paving the road to modern natural science. These need to be preceded by theoretical knowledge, which constitutes the philosophical or spiritual aspect of alchemy. In general, alchemy has two aspects: the material and the spiritual. The argument that alchemy was merely a primitive form of chemistry is untenable by anyone who is familiar with works written by its chief adepts. Additionally, the argument that alchemy is only a set of philosophical and theological teachings and that the alchemists’ chemical references are only allegories is equally untenable by anyone who is familiar with the history of alchemy, since many of alchemy’s most prominent adepts have made significant contributions to chemistry, and they have not been notable as teachers either of philosophy or of theology. In Antoine-Joseph Pernety’s *Dictionnaire Mytho-Hermétique* (Paris: Delalain, 1758), one can find a very important explanation of alchemical terms upon the material plane.

In fact, by the late Middle Ages, the Arabs and the Persians had already created big libraries, and had collected and translated many ancient Greek

philosophical and scientific books. In the eighth century, during the reign of the Abbasid caliphs al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid, many works of ancient Greek philosophers and scientists, such as Aristotle, Hippocrates, Galen of Pergamon, Ptolemy, and Euclid, were translated into Arabic by such prominent translators and scholars as Ibn Bakhtishu, Theodore Abu Qurrah, al-Bitriq, and his son Yahya. In the ninth century, the Abbasid caliph al-Mamun, son of al-Mahdi, supported the study of ancient Greek philosophy and science and was an advocate of philosophical freethinking. Moreover, in Baghdad, caliph Harun al-Rashid founded an intellectual center called the “House of Wisdom” (in Arabic, Bayt al-Hikma), which was generously sponsored and developed further by caliph al-Mamun.

Finally, Brother C.R. crossed over into Spain, where he learned the Jewish Kabbalah and the philosophy of the Moors. It is worth pointing out that the Moors were the first great improvers of natural sciences in medieval Western Europe, since they had acquired their sciences from the Greeks through the Byzantine Empire, and they created renowned universities in Spain, such as those of Seville, Cordova, and Granada. During his journey in search of wisdom, Brother C.R. observed how the Eastern sages shared their knowledge without jealousy, hypocrisy, or egoism.

In 1402, Brother C.R. returned to Germany, and he settled down to codify the vast amount of knowledge that he had collected. However, in Germany, he found only hostility and indifference. Thus, in a German place now unknown, Brother C.R. established a fraternity of sympathetic brethren: the Fratres R.C., who met annually in secret in the “House of the Holy Spirit,” as they called their assembly, with the aims of advancing science and an esoteric approach to religion, and of furthering a deep reformation of knowledge.

Six ordinances were laid down to govern the original members of the Rosicrucian Fraternity in the conduct of their lives:

1. None of them should profess any great powers, knowledge, or authority to the outer world, but they should do good and heal the poor freely.
2. No peculiar habit should be worn when out in the world to make them conspicuous or liable to persecution.
3. On at least one day in every year all Fratres should assemble to record their work and communicate to each other their gains of knowledge.
4. Every Frater should seek one or more suitable persons to succeed him.
5. “R.C.” or “C.R.” should be their seal, mark, and character.

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6. The Fraternity should remain a secret or private one, at least for a hundred years, if not longer.

Around 1450, the eldest Fratres or Magistri designed and executed a funeral Chamber in which Brother C.R. should be buried when his end came. Brother C.R. died in 1484, and he was entombed. On the door of the vault, the inscription “Post centum viginti annos patebo” was engraved on a brazen plate, meaning that the vault should be opened after 120 years. This long period passed by, and, even though Roman Catholicism had been fiercely attacked by the Religious Reformation, the work of the Rosicrucians had continued in peace and secrecy. In 1604, the Fratres then forming the central group of the Rosicrucian Fraternity opened the door of the secret chamber and entered the vault, where the Founder’s body was lying in perfect condition, clothed in the symbolic robe and the insignia of his office of Magus (Head) of the Fraternity. Also stored here were the original books and achievements of the earliest members.

Through the aforementioned symbols and allegories, the original Rosicrucian manifestos (the *Fama* and the *Confessio*) are concerned with the following goal: the union of religion and science in the context of a spiritual quest for the real truth of both the visible and the invisible things. This is the context in which Rosicrucians study systems of Eastern mysticism and delve into the natural sciences. In other words, the Rosicrucians promote the development of science in general while simultaneously cultivating an esoteric approach to religion that ultimately seeks to transform religion into spirituality. The unifying principle that pervades the entire spectrum of the Rosicrucians’ endeavors is their longing for communion with the one, ultimate source of the meaning of all beings and things, visible and invisible.

According to Mackey’s *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, the word “Heredom” (which is part of the name of the 18th degree) derives from the Greek words “Hierōs,” meaning “holy,” and “Dōmos,” meaning “house,” so that the term “Heredom” signifies the Holy House of Masonry.

The Council of Kdosh: The Degrees 19th–30th

The 19th to the 30th degrees of the A.A.S.R. all constitute the Council of Kadosh. These degrees are: (19°) Grand Pontiff, (20°) Venerable Grand Master of the Symbolic Lodges, or Master ad Vitam, (21°) Patriarch Noachite or Prussian Knight, (22°) Prince of Libanus, (23°) Chief of the Tabernacle, (24°) Prince of the Tabernacle, (25°) Knight of the Brazen Serpent, (26°) Prince of Mercy, (27°) Commander of the Temple, (28°) Knight of the Sun, (29°) Knight of Saint Andrew, (30°) Grand Elected

Knight Kadosh or Knight of the White and Black Eagle. Usually, these degrees are conferred all together in one ceremony or, alternatively, in parts.

The major motto of the 19th and the 20th degrees is “Laus Deo,” meaning “praise (be) to God,” that is, it praises the potential perfection of humanity. Pontiff means bridge-builder. The 19th degree, which is called Grand Pontiff, teaches that we must build bridges from one human being to another, serving the ideas of Justice, Truth, and Tolerance, thus leading humanity to a state of good spirit, or happiness. The 20th degree, which is called Venerable Grand Master of the Symbolic Lodges, or Master ad Vitam, is devoted to the protection of the pure core of Symbolic Masonry. In particular, the 20th degree teaches that the main goal of Freemasonry is that of philosophy, or finding the truth and serving the idea of goodness. However, as the 20th degree explicitly points out, ignorance, ambition, ostentation, and false beliefs have veiled the truths of Freemasonry; frequently, new and fantastic Masonic degrees were invented and unimaginably lofty Masonic titles were handed out. Thus, the 20th degree boldly assigns Freemasons the responsibility to rid Freemasonry of deception, corruption, false narratives, and vanity.

The major motto of the 21st and the 22nd degrees is “Omnia Tempus Alit,” meaning “all time feeds or crushes.” The 21st degree teaches that we must judge fairly and impartially, and not expect to gain benefits through a bad deed. The 22nd degree teaches that work is not an insult and a curse but a blessing, because it creates everything and, therefore, is a divine energy and the condition of every civilization.

The major motto of the 23rd, the 24th, and the 25th degrees is “Corde Gladioque Potens,” meaning “powerful in heart and sword.” The 23rd degree teaches that we should contemplate and approach the cause of being. The 24th degree teaches that we must follow the rules of correct reasoning, become free, and have a faith based on self-cultivation and self-confidence. The 25th degree teaches that we must free ourselves from the logic of material necessities. The biblical story of the “brazen serpent,” to which the 25th degree alludes, is recounted in Numbers 21:5–9.

The major motto of the 26th, 27th, and 28th degrees is “Ardens Gloria Surgit,” meaning “burning glory rises.” The 26th degree teaches altruism and good will. The 27th degree teaches struggle for the liberation of humanity, just as the Knights Templar fought for the liberation of the Holy Land. The 28th degree teaches that transcendence, the Masonic vision of perfection, is symbolized by the Sun; reason is the supreme stage of mental development; and the principle of analogy, that is, thinking through analogies, is the key to understanding transcendence.

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The major motto of the 29th and the 30th degrees is “Architectonis Magni Dei Gloria,” meaning “Glory to the Great Architect God.” The 29th degree teaches humility, patience, self-sacrifice, love of neighbor, meekness, magnanimity, courage, honesty, truthfulness, and dignity. Virtue, Truth, and Honor are the three most essential qualities of a Knight of Saint Andrew. The Grand Lodge of Scotland recognizes Saint Andrew as the patron Saint of Scottish Freemasonry. According to the Christian Bible and the tradition of Christianity, Saint Andrew was an agile and hardy Galilean fisherman whose name means “strong” and who also had great social skills.

In the 30th degree, the attention of the candidate is directed towards a mysterious ladder that has two supports and seven steps. The first support on the right bears the Hebrew name “Oheb Eloah,” meaning “love of God,” and the second support on the left bears the Hebrew name “Oheb Kerobo,” meaning “love of one’s neighbor.” The seven ascending steps symbolize the hierarchy of the liberal sciences (Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy), through which abstract thought and systematic knowledge of the universe become possible. The seven descending steps symbolize seven moral virtues, through which one can turn one’s consciousness towards one’s fellow-humans, “down here” (in this world), in order to promote humanity’s prosperity and progress. These seven virtues bear the following Hebrew names: “Tsedakah,” which means justice and charity; “Schor Laban,” which means white ox and, symbolically, goodness and innocence; “Mathok,” which means gentleness and mildness; “Emounah,” which means trust in truth; “Hamal Saghia,” which means Great Work and emphasizes the moral significance of practical work; “Sabbal,” which means burden and moral responsibility; and “Ghemoul Binah Thebounah,” which means that prudence leads to wisdom.

Furthermore, inherent in the ritual of the 30th degree is a peculiar chivalric ethos, whose roots go back to the seminal *Ramsay’s Oration*, written in 1737. The Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay was a native of Scotland, a Knight of the French Order of St. Lazarus, and tutor to the two sons of the exiled James III (“The Old Pretender”), the son of Great Britain’s exiled King James II, in 1724 and 1725. In fact, the Scottish adherents of the exiled British King James II who followed him into exile (after the landing of the Prince of Orange in 1688) brought to the English Court in St. Germain (which had been placed at the disposal of James II by the French King Louis XIV) Scottish Masonic traditions intermingled with Templarism. In 1737, in Paris, Ramsay delivered a thought-provoking and

controversial Oration before the English Provincial Grand Lodge of France, of which he was Grand Chancellor and Orator. In his Oration, Ramsay attempted to integrate the institution and the ethos of medieval chivalry into Freemasonry.

According to the Chevalier Ramsay's aforementioned oration, at the time of the Crusades, many princes, lords, and knights associated themselves and vowed to restore the Christians' Temple in Jerusalem and to employ themselves in restoring the traditional form and glory of their architecture. Thus, they agreed upon several secret ancient signs and symbolic words drawn from the Christian religion in order to recognize themselves among the heathens and Saracens. Furthermore, according to the same oration, those secret signs and words were only communicated to those who promised solemnly never to divulge them. As a result, the Chevalier Ramsay maintains, the previous sacred promise, often associated with the Templars' inner circle, was not heretical, but instead it was a holy bond to unite Christians of all nationalities into one confraternity. Moreover, according to Ramsay, sometime afterwards, Masonry was somehow united with the Knights of St. John. From that time, the Masons' Lodges took the name of Lodges of St. John.

The ritual of the 30th degree is strongly Templar in tone, and, in this degree's ceremony, the candidate is pledged to honor the memory of Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the Crusading Order of the Knights Templar by punishing crime, protecting innocence and people's rights, opposing any type of mental and political despotism that undermines people's rational faculty and fundamental freedoms, and fighting against oppression and injustice.

The "Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon" (in Latin, *Pauperes Commilitones Christi Templique Salomonici*)—commonly known as the "Knights Templar," the "Order of the Temple" (in French, *Ordre du Temple* or *Templiers*), or simply as "Templars"—were among the most famous Crusading Orders. When the Holy Land was lost, support for the Order faded. Rumors about the Templars' secret initiation ceremony created mistrust, and King Philip IV of France, deeply in debt and jealous of the Templars' financial prosperity and power, took advantage of the situation. In 1307, many Templars in France were arrested, tortured into giving false confessions, and then burned at the stake. King Philip IV had Jacques de Molay, the 23rd and last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, burned at the stake in Paris, in March 1314. Moreover, under pressure from King Philip IV, Pope Clement V disbanded the Order in 1312. Since at least the eighteenth century, several Masonic Bodies have embraced Templar symbols and rituals, mainly

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using the historical Order of the Temple as a symbol in order to teach moral lessons emphasizing the significance of committing oneself to noble goals, fortitude, and the need for a humanistic crusade.

It is worth pointing out that one of the most important and oldest mottos of the 30th degree of the A.A.S.R. is: “Nec proditor Nec proditus innocens foret,” which means that neither the betrayer nor the betrayed can be innocent. The Order of the Knights Templar was betrayed by some of its own knights, as well as by its secular head, King Philip IV of France, and by its ecclesiastical head, Pope Clement V. However, the Order of the Knights Templar itself had betrayed the ancient pure Christian ethos, which the Templars were supposed to safeguard. In fact, the Knights Templar gave in to the temptations of bloody religious wars and avarice. Not only did the Templars conduct a ruthless religious war and loot several areas in Byzantium and the Middle East, but they also accumulated huge financial wealth by trading money. The Order of the Knights Templar created an international banking network, became a banker of monarchs for their mortgages, and was offering loans to finance wars through the Order’s Paris headquarters.

Leaving aside every non-Masonic neo-Templar organization, which may pursue its own peculiar agenda, I should stress that those who can understand the esoteric teachings of Freemasonry are aware that the 30th degree of the A.A.S.R. uses the history of the Knights Templar neither in order to teach the “merits” of usury and “holy wars” nor in order to “sell” defunct chivalric titles, but in order to urge Freemasons to contemplate moral values and human rights and in order to transform Freemasons into Crusaders of Humanism.

Intimately related to the 30th degree is the ancient Egyptian legend of Osiris. From the perspective of a Knight Kadosh, the legend of Osiris firstly symbolizes the destruction of the Order as a result of the slain of Hiram Abiff, a martyr of fidelity to a sacred obligation. Secondly, it symbolizes the Freemasons’ attempt to raise Hiram Abiff as “the radical intelligence,” what the Kabbalists call Geburah (Power), which symbolically corresponds to Horus, or “Horus Abiff.”

The myth of Osiris symbolizes the human soul’s drama. Osiris himself symbolizes the soul proper: what in ancient Greek is called “nous,” or what the Kabbalists call “neshamah”; this refers to the repository of pure spirit, and, by “spirit,” I refer to everything that transcends basic physical necessities. Within the profane men, Osiris is dead through the lower nature, symbolized by Seth. Seth—the Brother who killed Osiris and dismembered Osiris’s body—symbolizes the animal soul, in particular

selfish sentiments and passions. Thus, Osiris is buried in the shrine of the “mummy” of the materialistic world and thrown into the Nile, which symbolizes materialistic life. But Isis, who symbolizes the realm of the “sacred” and the love for the divine—that is, for the real truth—seeks, with the help of Anubis (who symbolizes divine wisdom) and Thoth (who symbolizes divine grace), the parts of Osiris’s fragmented corpse (or being) in order to reassemble them, thus giving rise to an integrated and spiritually revived harmonious soul, symbolized by Horus.

Isis was the first daughter of Geb (the Egyptian god of the Earth) and Nut (the Egyptian goddess of the Sky), and she was chosen by her oldest brother and husband, Osiris, to share the throne. In Masonry, by the term “Egyptian triangle,” we refer to a right-angled triangle that has the following proportions: its base is equal to three cubits, its height is equal to four cubits, and its hypotenuse is equal to five cubits. In other words, by the term “Egyptian triangle,” we refer to the right-angled triangle whose sides have the lengths 3, 4, and 5, or one whose measurements keep these proportions. It is the easiest right-angled triangle to build, and it was used by ancient Egyptians in order to determine and construct the right angles needed in order to build a strong Temple. A Diophantine equation is an equation in which only integer solutions are allowed. The term “Diophantine” refers to the Hellenistic mathematician Diophantus of Alexandria, who made a systematic study of such equations and was one of the pioneers of algebraic geometry. The Egyptian triangle is the smallest Diophantine right-angled triangle. If we multiply the proportions of the 3:4:5 Egyptian triangle by five, then we obtain a similar Egyptian triangle whose proportions are 15, 20, and 25 cubits. In ancient Egypt, the 15:20:25 Egyptian triangle was called “Isiac,” and the term “Isiac” refers to the goddess Isis, who symbolizes the realm of the “sacred” and the longing for perfection.

The Consistory: The Degrees 31st and 32nd

The 31st and the 32nd degrees constitute the Consistory, and they are both worked in full. The 31st degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is called Grand Inspector Inquisitor Commander. This degree is conferred in a Supreme Tribunal wherein the candidate is charged to oversee the observation of Freemasonic justice. A 31st degree Mason is introduced to representatives of great law givers of the past, such as Moses, Zoroaster, Socrates, Confucius, and Alfred the Great King of Saxon England, and is counseled to focus one’s mind on the real Christian justice, which has been clarified by Jesus of Nazareth as follows: “if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not

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forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses . . . For with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged: and with what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you” (Matthew 6:14–15, 7:2). “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matthew 5:7). In the 31st degree, Scottish Rite Masons are taught that Justice and Equity are the watchwords of the Order, and that their duty is to administer the justice of equity, of right judgment, and of mercy. The term “Inquisitor” means one who seeks, searches for, and investigates the truth. In addition to the duties of a judge, the members of the 31st degree have to perform the following duties: to inquire into and scrutinize the work of subordinate Masonic Bodies; to safeguard that the recipients of the higher administrative degrees are not unnecessarily multiplied and that improper persons are carefully excluded from membership; and to see that, in their life and conversation, Freemasons bear testimony to the excellence of the Order’s ethos.

The 32nd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is called Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret, and counsels charity and tolerance towards all humankind. This is exemplified by a symbolic pilgrimage in search of truth, in which the candidate is conducted around the “Camp of Chivalry” where the respective points mark Confucius, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Jesus of Nazareth, and Muhammad. Here, within the Consistory, the candidate is able to realize and appreciate the moral content of the renowned religions and philosophies of the world. Confucius, the great lawgiver of ancient China, taught the principles of “solidarity” and “reciprocity.” He said to the Chinese that the most important benefit that they should desire for their country is justice, and that humanity should look for the great law of duty. According to Confucius, justice is equity to render to everyone that to which one is entitled.

Zoroaster, whose words became law to the ancient Persians, said that the best servant of God is a person whose heart is upright, who loves freedom, has due regard for what is just to everyone, who does not run after material riches, and whose heart wishes well to every living being. According to Zoroaster, those who are charitable and merciful in their judgments alone are just. According to the central premise of Zoroastrianism, which is exposed in the sacred volume called *Avesta* written in the Zend language, Ahura Mazda or Ohrmazd is the highest spirit of worship. Ahura literally means light, and Mazda literally means wisdom. Moreover, according to the *Avesta*, Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, being the destructive spirit,

contends with Ahura Mazda upon the earth for the souls of men; man may in this life fall under the evil sway of Ahriman, but Ahura Mazda will be supreme at the end.

The historical Gautama Buddha (also known as Siddhartha Gautama in Sanskrit), although born a prince, chose the life of a Hindu monk. He reformed certain rigid and ritualistic aspects of Hinduism, and he taught humans a path that leads to the elimination of suffering and passions. According to Buddha's teachings, this path consists of heartfelt concern for others, love, and compassion, the highest expression of which is the altruistic intention to become enlightened in order to do good to all beings. It is said that Buddha was once asked, "is it better to walk alone or in company?" He answered: "it is better to walk alone than to walk with a fool."

Moses, the greatest leader and lawgiver of the ancient Israelites, delivered the Israelites out of bondage and led them to the Promised Land. On Mount Sinai, Moses told the Israelites that God gave him the Ten Commandments that constitute the foundation of the Jewish moral system (according to Deuteronomy 5:1–22): (i) "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; You shall have no other gods before Me." (ii) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image." (iii) "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." (iv) "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." (v) "Honor your father and your mother." (vi) "You shall not murder." (vii) "You shall not commit adultery." (viii) "You shall not steal." (ix) "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (x) "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; and you shall not desire . . . anything that is your neighbor's." In its entirety, the Mosaic or Sinaitic Law comprises 613 commandments, and it is the most important form of law adapted to the needs of nomadic peoples. It helped the Israelites to maintain their existential otherness in general, and their monotheistic doctrine in particular, among different peoples and great civilizations.

Hermes Trismegistus, the mythical Greco-Egyptian Patriarch of Wisdom, taught that the first step of the soul seeking reunion with God is to recognize its own ignorance, and that it is God's wish to be known by humanity, since humanity is God's most glorious creation. According to Hermes Trismegistus, knowing God requires the second birth of the spirit, the unveiling of the "essential" human within, meaning that everyone who seeks to know God must acquire wisdom, practice virtue, do ill to no human, and be detached from worldly things. In other words, according to Hermes Trismegistus, a human being can become divine by reflecting the

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divine virtues that are equivalent to the essential self, which is the image of God.

Socrates, a great sage of classical Athens, taught that “there is only one good, that is, knowledge, and one evil, that is, ignorance” (as we read in Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Chapter 5, par. 31). Moreover, Socrates has argued that the “feeling of wonder shows that you are a philosopher, since wonder is the only beginning of philosophy” (as we read in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, 155d).

Plato, the most important student of Socrates, taught humans self-knowledge, and revealed to them the world of pure ideas and eternal truths. From the perspective of Plato’s philosophy, he who lives in harmony with himself, with his fellow-humans, and with the good-in-itself alone is just; the good-in-itself is the ontological underpinning of the cosmic order.

Thus spoke Jesus of Nazareth, who sacrificed his life for the salvation of humanity: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them” (Matthew 5:17). “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength . . . Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30–31). “You are gods!” (John 10:34).

Muhammad ibn Abdullah, the prophet of Islam, taught that God is One, and that in Him should we repose our hopes and to Him should we pray. According to Muhammad, when dealing with others, we should remember that God is watching over us, and that He will deal with us as we have dealt with others. Therefore, we must avoid evils such as cruelty, dishonesty, pride, antagonism, jealousy, selfishness, and callousness. Muhammad said: “The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe, and the believer is the one from whom the people’s lives and wealth are safe” (Sunan an-Nassa’i 4995). According to Islam, Allah did not send down one *Sharia*—that is, divine law—for all humankind. In Surat Al-Ma’idah (5:48), in the Quran, we read the following: “To each of you we have ordained a law and a way,” meaning that, even though God created humanity from a single Father (Adam) and a single Mother (Eve), He did not create us all as a single people; He ordained that humanity should emerge as different nations and different tribes. Thus, there is diversity among humankind as there is diversity among flowers, and this diversity is meant to enhance the splendor of Allah’s creation and to function as a means by which humans recognize each other. Furthermore,

it is worth stressing that the Quran proclaims that the status among men and women is classified on the basis of faith and conduct rather than birth, dismissing any arrogant claim to a birthright of superiority as false (Sura Al-Hujurat).

The above teachings of Confucius, Zoroaster, Buddha, Moses, Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Jesus of Nazareth, and Muhammad help a sufficiently cultured person to transcend the realm of primitive religiosity and ascend to the realm of genuine spirituality.

In its pure, or primitive, form, religion derives from the natural, instinctive tendency of the individual to protect oneself, survive, and control one's environment, whereas spirituality derives from free will, because spirituality is a conscious choice of a mode of being that transcends the logic of natural necessity. Therefore, religion gives rise to a society founded on needs and necessities, whereas spirituality gives rise to a society founded on freedom and truth.

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that the Darwinian theory of evolution holds that nature favors those factors that help the species survive, and, indeed, religion is one of the most important factors that have helped the survival of the human species in terms of both the management of social life and the tackling of psychological issues. However, spirituality is concerned with the deepening and the cultivation of moral consciousness.

The primitive form of religion is mainly based on the management of instincts and of selfishness, whereas science is mainly based on reason and observation. From this perspective, there is a fundamental contradiction between religion and science. Over many centuries, this fundamental contradiction has often been manifested through cultural conflicts and hostility, and often a crude religious mentality has led to the establishment of tyrannical regimes. However, a new situation arises when religion is spiritualized: when humanity moves away from primitive religiosity to higher levels of spiritualized religion, thus understanding spiritualized religion as a tool for the deepening and expansion of moral consciousness. Spirituality does not contradict science, since spirituality refers to the liberation of humanity from necessities, and science consists in a corrective and liberating action of human consciousness.

Spirituality provides a liberating type of knowledge that is based on a causal logic, since it seeks to disclose and interpret the efficient and final causes of the beings and things that exist in the world. Science provides a liberating type of knowledge that is based on a functional logic, since it seeks to explain and/or change the functions of physical and social systems. Spirituality and science in unison can provide a holistic type of

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knowledge, which is the major demand of classical philosophy. Hence, the spiritualization of religion, or the substitution of religious mentality with spiritual mentality, is a necessary condition for building a better person in a better society.

Finally, during one's initiation into the 32nd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, the aspirant is taught that the pillars of the symbolic Temple that Freemasons try to erect are Freedom, Justice, Reason, and Love. In other words, the members of the 32nd degree realize that, when traditional Masonic rituals refer to the rebuilding of King Solomon's Temple, they do not refer to a literal, material project, but to a biblical symbol of a spiritual world order. This is the essence of the "Royal Secret," which is communicated to the candidate in the 32nd degree. In the hands of a Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret, a Crusader's sword becomes a symbol of the sword of Reason and Illumination, and a Sublime Prince of the Royal Secret uses this spiritual sword in order to repel falsehood and dishonor in whatever guise they may appear.

As a result of the revision and the restructuring of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite by our Order, namely, by the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, the 32nd degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is focused on the writings of the Italian Renaissance nobleman and philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and, particularly, on his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*De hominis dignitate* in Latin), which has been called the "Manifesto of the Renaissance." Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* was presented as public discourse in 1486, and it was published in 1496, two years after Pico's death. Pico's *Oration on the Dignity of Man* underpins the way in which our Order interprets the "Royal Secret."

In his oration, Pico studies the humankind, and he contends that pure reason is the highest level that humanity can reach. Alone among creatures, the human being has a part of every other creature. This freedom enables every human being to raise or lower himself/herself. The higher levels of being are better than the lower levels of being. Freedom sets humanity apart from the other creatures, and even the higher beings imagined in various religious contexts should be envious of humans for their freedom. Pico maintains that humans can improve themselves through the moral sciences. By following higher ideals, humans can rise. These ideals include charity, intelligence, and justice. Acting with charity or justice requires intelligence.

When humans act well, they rise. When humans act poorly, they fall. A human being can thus become like a plant or animal. A plant is a low

form, which only lies in place and consumes. An animal lacks reason. When a human being stays still or responds without reason, he/she becomes like a lower creature.

Each person has inner conflicts within himself/herself, dragging him/her down. Such conflicts produce the passions. Additionally, each person often reasons incorrectly. By controlling one's passions, both positive and negative, and improving one's reasoning, a human being can prepare oneself for the most important spiritual accomplishments.

Pico devoted himself to his philosophical studies, instead of concerning himself over money or the opinions of others. He claims that philosophy should be pursued only for the sake of truth, not for money. Additionally, Pico studied mathematics. He considered numbers among the most important methods of thought, as did Plato and other philosophers. In this, they do not refer to ordinary calculations as merchants would perform, but rather to more arcane numerical arts and to the structure of reality.

Finally, according to Pico, "magic," which refers to a deep understanding of nature and the causing of intentional change, can be enlightened or dark. Enlightened magic is like religion, art, or science. Scholars have gone to great lengths to study magic. Magic can unite the higher and the lower. However, among some people, magic has a poor reputation. Dark magic, which degenerates into mania, illusion, and delirium, can have ruinous consequences.

The Supreme Council: The 33rd Degree

The active members of the 33rd degree constitute the Supreme Council. Based on the inner humanistic ethos of the 32nd degree, which I have just delineated, the members of the 33rd degree undertake the duties of encouraging charity and fraternal love throughout the Order and preserving the ethos and the statutes of the Rite. The members of the 33rd degree realize, and are explicitly taught, that their object is not to rebuild the material Temple of King Solomon, but a moral temple, wherein truth and love will dwell and people will live as an ecumenical brotherhood abiding by the laws of eternal equity and justice. Moreover, the members of the 33rd degree realize, and are explicitly taught, that they have not to avenge the murder of Hiram Abiff, who is a symbol of Masonic wisdom—which ignorance, lust for power, and falsehood have concealed from many people—but they must go on in search of the laws that regulate the moral world.

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Above (from left to right): The Charter (Lettera Patente) with which, on the 11th of January 2017, the Grand Master of the Ordine Massonico Tradizionale Italiano, Luigi Pruneti, authorized Nicolas Laos to found an independent Body of Lodges of Symbolic Masonry in Greece (working in the degrees 1^o–3^o), thus investing Nicolas Laos with the authorities and powers of a Grand Master of Symbolic Masonry. The Charter (Lettera Patente) with which, on the 11th of January 2017, the Grand Master of the Ordine Massonico Tradizionale Italiano, Luigi Pruneti, authorized Nicolas Laos to found an independent Body of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in Greece (working in the degrees 4^o–33^o), thus investing Nicolas Laos with the authorities and powers of a Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. Thirdly, Nicolas Laos's certificate of appointment as an active member of the 33rd and ne plus ultra degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite under the auspices of the Supremo Consiglio del 33.º ed Ultimo Grado Rito Scozzese Antico e Accettato Tradizionale d'Italia, which is affiliated with the Ordine Massonico Tradizionale Italiano (on the 27th of July 2020). The aforementioned Masonic Certificates underpin the formal Masonic

legitimacy of Nicolas Laos's Masonic action. Nicolas Laos, serving the Masonic philosophy and action plan of Professor Giuliano Di Bernardo, has created and runs the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry (A.O.M.P.R.S.M.) as an independent international Masonic association in line with Giuliano Di Bernardo's Illuminati and Dignity Order.



On the left: *The Masonic Certificate and Charter with which Tau Allen Bar Kohenim Greenfield, on the 8th of September 2012, bestowed upon Nicolas Laos the 95th degree of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis–Misraim and authorized Nicolas Laos to found and rule a research Lodge of this Masonic Rite (in addition to Tau Allen Bar Kohenim Greenfield's signature, this certificate bears the signatures of other senior members of the Mother Lodge of the "Sons and Daughters of Aaron," Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.). The Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis–Misraim is a Masonic system that combines the Ancient and*

*Accepted Scottish Rite with a degree system dealing with comparative religion, comparative mythology, as well as the occult. Tau Dr. Allen Bar Kohenim Greenfield, 33°-95°-97°, has played an important role in the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis–Misraim, and he has written a relevant ritual book entitled *The Compleat Rite of Memphis* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, second edition, 2014). The origins of "Egyptian Masonry" can be traced back to the Egyptian Rite of Masonry that was developed by the Italian occultist Count Alessandro di Cagliostro at the end of the eighteenth century, and, in 1872, John Yarker merged the Rite of Memphis and the Rite of Misraim, and he founded a Sovereign Grand Sanctuary of the Rite of Memphis and Misraim in his hometown of Manchester, while another initiatory line of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis–Misraim was founded by the Italian general, politician, and Freemason Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–82). The Rite of Misraim was originally structured and established in a formal way in Italy in 1804–05, and the Memphis Rite (also known as the Oriental Rite) was originally*

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organized in Paris (as a modification of the Misraim Rite), in 1838–39, by Jacques-Étienne Marconis de Nègre, who had previously been a member of the Rite of Misraim. The 97th degree of the Ancient and Primitive Rite of Memphis–Misraim was awarded to Nicolas Laos in the “Misir” Lodge, in Vršak, Serbia, on the 14th of June 2015.



On the left: Nicolas Laos’s certificate of appointment as an honorary 97th-degree member of the Sovereign Italian Sanctuary of the Egyptian Rite of Misraim, issued in Rome, Italy, on the 10th of October 2020 (signed and sealed by the Imperatore Gran Conservatore and the Gran Cancelliere of the aforementioned Obedience of the Egyptian Rite of Misraim).

The Ancients, including the authors of the Torah, taught with stories (didactic legends and allegories), which not only conveyed ideas but also, by their plot, animated ideas; and the “prophets” were persons who put their finger on the wounds of their polity and tried to heal them with their didactic and symbolic poetry. For example, Adam and Eve represent the primitive types of the human species; the serpent that tempted them represents time, which puts humanity to the test; the tree of knowledge of good and evil represents the concept of human rights and the way a person exercises one’s rights; and atonement through labor represents the concept of duty. Cain and Abel represent brutal force and intelligence, brutality and harmony. The giants (“Nephilim”) represent ancient types of conquerors and, above all, a brutal landed elite. The cataclysm represents revolution. The ark represents the preservation of a religious tradition within an ancient ethno-racial community. Nemrod and Babel represent attempts to create an empire that failed because of the dispersion of interests (symbolized by the confusion of languages), that is, because of

the absence of a universal ethics. Freemasonry has adopted this ancient teaching method, and, thus, it conveys various messages through didactic dramas, symbols, and allegories.

In the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, we teach the following:

- The Book of our Ritual and Constitution is the Word that commands the construction of the Temple whose Pillars are Reason, Realism, Truth, and our Right.
- The Temple of the Supreme Council of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic, which is one and unified international Masonic Obedience, works for Freedom, Tolerance, Fraternity, Transcendence, and the Initiatory Secret; the place is consecrated and hidden, which guarantees the inviolability of our mysteries.
- The Great Banner of the Supreme Council of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic is a sign of the unity and the solidarity of the Masons who make stone blocks for the Temple. Our Great Banner consists of two horizontal bands of equal width, with white on the top and black on the bottom. The white band is embroidered with a gold double-headed eagle surmounted by a crown and holding a sword in its claws. The black band is embroidered with a rayed gold equilateral triangle that is turned upward and has the number thirty-three in red at its center, while two daggers, having a half black and half white hilt, are directed, one from the right and the other from the left, towards the right side and the left side of the aforementioned triangle, respectively. These daggers, with their hilts half black, half white, as well as the two bands of our Great Banner symbolize two apparently antagonistic forces and the contest between light and darkness, good and evil, truth and error, a struggle which began with Time, and which is typified in Masonry by the efforts and anxieties of the candidate to attain the Light.
- The great cross-hilted double-edged Sword of the Supreme Council of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite for the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic represents the thought and the analytical skills of the Masons who make stone blocks for the Temple.

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A maxim given in Count Alessandro di Cagliostro's Egyptian Masonic Rite was the following: "Qui agnoscit martem, cognoscit artem," meaning "whoever recognizes Mars, knows art." Mars was an ancient Greco-Roman god of war. In alchemy, Mars also symbolizes separation, which refers to the isolation of the components of dissolution by filtration and, subsequently, to the discarding of any ungenue or unworthy material. The aforementioned maxim implies the struggle that an initiate must make in one's quest to understand the reality of oneself and the reality of the world. As we try to transmute our primal self into a higher and better self, and as we try to improve our existential conditions, we must face all our negative qualities and all negative historical forces, and win. This is the reason why we need the destructive force of "Mars." Additionally, the art of transforming a "Rough Ashlar" into a "Perfect Ashlar" requires struggle, discipline, and perseverance.

*The Socio-Political Teachings of Freemasonry in the Context
of the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite
of Symbolic Masonry and According to the Masonic
Philosophy of Giuliano Di Bernardo*

I have just delineated the philosophical significance of the three degrees of Symbolic Masonry and the thirty-three degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite as we teach them in the context of the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry, which I have created and run in order to operate as a Masonic Order that follows in an exclusive and absolute way Giuliano Di Bernardo's theory of regulativist Freemasonry. In other words, I have created this Order in order to unite only regulativist Freemasons. Therefore, I have assigned the members of the 33rd degree the task of teaching their Brothers and Sisters in the Order the reasons why Freemasonry is neither a type of religion, nor a super-religion, nor a type of mysticism. As Giuliano Di Bernardo has pointed out, both religion and mysticism are based on ontological claims. According to religious anthropologies, the transcendent is a providential deity who intervenes in history, as, for example, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach. According to mystical anthropologies, the transcendent is an Absolute Being without qualifications. Although religion and mysticism differ in the way in which they understand the ontology of transcendence, both have an ontological vision of transcendence, whereas regulativist Freemasonry is limited to a purely universal moral theory of transcendence, that is, a moral program for the perfection of humanity

without the ontological claims of either religion or mysticism. Hence, I have assigned my senior associates in the Order to explain to our members the way in which philosophical anthropology differs from religion and mysticism.

Finally, as I have already mentioned, our Masonic Order teaches and promotes a new variety of enlightened, scientific totalitarianism in line with Plato's political thought and with Giuliano Di Bernardo's critique of liberal democracy.

Feudalism, the dominant system in medieval Europe, was a system characterized by a rigid social stratification, according to which everyone had a rigidly instituted position within an "organic whole." The major constituent components were the class of the feudal lords, the class of the serfs, and the Church, whose major social role was to maintain a balance between the feudal lords and the serfs through religion. By the late Middle Ages, the bourgeois class (a social class of professionals who were neither feudal lords nor serfs) deprecated the political, economic, and spiritual despotism of the feudal system, revolted against it, and proclaimed that the social position of an individual should not be determined by feudal institutions and instead should be freely determined by individual action and by the interaction between individuals in the context of a free and fair society. The origins of modern liberalism can be seen most clearly in the thinking and politics linked to the English Revolution of 1688—specifically, in British empiricism and constitutionalism. The principles of constitutionalism, religious toleration, and commercial activity which were promoted by the English Revolution of 1688 became a standard for European and American liberals in the eighteenth century. The first group to use the "liberal" label in a political context was the Spanish political party of the "Liberales," which persistently fought for the implementation of the 1812 Constitution, and, in 1820, it overthrew the Spanish monarchy as part of the "Trienio Liberal." Arguably, the most important bourgeois revolution in the modern era is the French Revolution of 1789, whose major motto was "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity." However, the elite of the bourgeois class conceived capitalism as the embodiment of human freedom in the domain of economics. For this reason, after the displacement of feudalism by capitalism, the liberty and the rights of the human individual were gradually displaced by and subordinated to the liberty and the rights of the capital itself and the capitalist elite. Moreover, the rationalism of traditional liberalism and the original bourgeois class was gradually substituted and dominated by the selfish expedencies and passions of the capitalists, transforming the rationalist underpinnings and

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principles of classical political economy into contradictory and empirically insignificant assertions.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the European peoples realized that capitalism had displaced feudalism, thus replacing serfdom with free labor, but, instead of ushering in liberty, equality, and fraternity among the people, capitalism tends to replace the authoritarian and exploitative relationship between the feudal lords and the serfs with a new authoritarian and exploitative relationship, that between the capitalist class and the proletariat (working-class). Therefore, socialism emerged as a criticism of and a revolt against capitalism, just as the bourgeois ideology had previously emerged as a criticism of and a revolt against feudalism. In fact, the term “socialism” first appeared in 1832 in *Le Globe*, a liberal French newspaper of the French philosopher and political economist Pierre Leroux. By the 1840s, socialism had already become the object of rigorous social-scientific analysis by the German economist and sociologist Lorenz von Stein. Moreover, the English socialist intellectual and activist Thomas Hodgskin (1787–1869) articulated a thorough critical analysis of capitalism and of the labor class under capitalism, and his writings exerted a significant influence on subsequent generations of socialists, including Karl Marx. In particular, from the perspective of Thomas Hodgskin, socialism signifies an attempt to create a rational and fair market, in the context of which production and exchange are based on the labor theory of value (freed from exploitative institutions) as part of natural right, which endows moral consciousness, the freedom of the individual, social justice, and social autonomy with ontological underpinnings (in accordance with Thomas Hodgskin’s deism). In addition, the Russian-Soviet philosopher and scientist Alexander Bogdanov, one of the acknowledged founders of the science of planning and organizational theory, has argued that socialism is meaningless without a “universal organizational science” capable of combining and coordinating all the individual disciplines.

The Industrial Revolution gave an extraordinary impetus to capitalism, and capitalism played a crucial role in the development of science and technology, since scientific research and technology require great capital investments. However, the development of science and technology underpins the emergence of more complicated social relations and globalization. Thus, new political problems emerge. The individualist anthropology of liberalism and capitalism requires bourgeois democracy as an appropriate form of government. As Giuliano Di Bernardo has pointed out, modern, bourgeois democracy “is different, at least in some

respects, from [the democracy] of ancient Greece. Think of universal suffrage that did not exist in Greece. It is my opinion that universal suffrage will destroy democracy” (Giuliano Di Bernardo, *Freemasonry: Splendor and Decadence*, p. 175).

In addition, it is worth mentioning that ancient Sparta’s Doric model of statesmanship, known as “damocracy” (Doric form of “democracy”), which was formed by the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus (eighth century B.C.E.), consisted of the following two principles: (i) *the political equality of the citizens, who were actually an enlightened social minority*: the members of Sparta’s popular deliberative assembly, known as the “Apella” (which secured equal right of speech and equality of all the citizens before the law); (ii) *the citizen’s personal value*: measured according to the virtue and the spirituality that one manifested through the manner in which one was relating to and utilizing the established system of political equality. Thus, from the perspective of the Doric spirituality and politology, democracy and political equality refer to the rules that regulate the relations *between the members of a spiritual aristocracy* founded on the principle of the “sacred” and expressing the One, the Illuminated “Archagētes” (supreme leader), and have nothing to do with culturally plebeian forms of democracy. When the spirit of Sparta’s democracy—which dictates that the citizens should be judged and evaluated according to their true value (that is, inner nobility)—was lost, the citizens’ judgments and values were darkened and blurred, and the citizens started being judged and evaluated according to false values (such as material wealth, self-promotion, public relations, etc.), which prevailed in the modern era (especially in the context of bourgeois democracy or liberal oligarchy).

The triple

{*Liberalism, Capitalism, Democracy*}

promised prosperity, stability, and mutual understanding to humanity as long as humanity believed in the accumulation of capital, in economic growth achieved independently of the state, and in the political procedures of bourgeois democracy, whose real meaning I already described and explained in Section IV, where I presented the basic principles of politology. However, during the last decade of the twentieth century and during the first three decades of the twenty-first century, the increased international prevalence of the aforementioned triple (liberalism, capitalism, democracy), with the Euro-Atlantic geopolitical pole as the protagonist, led to an intensification of economic crises (culminating in the global financial crisis that erupted in 2008), to a worsening of international poverty, to an intensification of geostrategic rivalries and international

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conflicts, to the rapid strengthening of the pro-war policy of the American neoconservatives, to a reduction in intercultural understanding, as well as to the rise of various forms of populism and massive disinformation operations (both on the part of advocates of liberalism and radicalised advocates of anti-liberal views).

In summary, liberalism politically underpinned the imposition of capitalism; capitalism, with all its structural flaws, financially underpinned the great scientific and technological progress that took place in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries; advances in technologies, such as telephones, airplanes, mobile phones, and the internet, have made the growth of transport and communication networks possible, so that people and countries can exchange information, goods, and services more quickly and more easily, thus giving rise to globalization. Furthermore, the rapid globalization of the international economy (especially in the areas of production and finance) and the changing nature of the inter-state system in a post-hegemonic era (as other geopolitical and geoeconomic blocs, such as the BRICS, contest the authority and power of the Euro-Atlantic, particularly, the Anglo-American, bloc in the international system) contribute to the emergence of the “global” (as opposed to the “international”) political economy. In short, the “global political economy” is “an economic space transcending all country borders, which co-exists still with an international economy based on transactions across country borders and which is regulated by inter-state agreements and practices” (Robert Cox, “Structural Issues of Global Governance: Implications for Europe,” in S. Gill, ed., *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 260). Globalization naturally underpins the growth of issues of global governance, such as the global ramifications of a nuclear war, the management of the global economy, environmental issues and ecological concerns, global health issues (related to an increased movement of goods, services, ideas, and people), global and regional integration and disintegration, sovereignty and security, as well as intercultural relations. As a result of the growth of issues of global governance, liberal democracy becomes increasingly historically irrelevant and inefficient, since it merely reflects and often exacerbates the contradictions of the world system.

As a matter of fact, in the 1990s, the prominent Polish-American diplomat and political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski conceded that global political problems are also “philosophical,” and that the U.S.A. promotes a pattern of global politics that not only erodes the sovereign integrity of the nation-state but also “reduces the capacity of a superstate to exercise decisive

global power” (Z. Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the 21st Century*, p. 98). Additionally, Brzezinski pointedly argues that “ultimately it is ideas that mobilize political action and thus shape the world,” and that a global power that is not guided by a globally relevant set of values cannot for long exercise that predominance (*ibid.*, pp. x, xiii). But how can this problem be addressed in practice, given that, especially since the late twentieth century, the global relevance of the West’s political message has been undermined by the very crisis of liberal democracy in the advanced world? During the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, it became amply clear that the developed countries of the West, under U.S. leadership, tend to explicitly identify the content of liberal democracy with a way of life that has the following fundamental characteristics: (i) it promotes individual self-gratification (creating a condition in which little self-control is exercised over the dynamics of the desire to consume, show off, and project individuality); (ii) it glorifies arbitrary individual self-determination through various forms of biological and/or spiritual self-alteration (creating a condition in which little self-control is exercised over the dynamics of the desire to tinker with the self and to follow various fictional communities and grievance groups); and (iii) it serves the interests of a Western capitalist elite that uses free market theory and a rhetoric of individual rights as a pretext for imposing its own system of cartelization and exploitation.

Giuliano Di Bernardo has wisely responded as follows:

The proponents of liberal ideology are disoriented and do not understand why a vision that they believe to be the absolute best is being challenged and rejected. If they do not understand it is because their vision is superficial. This leads them to foresee apocalyptic situations for humanity. Their money-god is the best of all. Those who choose other gods are doomed to perdition and suffering. This reaction, more emotional than rational, will prevent liberalism from finding solutions that could mitigate its current state of crisis (Giuliano Di Bernardo, *Freemasonry: Splendor and Decadence*, p. 177).

The attempts of various conservative elites to construct a stable *Imperium*, implement prestige politics, and conduct psychological operations through religious neo-mythologies and narratives of mystical geopolitics must also be rejected. Some typical examples of such attempts are the following:

i. *The British-Israel neo-mythology*: In the nineteenth century, the British monarchy and the British government—already in control of the United

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Grand Lodge of England since the latter's inception in 1813—fabricated an imperialist British-Israel neo-mythology and promoted it through English Freemasonic Lodges and networks, through Pentecostalism (e.g., the “Bible-Pattern Church Fellowship”), and through nationalist and fanciful British “pyramidologists” (such as Herbert Aldersmith). According to the aforementioned British-Israel neo-mythology, ancient Israelites left Palestine and migrated to the British Isles, thus making Great Britain the “chosen people” of God, whereas, according to the same British-Israel neo-mythology, Germany, which was then the major opponent of Great Britain's free-trade policy, was descended from ancient Assyrians, and Russia, which was then Great Britain's major geopolitical competitor, was identified with the Gog described in the book of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39. Of course, all these arguments are merely propagandistic tales that are part of broader psychological operations conducted by the British establishment, and they have spawned various similar tales and distortions of history. The British historian Tudor Parfitt (who was the founding director of the Centre for Jewish Studies at London's prestigious School of Oriental and African Studies and Fellow of the Oxford Centre of Hebrew and Jewish Studies) has concluded that British Israelism is “of a feeble composition,” and that, indeed, even as a tale, British Israelism is of a very mean quality.

ii. *The Russian currents of Christian fascism*: The paradigmatic representative of Russian Christian fascism is Ivan Alexandrovich Ilyin (1883–1954), a Russian anti-Bolshevik, monarchist, jurist, and religious intellectual, who fabricated a neo-mythology according to which the factual world is not real and has no intrinsic value, in the sense that, according to Ilyin, God created the world, but the world proved to be an abortive process and a horrifying thing because of its contradictions. Hence, according to Ilyin, factuality is contradictory and worthless, and, through his radical subjectivism and romantic idealism, he concluded that the only true thing is Russian nationalism and chauvinism. In the context of his neo-mythology, not only did he modify traditional Orthodox theology to fit his Russian neo-mythology, he also presented Russia as a uniquely pure and innocent nation with a divine mission to save the world. Ilyin's thought has influenced several intellectuals of Eurasianism, such as Lev Gumilev (1912–92). Ilyin has made some insightful critical comments on liberal democracy, but he always remains trapped in fiction, romanticism, and mysticism, and he seems to ignore the historical fact that disrupting reason undermines people's ability to creatively assume their historical responsibilities.

Regarding romantic idealism, in general, I should mention that romanticism gives primacy to life values (which are characterized by sensationalism and particularity) over thought values (which are characterized by intellectual abstraction and universalism). Thus, ultimately, romantic idealists fail to understand the difference between the “real,” the “actual,” and the “empirical.” As Roy Bhaskar has pointed out, the “real” refers to what entities and mechanisms make up the world, the “actual” refers to events, and the “empirical” refers to that which we experience. In contrast to empiricism (which makes the mistake of looking at the “empirical” as a way of explaining the “real” and the “actual”) and in contrast to pure rationalism (which makes the mistake of trying to explain the world merely in terms of theoretically necessary conceptual truths), realist science is an attempt to describe and explain structures and processes of the world that exist independently of the subject’s conscious states.

iii. *The American Christian–Evangelical fundamentalists*: In the United States, not only have the Evangelical fundamentalists distorted the original European Protestantism, especially Luther’s theological work, but they have also promoted the mingling of politics, religion, and ethics in a way that reflects ancient Gnostics’ tragic perception of the world and demonology in order to offer pseudo-religious justifications for the U.S. foreign and domestic policy: taking on a Manichaean language, they divide political reality between “absolute good,” which they identify with the U.S. national interest, and “absolute evil,” which they identify with their political opponents. The U.S. Evangelical fundamentalism, which has been assimilated into the U.S. Evangelical Right, has its origins in the years 1910–15. In that period, a South Californian millionaire, Lyman Stewart (co-founder of Union Oil and of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles), published a twelve-volume work entitled *The Fundamentals*, in which he articulated a rhetoric that opposes modernity in a way that reflects Manichaeism. Moreover, Lyman Stewart’s book *The Fundamentals* and his Bible Institute of Los Angeles inspire and guide various American socio-religious groups to: (i) believe that the United States is a nation particularly blessed by God, (ii) interpret the Bible in a literal way, (iii) demonize whoever expresses a different view or cultural attitude, and (iv) support a form of “apocalyptic” geopolitics (usually underpinned by literalism, a peculiar Judeo-Christian rhetoric, and the distortion of Biblical texts in a way that “sanctifies” American and Euro-Atlanticist imperialism and the U.S. military-industrial complex).

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Furthermore, we must bear in mind that, in the regimes that I have called “counter-philosophical,” whether based on liberalism, conservatism, or fascism, various mafias develop, and, indeed, various mafias collude with the official political system. As the French Professor of Legal History and literary critic Jacques de Saint Victor argues in his book *Un Pouvoir Invisible*, the mafia (specifically, the European and American transnational system of organized crime) was born in the “décombres” (ruins) of the feudal regime, and it was developed further as a consequence of the advent of bourgeois democracy and capitalism from the nineteenth century onward. In fact, Jacques de Saint Victor maintains, the essence of the modern mafia is the result of the merger between a rotten nobility and a criminal bourgeoisie.

In line with Giuliano Di Bernardo’s thought, I adhere to the idea of a totalitarian *Imperium* based on a universal ethics and practical philosophy, not religion or mysticism. Although I reject the aforementioned British, Russian, and American versions of political theology and (geo)political mysticism, I appreciate certain aspects of the criticisms that some ideologists of this kind have made of liberal democracy. However, as I mentioned earlier, the starting point and the teleology of my own political thought and philosophy are radically different, being based neither on religion nor mysticism.

In the era of advanced modernity, major scientific and technological advances, globalization and, in general, increased social complexity, liberal democracy exacerbates structural political, economic, and social problems. Therefore, confronted with these theoretical and practical challenges, humanity needs an alternative world order. Our counter-proposal, according to the arguments that Giuliano Di Bernardo has put forward in his book *Freemasonry: Splendor and Decadence*, is a system of universal ethics, and the political model that we propose consists of an updated variety of Plato’s *Republic*, where, the “One” with a “Council of Sages” require all of their subjects to abide by the rules of a system of universal ethics. This is the sense in which we advocate totalitarianism, rather than liberal democracy; given that, in liberal democracy, the quantitative dominates the qualitative, and a liberal oligarchy prevails through various political “rituals” (such as general elections and bureaucratic procedures) and marketing techniques. In addition, we always keep in mind Plato’s position that the most important criterion by which we should judge a political leader is whether (and the extent to which) his/her rule has improved the people intellectually, morally, and materially.

The term “individual” can be conceptualized in the following two ways: (i) as an empirical, rational, thinking, and willing individual which is an undifferentiated sample of the human species; (ii) as a moral, autonomous, and hence (essentially) non-social being. When we affirm the unity of the human species at the level of morality, we are “citizens of the world,” and we maintain a level of universality that is similar to that of the exact sciences. From that perspective, in essence, there are only individuals and the human species, which is often called the “society of the human species,” and there are no other significant particular socio-historical entities (particular collective identities become insignificant or merely “private affairs”). However, when humans start appreciating their differences, a different world emerges: in that case, confirming Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s arguments, people maintain that humans become humans only through their participation in a particular integral society, in a *specific* society, and, from that perspective, the “society of the human species” becomes an ideational abstraction, as Rousseau had once argued in the context of his communication with Diderot.

Apart from the categories of “individualism” and “collectivism,” there is a third category: that of “personhood,” which means an individual-in-communion. In the event that personhood is constituted by an individual’s relationship with a universal reason and, by extension, with a universal ethics, such an individual becomes socialized by the very fact that such an individual’s consciousness has been expanded in order to carry a universal reason and a consequent normative system, a reason and a normative system that transcend any particular individual and refer to humanity. Therefore, both modern cosmopolitan individualists (who recognize and acknowledge only the significance of the individual’s identity) and Rousseau (who emphasizes the significance of particular collective identities) often ignore that a person whose personhood is constituted by one’s relationship with a universal reason (put slightly differently, a person who is specifically an existential-otherness-in-communion-with-a-universal-reason) can carry the entire human species within one’s soul, and, hence, being governed by a universal ethics, such a person can think and act globally for the benefit of the society of the human species without losing or diminishing one’s particularity. Hence, “personhood” signifies a synthesis between individualism and collectivism, and it can underpin our Masonic ethical value of fraternity.

The Problem of Postmodernism

Postmodernism seeks the overthrow of virtually all preceding positions of epistemology, and it is strongly influenced by the philosophy of Friedrich

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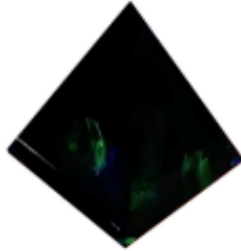
Nietzsche (1844–1900). Michel Foucault, one of the most influential postmodern scholars, argues that “nothing in man—not even his body—is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men” (Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, p. 153). Therefore, according to Foucault, there is no escape from the functioning of power and contingency, and struggle is always necessary to avoid domination.

Is the will to truth a truth, or is it simply another name for the will to power? “What in us really wants ‘truth’?” Nietzsche’s answer is the will to power. This is Foucault’s epistemological thesis, too. Moreover, following this Nietzschean epistemological argument, Jacques Derrida, one of most influential postmodernists, developed the theory of deconstruction, according to which texts collapse under their own weight once it is demonstrated that their “truth content” is merely the “mobile army of metaphors” identified by Nietzsche (Christopher Norris, *Derrida*).

According to Nietzsche’s conception of the will to power, a false judgment can be seen as an expression of creativity, and, hence, it can be interpreted as a consequence of a dynamic attitude to life. But if philosophy recognizes untruth as a condition of life, and, therefore, it moves beyond every distinction between good and evil, identifying will as such with truth, then it is necessarily indifferent as to whether an untrue judgment underpins injustice and violence. In other words, Nietzsche appreciates and respects creativity without any further qualifications and without any conditions. But, in this way, contrary to the classical Greek philosophers’ approach to the notion of creativity, Nietzsche’s approach to creativity is unable to provide a solid foundation for the development of life.

Nietzsche argues that philosophers are dishonest because they pretend that their thoughts represent objective reality, whereas, for Nietzsche, what they actually do is to reduce their prejudices, their ideas, to “the truth.” In reality, Nietzsche contends, philosophers defend judgments that are equivalent to advocates’ tricks or their own hearts’ desires, but they present them in abstract forms and by means of arguments which they have articulated after (not before) the original conception of their ideas. It is useful to mention that this Nietzschean argument underpins Richard Rorty’s postmodern approach to epistemology, according to which philosophers should give up on the idea that our knowledge “mirrors” nature and instead adopt a pragmatic theory of truth, which is compatible with Rorty’s self-description as a “postmodern bourgeois liberal” (Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, vol. I, pp. 197–202). However, Nietzsche makes a mistake: the validity of truth does

not depend on its genealogy but on its logic, its coherence, and the logic of truth depends on the fact that it can harmoniously unite a multitude of data in a specific perspective. Therefore, philosophers, being epistemologically sensitive, are not as dishonest as Nietzsche contends.



*Struggling to Restore the Pyramid to Its Proper Position:
Crows versus Owls, and the Black Sun of Enlightened
Transformation versus the Yellow Sun of the Corrupt
Establishment*

Let us recall the tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, which was composed by Aeschylus in the fifth century B.C.E. Aeschylus was not only one of the most prominent ancient Greek authors of Greek tragedy but also an initiate of the Eleusinian Mysteries and a brave fighter, since he fought to defend Athens against the invading Persian army at the Battle of Marathon (490 B.C.E.). Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (111a8–10), writes that Aeschylus was once accused of improperly revealing secrets of the Eleusinian Mysteries, but he was ultimately acquitted.

At the outset of the play *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus is seen accompanied by two faithful proxies of Zeus (the “father” of the gods). The names of these two proxies of Zeus are Kratos (literally meaning State) and Bia (literally meaning Force), and they personify brute power and callous violence, respectively. Kratos states that the punishment meted out to Prometheus is due to the fact that he stole fire from the gods and revealed the secret of how it is produced to humanity. Moreover, Kratos added that the punitive measure taken will compel Prometheus to understand and submit to the sovereignty of Zeus.

We must understand that Prometheus did not give fire to humans simply in order to enable them to cook their bread and vegetables. Fire is a precondition of technology, and technology is the means by which Prometheus decided to save humanity. Aeschylus reveals that fire is a key underpinning of civilization. But fire is not enough: in order for a

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technologically advanced civilization to exist, a psychological type of fire is also necessary: hope, the belief that life is not merely a path to death. In particular, in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound* (250–260), Prometheus says that he caused humans to cease keeping their eyes fixed on their future deaths, put hope in their hearts, and gave them fire, enabling them to master many arts. Thus, Prometheus defines the preconditions of a technologically advanced civilization: energy, and a sense of perspective and progress. Without historical time—or without the production of history by humanity and without the creative integration of humanity into history—no civilization can be developed. And without civilization, specifically, without technology and institutions, the humankind will be eliminated, will fall into Hades. The essential core of civilization is nothing but the transformation of nature into the dominion of humanity's reason and will.

The banner of the Grand Lodge of the Autonomous Order of the Modern and Perfecting Rite of Symbolic Masonry depicts the Skull and Crow symbol, consisting of a black crow standing atop a white human skull, together with the Black Sun symbol. The human skull symbolizes the following: (i) sympathy for the sufferings of the people, (ii) death, (iii) lethal force, and (iv) victory over the enemy. The black crow symbolizes cleverness and intelligence, intellectual and physical cleansing, adaptability, teamwork, reciprocity, and transformation. In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, the crow was Apollo's sacred animal (his messenger and spy). Apollo was a god symbolizing rational awareness, discretion, truth, music, purification, and healing. The crow's black color symbolizes Apollo's anger, and, in our Order, it reminds the neophyte that he/she faces terrible retribution, should he/she ever betray the Order's initiatory secrets. Moreover, in ancient Hindu mythology (according to the *Panchatantra*), there is an ongoing fight between the Crows, which are presented as good, and the Owls, which are presented as evil, because a Crow prevented the other birds from irregularly electing an Owl as their king, since the divine eagle Garuda, who was the bird of the god Vishnu, was already their king, and to take another was a sin that would result in severe punishment by the gods. Due to its persuasive arguments, the Crow achieved the cancellation of the Owl's irregular coronation. In Hinduism, Garuda's link to Vishnu, the Hindu god who preserves the moral law and fights injustice, has made him an iconic symbol of royal duty and power. Finally, in Alchemy, the Black Crow and Skull symbol signifies the work of enlightened transformation, and the presence of the Black Sun symbol

signifies the importance of this work and the promise of the completion of this work.

May the light of truth illuminate the world!

May the light of freedom, tolerance, fraternity, and transcendence illuminate the world!

May our initiatory secret prevail, and may we ever be united in every social and moral virtue, cemented in our vision of a universal ethics!

So mote it be.

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