

Psychological Effects of Henôsis

Bruce J. MacLennan

This article was originally published in

Platonism and its Legacy

*Selected Papers from the Fifteenth Annual Conference
of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies*

Edited John F. Finamore and Tomáš Nejeschleba

ISBN 978 1 898910 886

Published in 2019 by

The Prometheus Trust, Lydney

This article is published under the terms of **Creative Commons
Licence BY 4.0**

Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

No additional restrictions — You may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

The Prometheus Trust is a registered UK charity, no. 299648

www.prometheustrust.co.uk

Psychological Effects of Henôsis

Bruce J. MacLennan

I. Introduction

Jung's term "individuation" refers to the process of becoming psychologically *individuus*, that is, undivided or indivisible; it could almost serve as a translation of *henôsis*. Moreover, practices in analytical psychology, such as active imagination, have direct analogies in theurgy and are directed toward similar ends. In this chapter I explore these parallels in order to understand better the means and ends of ancient theurgical practice. In particular, I discuss the experience and effect of *henôsis* from the perspective of analytical psychology. In so doing, I am building on the work of Jolande Jacobi (1890–1973), one of Jung's colleagues, who explains the individuation process especially clearly.

The ultimate goal of individuation is psychological integration, that is, to become a psychologically complete and whole person.¹ In particular, this implies an expansion of consciousness to include unconscious contents so far as possible.² Porphyry explained what one should do

Ad Marc. 10

if you would practice to ascend into yourself, collecting together all the powers which the body has scattered and broken up into a multitude of parts unlike their former unity to which concentration lent strength. You should collect and combine into one the thoughts implanted within you, endeavoring to isolate those that are confused, and to drag to light those that are enveloped in darkness. (tr. Zimmern)

This integrative process brings one into contact with the unconscious archetypal forces that regulate all human lives, that is, to encounter the gods and goddesses. Plotinus recognizes these unconscious forces as well:

¹ Jacobi (1967) 13.

² Jacobi (1967) 14.

Enn. V 1, 12, 1–8, 11–15

Why then, when we have such great possessions, do we not consciously grasp them, but are most inactive in these ways, and some of us are never active at all? They are always occupied in their own activities, Intellect, and that which is before Intellect, always in itself, and soul, which is in this sense “ever-moving.” For not everything which is in the soul is immediately perceptible, but it reaches us when it enters into perception ... And further, each soul-part, since it is always living, always exercises its own activity by itself; but the discovery of it comes when sharing with the perceptive power and conscious awareness takes place. If then there is to be conscious apprehension of the powers which are present in this way, we must turn our power of apprehension inwards, and make it attend to what is there. (tr. Armstrong)

Finally, individuation draws one toward contact with the ultimate principle of psychic unity, which Jung calls “the God image within” or the Self (often with a capital “S”).³ Therefore he also terms individuation *Self-realization*.⁴ Moreover, Jung writes,

Self-reflection—or what comes to the same thing—the urge to individuation gathers together what is scattered and multifarious, and exalts it to the original form of the One, the Primordial Man. In this way our existence as separate beings, our former ego nature, is abolished, the circle of consciousness is widened, and because the paradoxes have been made conscious the sources of conflict are dried up. This approximation to the self is a kind of repristination or apocatastasis, in so far as the self has an “incorruptible” or “eternal” character on account of its being pre-existent to consciousness.⁵

By this process a person comes to understand their individual role in the world and society, and can discharge it with knowledge and authority or, we might say, with wisdom and will.⁶ Therefore, an individuated person is not a selfish egoist, but rather one who knows

³ Jacobi (1973) 152. Also, the *superordinate personality* (Jung 1968 CW 9i) ¶¶310, 315.

⁴ Jacobi (1973) 106, 127.

⁵ Jung (1969a CW 11) ¶401.

⁶ Jacobi (1973) 106.

their purpose in life and consciously fulfills it. By becoming a single integrated being, one becomes an individual in the truest sense of that word. Individuation is a developmental possibility open to all people, but the modern world impedes it in many ways.⁷

II. The Cycle of Life

Four Births

The human life cycle provides a context for understanding the means and ends of individuation. There are two phases, characterized most obviously by waxing and waning physical vitality, symbolized by the sun rising before noon and descending after it.⁸ This is a process of procession and return (that is, *proôdos* and *epistrophê*) in which a person differentiates themselves from an initial undifferentiated state, but then returns to it at death. Therefore, the first half of life is characterized by increasing physical vitality but decreasing contact with the One, whereas the second half is characterized by decreasing physical vitality, but—hopefully—increasing spiritual vitality arising from a return to the One. Psychologically, the return to the One is an ascent to integrated wholeness.

Jacobi says we have four births.⁹ The first is when we emerge from the womb, separate from our mothers, and become an independent living being. The second is puberty, when we are reborn as sexual beings, emancipate ourselves from parental authority, and become responsible adults (hopefully!). The third birth, which is not so apparent, occurs at midlife, when we have the potential to emerge as an independent spiritual being. This is the rebirth that psychospiritual practices such as theurgy may facilitate. The fourth birth is death, when we separate from the physical world and return to the undifferentiated state of unity from which we came.

Indeed, Jacobi notes that we may have many rebirths along the way to individuation. Like the sun, which has to set in order to rise again, time and again we must willingly sacrifice our security and power in order to find our way to a new life with its own sources of security and power.¹⁰

⁷ Jacobi (1967) 13.

⁸ Jacobi (1973) 149.

⁹ Jacobi (1967) 133.

¹⁰ Jacobi (1967) 133.

Natural and Artificial Processes

Jacobi further explains that individuation is a natural developmental process which can progress unaided to its natural end.¹¹ Certainly, we all know, from both history and personal acquaintance, of people who have grown into wisdom and spiritual authority. However, the process is not inevitable, and in our culture, which privileges material success and hedonism, the process may be derailed in midlife. From this perspective, the second half of life is seen as a sad decline, not as the culmination of a maturational process.

Each of these fundamental transitions—these four births—may be facilitated by initiatory practices, for an initiation effects the completion of one life and the beginning of another.¹² Theurgy was one way of accomplishing the midlife transition in the ancient world; modern analytical psychology has techniques such as active imagination for the same purpose today.¹³

Although self-initiation is certainly possible, it is not without its dangers, which is why the process is best managed by a qualified initiator, spiritual director, analyst, guru, etc. This is the case especially in the West, where these practices have atrophied in modern times, and relevant experience is sparse. Jacobi explains that a person's psychological balance may be upset by an invasion of unconscious contents, that is, by contact with gods and *daimones* and even possession by them.¹⁴ Moreover, excessive self-reliance can lead to spiritual hubris, isolation, and self-obsession. An experienced initiator can guide the initiand around these pitfalls.

III. Procession and Return

Let us consider in more detail psychological development during these phases of procession and return, for what is normal in one may be abnormal in the other.

Procession: The First Half of Life

The first phase is procession into material reality, and along with the development and growth of the physical body, there a growth and

¹¹ Jacobi (1967) 15.

¹² Jacobi (1973) 142.

¹³ Jacobi (1967) 15.

¹⁴ Jacobi (1973) 107–108.

consolidation of the conscious ego, which mediates the psyche's relation to the material world.¹⁵ Thus there is a natural tendency to ignore spiritual matters. In archetypal psychology, the ego is understood as a complex, that is, in Neoplatonic terms, as a *daimôn*. Thus a primary result of procession is the growth and maturation of the ego *daimôn*.

Concomitantly the superior function and dominant attitude are strengthened. As is well known, Jung distinguished four functions of consciousness: thought, feeling, sensation, and intuition, with two attitudes, introversion and extraversion.¹⁶ Normally one attitude and one or at most two functions dominate one's conscious relation to the world. Opposed to the superior function is the inferior function (e.g., feeling is the opposite of thought), which is unconscious and undeveloped.

The procession phase also leads to the development of the *persona* as the outward face of the ego, which accommodates it to exterior reality, in particular, to the social environment. It is the *daimôn* that guides and even possesses us in ordinary social interactions. It accomplishes this function well if it strikes a balance between the ego and the outside world but is less effective if it is dominated by either of these poles.

The development of the ego, with its superior function and dominant attitude, leads to a compensatory submersion of the inferior function and opposite attitude into the unconscious. This leads to the emergence of a complex, the *Shadow*, which accumulates all the traits, motivations, attitudes, and behaviors that have been rejected by the conscious ego. Since it functions as an autonomous personality with all the characteristics that the ego considers bad, it is literally a personal *kakodaimôn*. The personal Shadow develops around a collective Shadow that incorporates all the evils recognized by the social environment (and perhaps a few that are innate to *Homo sapiens*). The Shadow grows in strength throughout the first half of life.¹⁷

Another archetypal structure that develops in the first half of life, especially after the rebirth that is puberty, is the *Soul-image*. In heterosexual people it is contrasexual, that is, the opposite sex to the ego. For heterosexual men it is called the *Anima*, and for heterosexual

¹⁵ Jacobi (1973) 108.

¹⁶ Jung (1971 *CW* 6) ch. XI defines all these terms.

¹⁷ Jacobi (1973) 113.

women, the Animus. For homosexual people the Soul-image is ipsisexual and we may term it the Divine Double.¹⁸ The Soul-image is an erotically charged deity and regulates, among other things, our erotic interests. Due to the material focus in the first half of life, the Soul-image is not recognized as a divinity but is projected onto other people. This leads to the numinous charm, glamour, or fascination—the literal *fascinatio*—surrounding the objects of our eros. As Plotinus explains:

Enn. VI 7, 21, 12–14

But there comes to be an intense kind of love for them not when they are what they are but when, being already what they are, they receive something else from there above. (tr. Armstrong)

In the heterosexual case, mutual projection of Soul-images may lead to mutual possession and thereby facilitate continuation of the species.¹⁹ This is another aspect of the procession into the realm of generation that is the task of the first half of life. In the homosexual case, mutual possession also facilitates the continuation of humankind, but less directly; we may think of Socrates and Alcibiades.

Return: The Second Half of Life

The second half of life brings—or should bring—the *epistrophê*, the turn back toward our origin and source, a reorientation from the material toward the spiritual.²⁰ “Shut your eyes,” Plotinus advises, “and adopt and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use.”²¹ By returning to the well of our origin we acquire a new vitality, not physical vitality but spiritual vitality. Thus we may ascend towards the One and thereby achieve psychological integration. In the process, we may receive divine guidance, leading to the completion and fulfilment of our lives. Plotinus explains:

Enn. V 3, 8, 28–32

this illumination gives the soul a clearer life, but a life which is not generative; on the contrary it turns the soul back upon itself and does not allow it to disperse, but makes it satisfied with the glory in itself... (tr. Armstrong).

¹⁸ Walker (1991).

¹⁹ Jacobi (1967) 45.

²⁰ Jacobi (1967) 42; Jacobi (1973) 108.

²¹ *Enn.* I 6, 8, 26–28 (tr. Armstrong, modified)

In the first stage of ascent, we shift our attention from the sensible world to the soul; in the second, from the soul to the *nous*, and in the last, from the *nous* to the One. Arthur Davidson remarks:

To the figure of Narcissus, Plotinus opposes the figure of Ulysses, whose flight consists in discovering, first, that the body is only the reflection of a prior light which is the soul itself and to which we must return; in the next stage, the soul recognizes that its own light is also only the reflection of another light, which is that of Intellect or Spirit; finally Intellect appears to itself as the diffraction of the light of the primordial One.²²

When we shift attention from the sensible world to the soul, we recognize the *daimones* for who they are, and withdraw our projections from other people.²³ We recognize the Shadow and Soul-image as residents of our own psyches, which leads to greater personal responsibility but also to greater psychological integration.

Moreover, we recognize these archetypes and complexes as autonomous personalities—as gods and *daimones*—with whom we must negotiate, for they have interests and agendas of their own.²⁴ To this end analytical psychology uses a practice called *active imagination*, which like ancient theurgy, uses symbols to attune the soul to archetypal energies so that we may engage with them.²⁵ Through genuine *imaginatio*, as opposed to *phantasia*, we negotiate with the gods and daimons to accommodate their interests as well as our own.²⁶ In particular, they can aid us in our ascent to the One. Through theurgy, Iamblichus explains, “there occurs the vision of truth and intellectual understanding, and with knowledge of the gods follows a turning towards ourselves and knowledge of ourselves.”²⁷ By ascending to the gods we discover the depths of our individuality.

²² Hadot (1993) 10.

²³ Jacobi (1973) 114.

²⁴ Jung (1963) 187.

²⁵ Jung (1997) collects Jung’s writings on active imagination. See also Johnson (1986) for a clear introduction.

²⁶ Jacobi (1973) 144. She quotes Jung, “The *imaginatio* is to be understood here as the real and literal power to create images (*Einbildungskraft* = imagination)—the classical usage of the word in contrast to *phantasia*, which means a mere ‘conceit’, ‘idea’, or ‘hunch’ (*Einfall*) in the sense of insubstantial thought.”

²⁷ *DM X* 1, 286.8–10 (tr. Clarke, Dillon, & Hershbell).

Jacobi observes that the individuation process has much in common with the archetypal hero's quest.²⁸ First the hero must accept the call (which most refuse). Then the Shadow must be confronted and recruited as an ally in the journey through the abyss where rebirth is achieved. Some gods and *daimones* are helpers; others bar the way or pose challenges. Finally the hero must return safely to our world with the ultimate boon hard to obtain. Perhaps they will become benefactors to all people.

As in the hero's quest, the sequence of stages of individuation is not invariable.²⁹ There are certain processes that must be completed, balances and compensations that must be achieved, in order for wholeness and unity to be attained. The archetypes will mobilize psychodynamic forces and channel them toward completion; they have their own purposes and intentions.³⁰ We need only to cooperate with the gods and *daimones*—conformably with our ethics—to win the prize.

IV. Stages of Individuation

Despite the variability, we may identify four principal stages in the individuation process, that is, in the ascent to the One.

1. The Shadow

Typically the first stage of individuation is a confrontation with one's personal Shadow since it is the nearest personality in the unconscious. Because, however, it embodies all that we reject, it is also the most unpleasant to encounter.³¹ Therefore, as a step towards wholeness, it is necessary to recognize that your personal *kakodaimôn* is a creature of your own—albeit unintentional—creation; it is born of your ego as its complement. Prospero has reached a degree of psychological insight when he says of Caliban, “this thing of darkness! / acknowledge mine.”

Due to our reluctance to accept our Shadows as our own, they are typically projected onto other people. Therefore the first step in confronting the Shadow is to withdraw these projections, and to understand that our negative reactions to other people are often a

²⁸ Jacobi (1967) 46–47.

²⁹ Jacobi (1967) 47.

³⁰ Jacobi (1973) 124.

³¹ Jacobi (1973) 112.

consequence of their activating our own Shadow complexes. Thus we discover that the *kakodaimôn* resides not in other people, but in the unconscious, the realm of the gods and *daimones*. Moreover, other people can be possessed by our *kakodaimones* through a process of mutual possession; essentially they subconsciously accept our Shadow projections. By withdrawing our projections, we aid their release from possession by our *kakodaimones*.

The Shadow cannot be banished, nor should we want to do so; it would be cutting off or destroying a part of our psyche and defeat our aim at wholeness. Attempting to banish the *kakodaimôn* only frustrates its intentions and makes it more likely to possess us, so that we behave badly. Rather, our goal should be to recruit this *daimôn* as an ally in our quest.³² First, as the nearest occupant of the unconscious, it can bar the way toward unity (like the hylic *daimones*). Second, it has many qualities and skills that we lack, which may be helpful on the path. As the complement of the ego, it has strength in the functions where the ego is weak. If someone is thinking-oriented—that is their superior function—then their Shadow will be strong in the inferior function, feeling. If you are superior in sensation—perceiving external reality—then your Shadow will be superior in intuition. However, so long as the *kakodaimôn* operates in the background and is projected onto others, its faculties will be relatively undeveloped and primitive, which is why we want to avoid possession by it.

Therefore, before we can depend on the Shadow as an ally and transform it from a *kakodaimôn* to an *agathos daimôn*, we must negotiate with it. This is where we may apply theurgy and where its modern equivalents, such as active imagination, come into play.³³ First, we must invoke the Shadow, and seek to understand its viewpoint and needs. We should negotiate a means of accommodating them within the bounds of personal ethics, common sense, societal norms, and practicality. Second, we may seek the Shadow's aid in our quest, for it has powers that we lack. This negotiation may extend across many active imagination sessions, that is, many theurgical operations. Finally, it is appropriate to conclude the negotiations with a symbolic ritual, a "pact" if you will. In this way we reach an accord with the Shadow, now transformed into an *agathos daimôn*.

³² Jacobi (1967) 47.

³³ The steps presented here are described in detail in Johnson 1986.

Parent to our personal Shadows is the collective Shadow, who may appear in dreams and visions as a negative aspect of the Wise Old Man archetype, perhaps an evil sorcerer or priest.³⁴ We must reach an accord with our personal Shadow before we can confront this culturally shared personification of Evil, but this is an important task for anyone aspiring to enlightenment, for the projection of the cultural Shadow on other groups is the unconscious foundation for bias of one group against another.

2. The Soul-image

The second stage in the ascent is typically an encounter with the Soul-image, that is, the Anima or Animus in heterosexuals and the Divine Double in homosexuals. Jacobi remarks that the appearance of the Soul-image in dreams, fantasies, and visions signals completion of the first half of life—procession—and the beginning of the second half, the *epistrophê* or return.³⁵ Therefore, the Soul-image can serve as psychopomp, guiding us deeper into the unconscious to contact the gods and *daimones* there.³⁶

The Soul-image is complementary to both the ego and the Persona, most obviously in heterosexuals, to whom the Soul-image is contrasexual.³⁷ As the Persona mediates the ego to the outer world, so the Soul-image mediates the ego to the inner world, and therefore can be our guide and protector in our journey to those realms.³⁸ Think of Odysseus and Athena or Aeneas and the Cumaean Sybil.

Jacobi notes that the Anima in men is generally singular but may possess multiple incompatible traits.³⁹ We may think of Athena Pronoia, Erganê, Glaukôpis, etc., or of Aphrodite Pandêmos, Ourania, Androphonos, etc. The Animus in women, in contrast, is usually plural, with different Soul-images having different traits. She attributes these characteristics to unconscious compensation for a polygamous tendency in males and to a monogamous tendency in females.

³⁴ Jacobi (1973) 111.

³⁵ Jacobi (1973) 115, 123–124.

³⁶ Jacobi (1967) 44.

³⁷ Jacobi (1973) 119–120.

³⁸ Jacobi (1973) 119.

³⁹ Jacobi (1973) 121.

As a representative of the unconscious, the Soul-image is typically stronger in the inferior functions of consciousness. For a thinking-oriented person, for example, that would be especially its opposite, feeling, but also to a lesser degree sensation and intuition. Such a Soul-image may appear in threefold form, for example, a triple goddess or a triad of nymphs. Since both the Soul-image and the Shadow are complementary to the ego and Persona, they may team up, even appearing as a married pair.⁴⁰

The Soul-image can manifest in two opposing forms: an upper, light, and more positive form, and a lower, dark, and more negative form.⁴¹ We may think of Aphrodite Ourania and Aphrodite Pandêmos. The lower form is usually more primitive, less differentiated, and often associated with the inferior function; in dreams and visions it may appear as an animal or even as an inanimate object.⁴² Through theurgy we may cultivate our relation to the higher form, who may serve as psychopomp and lead us to the One.⁴³

In the first half of life we project the Soul-image onto certain other people, and as a consequence see them as ideals and nearly divine.⁴⁴ In the second half, we must recognize that the Soul-image resides in heaven, not on earth; we must withdraw the projections. This leads to more realistic relations to these significant others, but also allows us to recover the psychic energy from the relation.⁴⁵ That is, rather than depending on the vehicle of another person, we can participate directly in the divine energy of the Soul-image. By communicating with our Soul-image through theurgy, we can obtain guidance and inspiration to aid us in our return to the One.⁴⁶ We may even invite possession by this god or goddess.

In the first half of life, through mutual projection we may have joined with our Anima or Animus embodied in another person, and perhaps engendered physical children.⁴⁷ In the second half of life, we may unite spiritually with our Soul-image and engender spiritual children.

⁴⁰ Jacobi (1973) 120.

⁴¹ Jacobi (1973) 118.

⁴² Jacobi (1973) 116, 120.

⁴³ Jacobi (1973) 119.

⁴⁴ Jacobi (1973) 115.

⁴⁵ Jacobi (1973) 122–123.

⁴⁶ Jacobi (1973) 115.

⁴⁷ Jacobi (1973) 123.

That is, together we create something new on the spiritual plane, perhaps a work of art, perhaps a better integrated psyche.

3. The Archetypes of Spirit and Matter

In the third stage of the ascent we are likely to encounter the *Mana Personalities*, which develop from the parental archetypes.⁴⁸ They thus represent our origin and are sources of authority, and especially in the second half of life, sources of *spiritual* authority. On the one side we have the Wise Old Man, who represents the spiritual principle, and on the other, the Great Mother, who represents the material principle,⁴⁹ that is, the “principles of the primordial, masculine, spiritual Logos and of the primordial, feminine, earthly Eros.”⁵⁰ They are personified aspects of the Monad, representing Form, and of the Indefinite Dyad, representing Matter. Numenius is reported to have said that

Fr. 52 (Test. 30 L)

Pythagoras gave God the name of Monad, but to matter he gave the name Dyad. This Dyad, he says, when indeterminate is in no way generated, but when limited it is generated; that is, before it was adorned and obtained form and order it was without origin and generation. (tr. Petty)

They are the father and mother of the gods, perhaps Kronos and Rhea, for Kronos is identified with pure mind, the *koros nous* according to Plato (*Cra.* 396b), and Rhea is connected with *rheô* and *rhoê*, the unending and creative flux of materiality (*Cra.* 402a–b).⁵¹ Plotinus says,

Enn. V 1, 4, 6–12

let him ascend to [the cosmos’] archetypal and truer reality and there see them all [the gods and *daimones*] intelligible and eternal in it, in its own understanding and life; and let him see pure Intellect [*noun*] presiding over them, and immense wisdom, and the true life of Kronos, a god who is fullness [*korou*] and intellect [*nou*]. (tr. Armstrong)

⁴⁸ Jacobi (1967) 46; Jacobi (1973) 126.

⁴⁹ Jacobi (1973) 125.

⁵⁰ Jacobi (1967) 46.

⁵¹ Pseudo-Iamblichus (*Theol. Arith.* 14, 6–9) says the dyad is named Rhea after the flux and change in nature.

The Mana Personalities appear in many forms, both light and dark.⁵² As the Monad and Indefinite Dyad are complementary aspects of the Ineffable One, so these archetypes of Spirit and Matter are the two halves of the Higher Self that must be united through individuation.⁵³

As the complementary aspects of a totality, the Wise Old Man and Great Mother stand on the path to the Ineffable One.⁵⁴ They hold the keys to the collective unconscious, to Olympus where the gods dwell, for they are direct emanations of the One. Previously we were among the *daimones*; now we ascend to the gods, the archetypes of the collective unconscious. Theurgy enables communion with the Wise Old Man and Great Mother, which brings profound insights and intuitions. Adopted by the divine parents, one becomes a divine child so far as possible for mortals.⁵⁵

Here also lies one of the pitfalls along the way, as Jacobi explains.⁵⁶ With this influx of divine knowledge, there is a danger of ego inflation, self-glorification, and megalomania; there is a risk of identification with the Mana Personalities. Moreover, the influx of unconscious contents can destroy the equilibrium of the psyche, dissolving the Persona and the ego's orientation to external reality. Furthermore, as with other archetypes, it may be difficult to discern the Mana Personalities, which are deep in the collective unconscious, from the complexes/*daimones* engendered by them, who reside closer to consciousness in the personal unconscious; as a result, more personal content may be mistaken for more universal truths. Consequently we should not suppose that we are prophets of the gods bringing revelations to humanity. Jacobi observes that a certain amount of inflation is probably unavoidable, and therefore humility is required for progress.⁵⁷ Plotinus warns us:

Enn. II.9, 9, 46–51

Then the man of real dignity must ascend in due measure, with an absence of boorish arrogance, going only so far as our nature is able to go, and consider that there is room for others at God's

⁵² Jacobi (1973) 125.

⁵³ Jacobi (1973) pl. 5.

⁵⁴ Jacobi (1973) 126–127.

⁵⁵ Jacobi (1973) 126.

⁵⁶ Jacobi (1973) 125–126.

⁵⁷ Jacobi (1973) 126.

side, and not set himself alone next after God; this is like flying in our dreams and will deprive him of becoming a god, even as far as the human soul can. (tr. Armstrong)

4. The Self

We come now to the fourth and final stage, a unification of all the opposites: inner and outer, spirit and matter, conscious and unconscious, personal and collective, mortal and divine. The imbalance caused by the influx of unconscious contents has served an important function: toppling the ego from its fallacious assumption of control.⁵⁸ Now balance must be restored by shifting to a new psychic center: the Higher Self, the “inmost flower of the soul” (as Proclus terms it⁵⁹). This is the precious goal sought by the hero, the rejuvenating elixir.

We are reminded of Aristophanes’ yarn in Plato’s *Symposium*.⁶⁰ Humans, originally spherical, but split by Zeus into opposite-sex or same-sex halves to decrease their power, are ever seeking their missing halves. The reunion is accomplished by means of individuation, which discovers and unites us with our complements to restore the well-rounded whole and to regain our human potential.

There is a polarity between the conscious and unconscious, and to achieve balance, a new center must be found between them. This point of balance is the Higher Self, the image of the Ineffable One within the psyche, the principle that integrates all psychic contents, conscious and unconscious.⁶¹ Because the unconscious does not understand the language of the conscious ego, the union cannot be achieved consciously. Jacobi explains, however, that union can be achieved magically, that is, by the use of symbols, which transcend the conscious and unconscious.⁶² Symbols are, of course, the tools of theurgy as well; Iamblichus explains:

DM II 11 (96.13–97.2, 4–7)

it is the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged, and the power of unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, to

⁵⁸ Jacobi (1973) 127.

⁵⁹ *Ecl. Pr. Phil. Chald.* IV 156 (Cod. Vat. 233r), Jahn, 4.23.

⁶⁰ Jacobi (1973) 140.

⁶¹ Jacobi (1973) 127.

⁶² Jacobi (1973) 140–141.

whom these symbols relate, that establishes theurgic union. Hence, we do not bring about these things by intellection alone.... For even when we are not engaged in intellection, the symbols themselves, by themselves, perform their appropriate work, and the ineffable power of the gods, to whom these symbols relate, itself recognizes the proper images of itself, not through being aroused by our thought. (tr. Clarke, Dillon, & Hershbell)

The gods recognize their own divine symbols, which they have given to us; in psychological terms, the archetypes of the collective unconscious are activated by symbolic releasing stimuli, which are part of their structure, some innate, some learned. As Iamblichus says, “we preserve in their entirety the mystical and arcane images of the gods in our soul; and we raise our soul up through these towards the gods and, as far as possible, when it has been elevated, we experience union with these gods.”⁶³

Entry into the fourth stage of individuation is often signaled by the emergence of a uniting symbol in dreams and visions. Mandalas are the most common and familiar examples. Using hieroglyphs for comparison, Plotinus says, “every image is a kind of knowledge and wisdom ... all together in one, and not discourse or deliberation.”⁶⁴ Uniting symbols emerge when balance is being restored, and the intrapsychic realm is experienced to be just as real as the external world.⁶⁵ That is, the gods and *daimones* are experienced as real.

Mandalas symbolize reconciliation of opposites and the emergence of a center.⁶⁶ Typically they are square or circular and have a fourfold symmetry. The center may be distinguished by a special symbol, such as a deity or golden flower.⁶⁷ They are not only symbols of order, but as Jacobi explains, they create order by their symbolic effect; they are psycho-integrators.⁶⁸ Jung says a mandala is a magic circle, which protects the sacred *temenos* of the innermost Self from emanation outward and from harmful influences coming in.⁶⁹

⁶³ *DM VII 4* (255.13–256.2, tr. Clarke, Dillon, & Hershbell).

⁶⁴ *Enn. V 8, 6, 6–9* (tr. Armstrong).

⁶⁵ Jacobi (1973) 135.

⁶⁶ Jacobi (1973) 135–136.

⁶⁷ Jacobi (1973) 139.

⁶⁸ Jacobi (1973) 139.

⁶⁹ Jacobi (1973) 139.

Mandalas sometimes arise in earlier stages of the individuation process.⁷⁰ For example, deities and other numinous figures may appear in a mandala arrangement, such as a male Shadow figure with a trio of Anima figures around a table. Mandalas come and go spontaneously; their appearance cannot be willed, for individuation is guided by the gods and the Ineffable One, not by the ego.⁷¹ Plotinus tells us, “one must not chase after it, but wait quietly until it appears, preparing oneself to contemplate it, as the eye awaits the rising of the sun.”⁷²

The way to the new psychic center is not a straight line, but a circumambulation, a spiraling inward.⁷³ The gravitational force of the Self, the One within, draws the psyche in an orbit through all the opposites towards their union in the center.⁷⁴ The One, says Plotinus,

Enn. I 7, 1, 23–27

must stay still, and all things turn back to it, as a circle does to the center from which all the radii come. The sun too is an example, since it is like a center in relation to the light which comes from it and depends on it... (tr. Armstrong)

The goal is genuine Self-knowledge, that is, knowledge of the Divine Self, for Self-knowledge is the discovery of what one truly is, as opposed to what one hopes to be.⁷⁵ According to Jacobi, Self-knowledge results in a thinning of the personal unconscious, because the ego is in more direct contact with the collective unconscious;⁷⁶ that is, one is dealing more often directly with the gods, rather than through daimonic intermediaries. Iamblichus states that a personal *daimôn* (*oikeios daimôn*)

DM IX.6 (280.13–281.3)

continues to direct men’s lives up to the point at which, through sacred theurgy, we establish a god as the overseer and leader of our soul; for then it either withdraws in deference to the superior

⁷⁰ Jacobi (1973) 137n2, 138.

⁷¹ Jacobi (1973) 127, 141.

⁷² *Enn.* V 5, 8, 3–6 (tr. Armstrong).

⁷³ Jacobi (1973) 127.

⁷⁴ Jacobi (1973) 140.

⁷⁵ Jacobi (1973) 132.

⁷⁶ Jacobi (1973) 129.

principle, or surrenders its administrative role, or subordinates itself so as to contribute to the god's direction of the soul, or in some other way comes to serve it as master. (tr. Clarke, Dillon, & Hershbell)

Spiraling toward the inner light, one becomes progressively more enlightened, for enlightenment results from the integration of unconscious contents into the light of consciousness.⁷⁷ This is symbolized in mythology by the solar attributes of heroes who achieve enlightenment and apotheosis. The benefits of enlightenment include comprehension of the meaning of life, formation of an integrated psyche, and development of a worldview that is truly one's own, and not borrowed from others.

According to Jacobi, one of the psychological effects of individuation is liberation from the disorientation of the modern world, which has resulted from its lack of psychic integration and lack of contact with the archetypal forces of life.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Jung stresses the importance of maintaining an ordinary home and work life while undergoing individuation; we should not become monks, even Neoplatonic monks! We must learn to endure the tension between the world of ordinary consciousness and the archetypal realm, both of which are essential aspects of life.⁷⁹

The individuated person is not immune to pain and suffering, but they can face it with tranquility.⁸⁰ As Jung explains, the greatest problems of life are unsolvable except by raising consciousness.⁸¹ Then pain occurs only in the lower stories of the house; in the upper stories both joy and sorrow are reduced. Troubles are not repressed, which is unhealthy; they are simply located elsewhere from the Higher Self. As Plotinus says, "that which suffers pain is one thing, and there is another which even while it is compelled to accompany that which suffers pain, remains in its own company and will not fall short of the vision of the universal good."⁸²

⁷⁷ Jacobi (1973) 133–134.

⁷⁸ Jacobi (1973) 133.

⁷⁹ Jacobi (1973) 128.

⁸⁰ Jacobi (1973) 128, 131.

⁸¹ Jacobi (1973) 134–135.

⁸² *Enn.* I 4, 13, 9–13 (tr. Armstrong).

Union with the One provides veridical experience of the primal ground of being.⁸³ As a goal, it poses an ethical challenge, calling us forward to more enlightened decisions.⁸⁴ Jacobi says union is the ultimate psychic experience and the highpoint in our knowledge of the psyche.⁸⁵ Nevertheless, the experience of self-realization that is the result of individuation is ultimately ineffable.⁸⁶ It cannot be described in words because, according to Jacobi, a part—the ego—can never understand the whole—the Higher Self.⁸⁷ The Ineffable One is the source from which we came and the goal to which we are destined; it is therefore near to us, yet ultimately unknowable.⁸⁸ Jung says that Self-realization

is a subjective state whose reality cannot be validated by any external criterion; any further attempt to describe and explain it is doomed to failure, for *only those who have had this experience* are in a position to understand and attest its reality.⁸⁹

Therefore, individuation does not lead to intellectual knowledge, but to experiential understanding, the force of which leads to unshakeable certainty.⁹⁰ Plotinus states:

Enn. I 6, 9, 16–18, 21–25

If you have become this, and see it, and are at home with yourself in purity, with nothing hindering you from becoming in this way one, with no inward mixture of anything else, but wholly yourself ... when you see that you have become this, then you have become sight; you can trust yourself then; you have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see. (tr. Armstrong)

One may wonder how many fully individuated persons walk upon the earth; they are not easy to find. Jacobi remarks that for most of us

⁸³ Jacobi (1973) 132, 148.

⁸⁴ Jacobi (1973) 132.

⁸⁵ Jacobi (1973) 132.

⁸⁶ Jacobi (1973) 148.

⁸⁷ Jacobi (1973) 129.

⁸⁸ Jacobi (1973) 131.

⁸⁹ Jung (1980 *CW* 12) ¶188; emphasis in Jacobi (1973) 129.

⁹⁰ Jacobi (1973) 148.

individuation is a lifelong pursuit of an unattainable ideal.⁹¹ However, Jung says, “The meaning and purpose of a problem seem to lie not in its solution but in our working at it incessantly.”⁹² Therefore, the purpose of individuation may lie in our ever striving to return to the One, which in itself gives meaning to life.

V. Conclusions

In conclusion, what are the consequences of the individuation process, that is, of *henôsis*? Jacobi says that individuation can be viewed from five perspectives.⁹³ First, as a process of psychological development, it leads to an unfolding of all the psyche’s potentialities, integrating contemporary consciousness with its historical roots, thereby uniting consciousness and the collective unconscious. Second, it integrates the inferior functions and attitude into consciousness, leading to a more complete and well-rounded ego, expanding our faculties for decision-making, thereby increasing free will. Third, it improves psychological health by redistributing psychic energy, dissolving complexes and withdrawing projections. Fourth, it has a religious aspect, for by establishing an experiential living relation between the individual and the gods, it allows the individual to understand better their place in the cosmos. Finally, it has a social effect, for it helps individuals to understand their role in society and accommodates them to life as social beings.

Jacobi argues that individuation (or Self-realization) should be each person’s highest task.⁹⁴ It benefits the individuated person by providing a secure anchor in the eternal, that is, in fundamental reality. It also benefits others, because individuated persons tend to be kinder to others, for having descended into their own abyss and discovered their Shadow, they are more tolerant and forgiving of others’ limitations and failings. Finally, individuation benefits humankind, for by uniting with the One, the individuated person has experienced how all things are connected and therefore understands their own role in the whole and can fulfil it better.

⁹¹ Jacobi (1973) 105–106.

⁹² Jung (1969b CW 8) ¶771; see also Jacobi (1967) 134.

⁹³ Jacobi (1967) 132–133.

⁹⁴ Jacobi (1973) 150–151.

Bibliography

Editions

- Proclus. Jahn, A. 1891. *Eclogae e Proclo de philosophia Chaldaica; sive de doctrina oraculorum Chaldaicorum*. Halle.
- Pseudo-Iamblichus. de Falco. 1922. *Theologumena arithmeticae*. Teubner.

Translations

- Iamblichus. 2003. *On the mysteries: Translated with introduction and notes*. Writings of the Greco-Roman World, No. 4, trans. E. C. Clarke, J. M. Dillon, & J. P. Hershbell. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.
- Numenius. Petty, R. 2012. *Fragments of Numenius of Apamea: Translation and commentary*. Platonic Texts and Translations VII. Westbury: Prometheus Trust.
- Plotinus. Armstrong, A. H. 1966–89. *Plotinus*, 7 vols. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard.
- Porphyry. Zimmern, A. 1896/1986. *Porphyry's Letter to His Wife Marcella*, Intr. D. R. Fideler. Grand Rapids: Phanes.

Secondary Sources

- Hadot, P. 1993. *Plotinus, or the simplicity of vision*. Trans. M. Chase. Intr. A. I. Davidson. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr.
- Jacobi, J. 1967. *The way of individuation*. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- 1973. *The psychology of C. G. Jung*, rev. ed. Trans. R. Mannheim. New Haven: Yale.
- Johnson, R. A. 1986. *Inner work: Using dreams and active imagination for personal growth*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Jung, C. G. 1963. *Memories, dreams, reflections*. Ed. A. Jaffé, Trans. R. & C. Winston. New York: Vintage Books.
- 1968. *The archetypes and the collective unconscious*, 2nd ed. Trans. R. F. C. Hull. Collected Works 9, part 1. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press.