

13. INTRODUCTION TO THE PURGATORIO

The "state" found in the *Purgatorio* is totally permeated by a feeling of faith, peculiar to the souls who yearn to pass beyond their limits and, through stages of purification, seek the attainment of true freedom.

The ancient world had projected Hell for the damned and Paradise for the blessed, without affording man the slightest hope of transformation. Purgatory, as the projection of "a condition of souls after death", only appeared in the Middle Ages, a period rich in transformations for Western man.¹ This phase of maturation reaches its peak in the work of Dante.

Emerging from the pit, which threatens to swallow men into the unconscious, imprisoning them in the hell of archetypal possession, Dante makes us feel how those who live by natural instinct alone, without reflecting (without, that is, using the good of the intellect), are punished by nature itself (the Biblical God who punishes through the law of retribution). This archetypal response also corresponds to the eastern tradition of Karma.

In the *Purgatorio* the valorous dimension of the hero emerges in the shape of an innate impulse to transcend the limits of the natural man. The individual man is constantly faced with the difficult task of harmonizing contrasting tendencies. Some of these impulses are egotistical, and emerge from the centre of the Ego, while others are ideal or spiritual, springing from a more inclusive personality, the Self, in which the Ego is contained though it no longer forms the centre.

As a consequence of the metanoia achieved at the point where Lucifer was positioned, the infernal circles become an inverted reflection of the heavens. Thus the heavens and the circles of the *Inferno* form the two faces, one in darkness, the other in light, of the archetypal instance they symbolize.

Inferno

The Indecisive (Vestibule)
Limbo (I circle)
The lustful (II circle)
The gluttonous, hoarders &
spendthrifts (III-IV circle)
The wrathful, slothful,
violent (V-VI-VII circle)
The fraudulent (VIII circle)
Traitors (IX circle)

Paradiso

Weak-willed spirits (I Heaven: Moon)
Active spirits (II heaven: Mercury)
Lover spirits (III Heaven: Venus)
Wise spirits (IV Heaven:Sun)
Spirits who struggled for the faith (V
Heaven: Mars)
Righteous spirits (VI Heaven: Jupiter)
Contemplatives (VII Heaven: Saturn)

Hermetic correspondences between the Circles of Hell and the Heavens.

The “stamps” the heavens transmit to matter – impressions the heavens themselves have taken from the seal of the heaven of the fixed stars and angelic choirs – are therefore representations of the unknowable archetype in itself, the instinct in itself, the “quid”. From this it can be deduced, as Jung says, that in matter, namely the physical part (earth), instinct finds its dynamic effect while the ideal image is found in the spirit (heaven).²

13.1 The Bipolarity of the Psyche

The bipolarity of the psyche (hell-heavens) is immediately evident in Dante’s cosmography. Between these two poles, positive and negative, the human process of transformation unfolds within the limited sphere of human free will, the free choice entrusted to the mind, over which “the stars have no control” (Pur. XVI, 81).

Free choice is presented as a “battle with heaven” (“first struggles with the heavens”, Pur.XVI,77). This war between opposites takes place in the *Purgatorio*, since the tendencies of natural instinct and ideal images are in opposition. It is from this immanent conflict between ideals and personal human limitations that man’s moral dimension emerges. The problem of good and evil does not concern God, who lies beyond all forms of polarisation, but man alone: “the

cause lies in yourselves and only there" (Pur. XVI,83), "the simple soul, pure in its innocence" (Pur. XVI, 88).

In psychological terms, the passage through the *Purgatorio* corresponds to the phase of integrating the Shadow. This does not consist in eliminating it (which would immediately drive man back into Hell) but in conscious co-existence with the Shadow while attempts are made to transmute it.³ Whereas the *Inferno* confronts man with his normal innate imperfection, the *Purgatorio* allows him to redeem himself by accepting his limitations and by undertaking the difficult task of striking a balance between such limitations and the human search for freedom.

The process of individuation which unfolds in the *Purgatorio* does not drive man to rid himself of his body so as to follow an ascetic path, rather it encourages him to live with the body but without being dominated by it:

... "Still wrapped in mortal bonds
that death has yet to loose, I climb to Heaven:
and through the pains of Hell I have come here.
[Pur. XVI, 37-39]

While in hermeticism and most gnostic systems there was a tendency to deny and repress the physical, bodily side, as this is a source of constant difficulties, in the *Commedia* – in keeping with alchemical hermeticism – there is an optimistic tendency towards the transformation and reciprocal integration of opposing tendencies. Indeed the *Purgatorio* is where the infernal circles are transmuted into the opposite polarity of the heavens, in accordance with the law of correspondences.

The opposition between natural instinct and spiritual instinct, between earth and sky, nature and culture, creates a field of tension where psychic energy may be channelled. This process is accompanied by a normal state of suffering, which is an integral part of every individual's experience: not the neurotic suffering of the *Inferno*, but the suffering required to break free from possession by natural instincts and so reach inner freedom. Only in this way can the creativity innate in everyone find expression in new forms (the "state" of Earthly Paradise).

In the Earthly Paradise, where the tensions of sky and earth are united harmoniously, what the initiatory tradition designates the “true man” or the “primordial man” is reconstituted. This is potential in each of us and is a reflected image of the not yet realised Self (the Self will only be revealed to Dante in the Celestial Paradise after he has passed through the “state” of the heavens). The Earthly Paradise corresponds to the end of the “lesser mysteries”, or “mysteries of the earth”, connected to the world of the Mother (earth). Therefore, the ascent described in the *Purgatorio* is the long, painful, and exhausting process of harmonizing the contrasting tendencies within man, so as to attain the state of Eden, where everything was harmoniously present in a mythical past of blessed innocence that was subsequently lost (original sin).

This process does not lead to the state of innocence, but to a purity of being that is alluded to in the Gospels:

Any one who does not welcome the Kingdom of Heaven *like* a little child will never enter it. [Mark, X,15]⁴

What meaning does the expiatory situation of the *Purgatorio* have for each of us? In the course of life, once we have emerged from the state of indecisiveness (the vestibule of Hell), we come face to face with obstacles and shadows (attachment to persons, objects and situations) that obstruct our path (the *Inferno*). To free ourselves from these identifications and projections we must detach from them and consider them objectively: the situations remain unchanged (the eternal state of Hell) but the consciousness changes. This process of detachment from projections is always painful (the symbolic punishments of the expiators dictated by the law of retribution) because altering or abandoning aspects of oneself always involves suffering.

This is the way in which the drama of life is to be accepted. We are no longer prisoners of neurosis, gone are the unilateral situations of the *Inferno*, instead suffering is willingly accepted because it holds the promise of release for the consciousness. Jung speaks of a “passion of the Ego” (CW XI, par. 233), which is violently shaken by the Self. Until the suffering is experienced with such intensity it is impossible to attain inner freedom. This form of freedom is not the freedom to do as one pleases – which would immediately lead back to hell – but

obedience to an inner law that is in harmony with the law of the universe.

13.2 *The Consciousness and the Shadow*

In the canticle of the *Purgatorio* we take stock of what was gradually revealed in the journey through the *Inferno*. The function of consciousness is peculiar to man, and without it the unconscious could not be integrated. Instances of limitation, forms of automatic behavior (the beasts) that condition freedom and the consequences of these automatisms were all revealed to the consciousness. The consciousness also feels another "instinct" peculiar to man, the ideal tendency towards a mysterious unifying point already anticipated in Canto II of the *Inferno* (the instinct of individuation, as Jung calls it).

Therefore what emerges is the need to create harmony and win the release of consciousness from internal and external forms of conditioning,⁵ in an act of redemption that man, in imitation of Christ, can perform on himself by finding a new balance between body and spirit.

Dante is well aware that man lives above an abyss that gapes just below the ground he walks on, and this is projected in his cosmogony. In psychological terms, it is the entire world of the collective unconscious that yawns below the thin layer of consciousness, ready to engulf man the moment he loses control (the wood). It is essential to discover the obscure mechanisms operating in the recesses of the psyche unbeknown to man. Dante himself tracks down many of them in his work: biological instincts (the beasts), hereditary factors (gestation, Pur.XXV), external historical influences (the conversation with Cacciaguida, Pur.XVI), the "light" entrusted by God to man (the divine breath, Pur. XVII, XXV).

In the *Purgatorio*, too, Dante is accompanied by his physical aspect, which projects his shadow. *The physical shadow is an analogy of the psychological Shadow*, that is to say, it represents all the limitations or negative habits already encountered in the *Inferno* and which hold sway over the human personality. But the psychological Shadow also bears within itself untapped creative capacities which are still trapped and unconscious.

Greeted with amazement by expiators on all the terraces, the shad-

ow represents the limitations with which the body restricts inner freedom, limits that are now visualized by the light of consciousness as represented by the Sun.

But when the souls in front saw the sun's light
was broken on the ground to my right side,
my *shadow* stretching to the rising cliff
they stopped, and stared slowly shrinking back;
all of the rest that followed on their heels
did as they did, not knowing why they did.
[Pur. III, 88-93]

And again:

if they were stunned, as I suppose they were,
because he casts a *shadow* – now they know,
and it could profit them to honour him.
[Pur. V, 34-36]

The Shadow is, then, man's natural companion, forever at his side and with which he must learn to co-exist if he is to avoid being imprisoned by it.

The man without a shadow is the damned soul of the *Inferno*, he is *in* the shadow and identifies with it. This is the man who has not been able to assume responsibility for his own impulses and has lost his moral values, reduced to the level of an animal hungering after its prey. He is possessed by those appetites which are released when the black waters of chaos (that is to say, unconscious projections) have swallowed the king during the alchemical process.⁶ Let us briefly recall the episode of the cord in the flight on Geryon (Inf.XVII). For man the integration of the Shadow – that is, knowing it, attempting not to reject it, and making a commitment to transforming it – is a fundamental ethical problem: we all make mistakes, but it is by recognising them and trying to surmount them that life is made into a continually renewed experience. The painful acceptance of conflict lends dignity to the soul, in that each of the opposing parts is an aspect of the same soul. Repression of one or other side in the conflict is tantamount to murder and means a “loss of the soul”.

The active participation of the consciousness is essential during the

task of transformation. Dante will bear his shadow with him as far as the summit of the Sacred Mountain, until he stands where the “mid-day sun” shines at its zenith. The psychological equivalent of the bodily shadow is found in the seven P’s (which may stand for “planeta” latin, for planet in the hermetic tradition, or “peccata”, the Latin for sins) the guardian angel will cut into Dante’s forehead on the threshold of Purgatory proper.⁷

As the body is the equivalent of consciousness (in that, as Jung states, “psychologically speaking the body is the expression of our individual and conscious life”⁸), the shadow of the body is also analogical to that area of the unconscious that consciousness carries with it. Here in the *Purgatorio* the individual may, therefore, resume responsibility for the part of the shadow that belongs to him – the personal Shadow – and not for the entire archetypal Shadow which posed the greatest threat in the *Inferno*.

The body will purify itself, becoming a sort of glorious body (the resurrection of the flesh) which may host, as Meister Eckhart puts it,⁹ the birth of God in the soul. Dante takes up his shadow and with it climbs all the terraces of the *Purgatorio* that mark the stages of the process, shouldering, as it were, the conflicts of his own personal “cross” along the tiring *via crucis* this canticle represents. What Jung calls “the crucifixion of individuation”¹⁰ consists of this painful conflict between opposites.

When the conflict between opposing tendencies is resolved, an inner sense of liberation emerges, which is marked in the *Commedia* by an earthquake and chants of *Gloria*. Whoever has personally experienced the sudden sensation, reached almost miraculously at the end of a long-fought existential conflict, can understand the full meaning of Dante’s description (The release of Statius, Pur.XX).

However, conflicts are not always completely resolved and there is often much wavering between one extreme and the other. As Jung points out,¹¹ the Self – cosmogonic Eros – always assails the Ego. If the Ego is unaware of this it is imprisoned and falls under the sway of the unconscious. If the Ego is aware, that is to say, if it uses the good of the intellect, it can accept its dependence on the Self. The freedom of the Ego lies in this choice (“free subjects”, Pur. XVI,80). This is precisely what Seneca feels when he says: “Ducunt volentem fata, nolentum trahunt” (“Fate leads those who are willing but drags those

who are not”).

The free Ego chooses submission (“Thy will be done”), not slavishly, but as a free choice: there are no longer two separate wills, but only one. Jung claims:

It is, in fact, a change of feeling... a change known to us from the testimony of St. Paul: “Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me”....Religious language is full of imagery depicting this feeling of free dependence, of calm acceptance...This state is felt to be higher than the previous one; it is really like a sort of release from the compulsion and impossible responsibility. [Jung, *Commentary on “The Secret of the Golden Flower”*, CW XIII, para. 77-78]

13.3 *The Seven Terraces*

The seven cornices of the *Purgatorio* are a theological representation of the Seven Deadly Sins which must be expiated and transformed into the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Allegorically speaking, the cornices correspond to the seven initiatory grades of the hermetic tradition, the trials the adept must undergo to transmute his limits into virtues.¹²

From the alchemical point of view, the passage through purgatory corresponds to *mundificatio*, or purification, to the differentiation of the consciousness from the unconscious, corresponding to the repeated distillations meant to clean and rid matter, that is to say, the consciousness, of contaminating *nerezza*. In fact, the beginning of the *Purgatorio* corresponds to *albedo*, when the soul leaves the putrefied body in the tomb and ascends into the sky to then return with dew (the rite of baptism with dew, Pur. I) in order to revive the corpse, heralding the divine birth that is about to take place.¹³

According to Kundalini Yoga, this is the starting-point of anahata consciousness, the chakra of the heart. At this point in the initiatory process, freed from identification with sub-diaphragmatic drives, the initiate begins to perceive Purusha (the Self), which in fact resides in the heart.

From a psychological point of view, the seven terraces stand for moments when the vital energies connected to the Shadow, powers that must be educated and channelled creatively, undergo transformation. This involves the painful struggle to endure the tension

between the drives of the Ego which are opposed to the drives of the new centre, the Self. At this point, the barely perceived Self is still remote from consciousness, but it is already constellated and active in the unconscious; it now guides the process, heralded by the four stars (the quaternity) and then by the Sun which lights the way. The work of *mundificatio* is only possible if the Ego can endure the tension between opposing tendencies and is able to distinguish between itself and the inflationary influx of the unconscious.¹⁴

Antepurgatory

Before Purgatory proper Dante sites the Antepurgatory, comprised of the shore and two terraces. This moment of transition is necessary so that the newly arrived souls who have just been ferried there by the pilot Angel – as well as the two pilgrims, who have only just emerged from the underground passage – can grow accustomed to this new situation. Even though they have intuited and chosen another way of being, the souls lack the strength, courage, will and energy to immediately sustain the struggle. Therefore they pause and wait for the emergence of an inner resolve.

Each of us knows how difficult it is to change attitude in life. It is not enough to have glimpsed our personal limitations and decided to change our behaviour. One easily falls back into old ways, lacking sufficient strength to proceed. With the result that one lives as though suspended, not wishing to turn back, but not knowing how to go forward. This is the attitude presented in Antepurgatory. Before being admitted to the discipline of the “struggle” between opposed tendencies, a period of apparent immobility is necessary.

In the *Purgatorio*, as in the *Inferno*, everything takes place in accordance with the spontaneous movement of the soul. Nobody decides from outside, there are no punishments which come from without, and individuals are exactly what they feel they are. The state of *disorientation* is perfectly expressed in the attitude of the souls encountered in Antepurgatory.

As sheep will often start to leave the fold
first one, then two, then three – then, hesitantly,

the rest will move, with muzzles to the ground,
and what the first sheep does, the others do”
if it should stop, they all push up against it,
resigned to huddle quiet in ignorance-
[Pur. III,79-84]

These souls are presented as a collective soul, only slightly conscious, standing uncertainly before a new, barely perceived, and perhaps feared, mystery. Fragile beings, lacking the vigour of conscious responsibility and as yet incapable of free choice, they recall the indecisive in the Vestibule of Hell. However, once the latter overcome their indecision, they are driven to the shores of Acheron by an external propulsive force. This flock, on the contrary, advance together, timidly, driven forward by a faint weak collective will, without a clear idea of where to go.

These souls have preserved intact the bad habits they have brought from the world. Some died bloodily, seeking vengeance or power, overwhelmed by violence, the memory of which still weighs heavily upon them (Jacopo del Cassero and Buonconte da Montefeltro, Canto V; Manfred, Canto III). The group also includes figures who still live on the memories and habits of their earthly existence and everyday life, as in the episodes featuring Casella (Canto II), Sordello (Canto VI), Belacqua (Canto IV), and Nino Visconti (Canto VII). These souls now exist in a dazed state and, contemplating their pasts, consider the errors they have committed. Others are indolent, like Belacqua, for whom indolence became a habit during his earthly existence.

When the will to assume the discipline of expiation emerges in them, they, like Dante will enter Purgatory proper by means of confession. The state of disorientation and weak will described in Antepurgatory is typical of individuals who find themselves standing before a new beginning: it has already been seen in the *Inferno* and will be met once more in the *Paradiso*. The need to temper the will gradually seems to become an inherent necessity in the psyche. However, this pause must not last too long, otherwise there is the risk of falling back into old habits (the Casella episode in which even Virgil forgets the task before him). From dreams we can see how the unconscious often plays a compensatory role, sending images to

shake us out of states of inertia (in the *Purgatorio* a rough and demanding Cato returns).

Inflation is another danger, especially when the integration of the Shadow is just beginning. In acquiring the energy which initially belonged to the unconscious (through the knowledge of Hell), there is a considerable increase in the scope and the power of human consciousness. If the Ego believes it possesses this energy it runs the risk of inflation, that is to say, it swells, presuming it is capable of too much, and this may lead to catastrophe.¹⁵

In fact, Dante runs this very risk when he realizes how amazed the souls are to see him, a living man, making his way through their world, and when, pleased by this, he starts to feel “better” than the others:

“He seems to walk as if he were alive!”
Hearing these words I turned around and saw
souls staring in amazement at my form,
at me alone – and at the broken light.
[Pur. V, 6-9]

Jung often speaks of this moment and the risks it involves in the course of analysis. It is, however a necessary phase:

The more numerous and the more significant the unconscious contents which are assimilated to the ego, the closer the approximation of the ego to the self... This inevitably produces an inflation of the ego... [The man] prides himself on what he believes to be his self-control and the omnipotence of his will, and despises the man who lets himself be outwitted by mere nature.

If, on the other hand, the inner authority is conceived as the “will of God” (which implies that natural forces are divine forces), our self-esteem is benefitted. [Jung, *Aion - The Self*, CW IX, II, para. 44-49]

Here Virgil intervenes and reproaches his pupil severely:

Keep up with me and *let the people talk!*
Be like a solid tower whose brave height
remains unmoved by all the winds that blow;
the man who lets his thoughts be turned aside
by one thing or another, will lose sight
of his true goal, his mind sapped of its strength”.
[Pur. V, 13-18]

<i>Anteinferno</i> (Vestibule of Hell)	<i>Antepurgatory</i>	<i>Anteparadise</i>
the indecisive: wanted neither good nor evil.	the negligent & excommunicated converted at death died violently negligent princes: drawn to earthly things	breaks of vows: weak wills

Correspondences between forms of "weak will" in the three canticles.

The Way of the Cross

Following metanoia, the stages of the re-ascent do not correspond to an actual upward climb, in spatial terms – because it is a question of sinking further into oneself. But the difficulty of the path lies in the increased consciousness it leads to.

The path to integration of the Shadow is as winding and steep as the climb that twists around the Sacred Mount. It is necessary to proceed slowly, shedding the "burden" a little at a time, starting with the heaviest, pride and envy (the she-wolf). Gradually the strain decreases the further along the path one goes.

"This Mount is not like others: at the start
it is most difficult to climb, but then,
the more one climbs the easier it becomes;
and when the slope feels gentle to the point
that climbing up would be as effortless
as floating down a river in a boat-
well then, you have arrived at the road's end,
and there you can expect, at last, to rest.
[Pur. V, 88-95]

At first, though, the climb requires all our energies and commitment:

Squeezed in between the tight walls of the pass,

we struggled upward through that broken rock,
using our hands and feet to climb the ground...
I felt my strength drain from me, and I cried:
“O my sweet father, turn and look at me;
unless you slow your pace, you’ll lose me here”.
“My son”, he said, “keep climbing, just to there”,
and pointed to a ledge, not far above,
that made its way around the mountain slope.
His words were like a goad, and I strained on
behind him, *climbing with my hands and knees*
until I felt the ledge beneath my feet.
[Pur. IV, 31-51]

The way is narrow, steep, deserted, and uncharted, and there seems to be no end to it; the important thing is not to stop at the outset, but to proceed, climbing towards the peak – that is to say, without ever losing sight of the inner ideal – until we encounter someone who can set us on the right path.

The climb requires total commitment from the physical man, who, exhausted, “strains on”. The mind, however, pulls forward, calling for greater effort and the man feels proud whenever he surpasses himself.

The beginning of the climb to the first terrace is no less challenging:

Then we were climbing through a narrow cleft
along a path that zigzagged through the rock
the way a wave swells up and then pulls back.
“Now, we are at the point”, my guide began
“where we must use our wits: when the path bends,
we keep close to the far side of the curve”....
When we were free, once more out on the mount,
where this recedes enough to form a ledge,
we stopped there on the level space that stretched
lonlier than a desert path – I, tired,
and both of us uncertain of the way.
[Pur. X, 7-21]

The description of the climb expresses all the difficulty of enduring the tension between opposites and the conflicts between them (“a path that zigzagged”). Flexibility, rather than rigidity, is required; the qualities needed here are those of “the broken reed” that Dante is

girded with following the rite of baptism in Canto I.

The art (Musa translates “un poco d’arte” – a little art – with “use our wits”) Virgil mentions consists in adapting to situations and striving to overcome fatigue by using reason as a spur. This is the form of heroism found in the *Purgatorio*; not high-sounding heroism, but the most difficult form, connected to the mainly unresolved problems and conflicts of day to day existence that make life so difficult. In the *Purgatorio*, the focus shifts from a world of ideals to the sphere of what is humanly possible.

The intuited sense of eternity makes the attainment of impossible goals less pressing, spurring the individual to completion, not perfection, within the limits of personal potential. This is the way of the Cross, followed by the common man, with all his resolutions, his faint resolve, his absurd pride, his envy, negligence, weaknesses, and malice. The *Purgatorio* is a mirror of life and human reality, full of doubts and uncertainties.

The souls are simpler than in the *Inferno*, they are more human and more delicate; they share a common base of serene calm where individuals become progressively more spiritual and punishments are softened by hope (“who cry and sing as they go” Pur. XXVI, 142). Despite the constant devotion to surmounting their own limitations, the souls are not egotistically obsessed with them, indeed, they are responsive to the two pilgrims and ready to converse calmly with them. They help and encourage each other, praying for the living and in turn asking those in the grace of God to pray for them, so they may be helped towards complete purgation and shorten its duration.

The souls encountered in the *Inferno* and those seen in the *Paradiso* are more powerful, in vice as in virtue they are of greater stature because they represent a “type”. Here in the *Purgatorio* everything is put in the right perspective. Dante is a friend to all and presents a series of calm yet moving scenes in which he rediscovers his past, the friends of his distant youth, the companions of revelry (Forese Donati), masters of poetry (Guinizelli), fellow poets (Bonagiunta, Aniello) and finally Beatrice. Hate is transformed into love and suffering for the state of man:

O Tuscan I must weep when I recall...
[Pur. XIV, 103]

Dante's distress is all too real; distress for his city and human wickedness. In this canticle, too, his passionate nature sometimes vents itself in contempt and irony.

As De Sanctis says,¹⁶ Dante's *Purgatorio* recalls the second half of life, when external events are no longer the principal focus, and our interest is concentrated on our inner self, nature, friends, family relations, art and reflection. The delicate subtleties of the *Purgatorio* illuminate our daily life.

The Importance of Prayer

The importance Dante gives to the prayers of the living for those on the path of expiation requires some consideration. To be effective, however, the prayers must come from those who are in a state of grace:

Prayers could, of course, make my time shorter here:
prayers from a heart that lives in grace – the rest
are worthless, for they go unheard in Heaven!
[Pur. IV, 133-135]

This claim of Belacqua's is in direct contrast with Virgil's words in the *Aeneid* (VI, 376), where he denies that prayers can modify divine decree. Two cantos later, Virgil clarifies this point:

The words of mine you cite apply alone
to those whose sins could not be purged by prayer,
because their prayers had no access to God.
[Pur. VI, 40-42]

It would seem that the Christian belief in the power of prayer to help expiators is in contrast with human reason as exemplified by Virgil. At a deeper level, though, we understand that prayers that come from the mind alone are never enough, while the other kind of prayer – coming from the heart of those who have faith in love and conduct an inner dialogue with the divine discovered within themselves – can help the suffering soul on the ascent. This, however, is as far as Virgil, the mind, can go; he cannot go beyond his essential

nature. To know more the disciple will have to turn to Beatrice who, as a *mediatrix* between God and man, will resolve all doubts.

From a psychological point of view, Dante's feelings about this question are most exact. Helen Luke¹⁷ perceptively points out that prayer is a non-verbal human dialogue by means of the unconscious with God (psychologically speaking, with the Self). Those who have attained a mature love radiate a flux of positive energy which releases new energies in others. The individual who is in contact with the Self, having burnt up all egotistical longing, can share the burden of others and be of genuine help to them. This is more than a dogmatic claim by the Catholic Church. As always, dogma contains a psychic truth that is no longer understood. Often an encounter with someone who has made contact with the Self proves decisive in changing an otherwise desperate situation.

It is in this sense that humanity is helped by the intercession of the saints and all those, known and unknown, who consciously confront the unconscious, as did Jung in the course of his research. Who knows how many others are helping the world in this critical period through their own personal journey of self-knowledge.

Helen Luke also goes on to point out how the unconscious prayers of those who do not genuinely desire the good of others, but, without realising it, desire them to achieve what they themselves failed to do, have a negative effect, possibly driving others to rebellion or even obstructing their development. This is especially important in relations between parents and their children, and between teachers and their pupils. It is essential that the motives of the prayers we unconsciously make for others are always made clear.

The Role of Reason

At this point in the process Virgil, human reason, is no longer sure of the path: it is no longer a question of simply knowing, but of a more complete experience gained by using also the other functions, feeling, sensation, and intuition. Unlike in the *Inferno*, where, student-like, Dante followed his master's instructions, here Virgil and Dante are almost on equal terms, united both in their decisions and their indecision.

madness it is to hope that human minds
can ever understand the Infinite
that comprehends the Three Persons in One Being.
Be satisfied with *quia* unexplained,
O human race! if you knew everything,
no need for Mary to have borne a son.
You saw the hopeless longing of those souls
whose thirst, were this not so, would have been quenched,
but which, insteads, endures as endless pain:
I speak of Plato and of Aristotle,
and many others". Then he bent his head,
remaining silent with his anguished thoughts.
[Pur. III, 34-45]

Even the highest forms of philosophy are impotent before the mystery of being. And yet the function of the mind is still required in order to bring man into contact with the divine message carried by Beatrice.

... "I can explain to you
as much as reason sees, for the rest, wait
for Beatrice – it is the work of faith.
[Pur. XVIII, 46-48]

The mind is the light of consciousness, a function at the service of man. It is up to man to decide how he wants to use it:

"You are free subjects of a great power,
a noble nature creates your mind
and over this the spheres have no control.
[Pur. XVI, 79-81]

The mind is, then, the particle of divine light directly instilled in man by God and, therefore, it is not subject to the heavens, that is to say, the influence of the stars. This is a concept Dante takes from the hermetic and gnostic tradition, according to which, in order to discover his true divine nature and reach God, man must escape the influence of the stars. But Dante's vision is less pessimistic. Life is not only "evil", but offers an experience of the contradictions in human nature. The dogma of the incarnation of God and the resurrection of

the flesh holds the promise of man's release from fate, which was, on the contrary, accepted in the philosophy of the stoics and in hermetic and gnostic thought.

Thus, even after Virgil's slight human error before Cato, and Cato's reproach in the Casella episode, Dante confirms his faith in reason and by so doing affirms its dignity:

but I drew closer to my faithful friend.
And where could I have run without his help?
Who else but he could take me up the mount?
[Pur. III, 4-6]

There are still many risks for the man who has embarked on this journey: disorientation, inflation, fear, and indolence. The mind remains the most precious aid for facing all these difficulties.

13.4 *The Law of the Mountain*

A further profound insight that Dante expresses in the *Purgatorio* is "the law of the mountain", which regulates the progress of the two pilgrims. One may only climb by day, when the Sun illuminates the way, at night it is necessary to rest. Here, the darkness of the night is positive, because it fosters contact with the unconscious. The night is the time for meditating, reviewing the stages of the journey, or sleeping, the moment for the dreams that put the consciences in contact with the deepest layers of the psyche, where the soul is "almost divine" (Pur. IX, 18).

During sleep the archetypal dreams appear, bringing energies needed for future transformations and leading to increased awareness. Here, the death-birth passages encountered in the *Inferno* are replaced by dreams (absent in both the *Inferno* and the *Paradiso*, where the consciousness is in direct contact with the archetypal situation and, on the contrary, risks identifying with it).

The impossibility of continuing the climb by night is not a prohibition, but an inherent need of the psyche. Dante feels his strength fading and as a consequence he needs to lie down and rest. This is a most precious message for today's world, where we are always in a