

Type is With Us from Birth: Part III

A New Theory on the Origins of Type & the Nature of Type Motivation

by Susan Rhodes

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Gurdjieff taught a practical work of self-transformation and left us the enneagram, which can serve as a compass or a map, guiding us by the cosmic laws, into the knowledge of ourselves and our possibilities.

– Nathan Bernier

For several years, I have been researching the origins of our enneagram type. I have been collecting bits and pieces of information to include in an article that would talk about not only the fact that type is with us from birth but would also explore the implications of this fact. I did not publish this material right away because I understood its import—how it had the power to radically alter our current understanding of the enneagram. So I bided my time, carefully piecing together my arguments and waiting for the right moment to explore this topic in depth.

The moment came a few months ago, after the publication of my article, “The Enneagram of Individuality,” in the Sept. 2008 *Enneagram Monthly*. In that piece, although I mainly talked about the role of type in the individuation process, I mentioned in passing that type is with us from birth. Unbeknownst to me, another article was being published at the same time in the *Enneagram Journal* that portrayed type as the outcome of early conditioning.¹ Not only that, but it was premised on certain neo-Freudian theories about child development that are clearly outdated and empirically disproven.

So it seemed to me that the time was ripe for a detailed exploration of the origins of type. Hence, I have written a three-part, 40,000-word essay designed to give a detailed account of my position. I started by critiquing the idea to use a neo-Freudian (object relational) approach to account for the origins of type (Part I) and then proceeded to discuss the extensive (and to me, deleterious) influence of Freudian thought on the development of enneagram theory (Part II).²

In Part III, my goal is to discuss an alternative model for enneagram work that is based on a systems-theory, options-oriented view of human nature that rests upon five key premises. Here are the premises in full:

1. The enneagram is both a living symbol and tool that can be used to describe human individuality in terms of nine archetypal centers of purposeful energy, the flow between those energy centers, and the way these combine to create a dynamic whole.
2. The nine archetypal elements of the enneagram (which we call the enneagram types or points of view) are present from birth; as such, the enneagram types are more accurately described as *temperament types* or *essence types* than personality types.
3. As an innate and permanent feature of embodied individually, each enneagram type is an inherently energy-positive and competent psychic structure; its basic nature is in no way false, pathological, or insufficient.
4. Because each type is elemental, competent, and energetically unique, it can serve as a “deep structure” or blueprint for the development of differentiated perception, conception, and action that becomes the core of the mature personality.
5. By providing a definitive structure that can contain, shape, and enhance embodied individuality, type supports our ability to be receptive in the moment, creative in our thinking, and responsible for our actions—i.e., to appreciate and fulfill *dharma* (our responsibilities to ourselves and to life).

In brief: The enneagram is a living, dynamic system and tool that can be used to describe nine kinds of human individuality—the *nine enneagram types*. Each type represents a profoundly motivating aspect of temperament that exists from birth that provides each of us with resources for the development of a mature personality in adulthood. We can thus say that our enneagram type is in no way a barrier to development but rather a means of enhancing individuality and thus supporting life in the larger sense (the dharma).

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Below I further unpack these five points, discussing what they mean, why they matter, and what their widespread acceptance might mean for the future of the enneagram work.

Premise 1: The enneagram is a dynamic system

The enneagram is both a living symbol and tool that can be used to describe human individuality in terms of nine archetypal centers of purposeful energy, the flow between those energy centers, and the way these combine to create a dynamic whole.

The enneagram is about the nature of life and life's potential, which is essentially positive in nature. In this instance, "positive" is meant to evoke the idea of openness, liveliness, dynamism, and radiance. This essentially positive quality of the enneagram is what led Gurdjieff to describe it in superlatives, calling it the "a universal symbol," "a fundamental hieroglyph of a universal language," "the perpetual motion that men have sought since the remotest antiquity," and "the philosopher's stone." Thus, to call the enneagram merely positive is a modest claim; by Gurdjieff's descriptions, it is at last positive (if not much more). Using modern terminology, it is the kind of system that systems theorists refer to as open: a system that is open to interaction with its environment.

It is for this reason that those who work with the enneagram from a Fourth Way (Gurdjieffian) point of view have always tended to disparage the way the enneagram is used by most people today: to describe personality fixation. Using the enneagram in this way assumes the kind of static model that Gurdjieff did not favor; in his words, "a motionless enneagram is a dead symbol; the living system is in motion."

This is why A.G.E. Blake notes that "the fixations are 'negatives' " rather than positives—negatives that do not really belong in a system as dynamic as the enneagram.³ Blake sees the enneagram as home to nine energetic points that we have to experience and move through, envisioning a progression of people moving through the points in a chain. He observes that "anyone who arrives at some point and does nothing but consolidate his position, acts as an obstruction [to others who would move through that point]. This is the real danger of what Oscar Ichazo, Helen Palmer, and others have expressed as fixations."⁴

What is interesting about his remarks is how they re-focus our attention on the idea of the points of view as dynamic energy centers, rather than places where people get stuck. The creation of an enneagram model in which the points represent places of "stuckness" has puzzled those who learned the enneagram in the context of Gur-

djieff's teachings, because it constitutes such a dramatic departure from the idea of the enneagram as a source of constant motion. As participants in this dance of life, we are also in constant motion—this is what the Gurdjieffian teachings on the enneagram tell us over and over again.

Given this scenario, how is it that when we use the enneagram to describe the psyche, we develop a model that is so static in nature—that focuses so heavily on fixation rather than flow? Such a model violates the very spirit of the enneagram. We should remember Gurdjieff's observation that "a motionless enneagram is a dead enneagram." Elsewhere, he observes that "there is nothing dead or inanimate in nature"⁵—another reminder of the fruitlessness of thinking of the human psyche only in terms of fixation. Finally, he tells us that "it is impossible to recognize a wrong way without knowing the right way... One must think of how to find the right way."⁶

Gurdjieff was a tough spiritual teacher, but his focus was still essentially positive—and that positive focus is nowhere more clearly discernible than in his teachings on the enneagram. This is why his enneagram teachings still inspire people today—and also one of the reasons why those who embrace Gurdjieff's approach tend to reject Ichazo's personality enneagram: because the former is dynamic while the latter is static. However, there is really no reason why the personality enneagram has to be a static enneagram; it is only the way we interpret the idea of "type" that makes the latter static. If we were to see the nine types as dynamic energy centers (instead of points of neurotic fixation), it would be possible to see both enneagrams as descriptions of a dynamic process. I believed that it is critically important to find some way to reconcile Ichazo's static personality enneagram model with the Gurdjieff's dynamic process model—not simply to link these two approaches conceptually, but to open the door to a way of thinking based on a positive, dynamic metaphor—one that can stand the test of time.

This is actually not so difficult, if we are willing to accept the proposition that personality (or more properly, individuality) is not automatically equivalent to fixation. However, since the teachings on the personality enneagram seem to have been originally developed as a means of describing fixation, the idea that "personality equals fixation" is deeply-ingrained and therefore difficult to drop. Thus, part of the purpose of this article (along with others I have written) is to demonstrate how it is possible to conceptualize the enneagram and the enneagram types in a way that remains true to Gurdjieff's dynamic vision of the enneagram, and at the same time describes an expanded model of personality that can help us see more clearly the relationship between ego and essence.⁷

The enneagram has the power to show up our dynamic inner nature: that it is multifaceted, multidimensional, and transpersonal. It is not merely mechanistic. It is not intended to model a deterministic, closed-system conceptualization of life. We know this because we know that Gurdjieff abhorred the idea of people behaving like robots, and was always trying to alert his students to guard against this kind of mechanical behavior and to awaken them to other possibilities.

If we look at the types simply as points on the enneagram circle, we might be able to imagine their archetypal and dynamic nature. But to do so, we have to let go of the idea of the types as exemplars of ego fixation, because this is contrary to the spirit of the enneagram.

If the types are fixed in any way, that fixation is surely a function of some eternal principle, that “fixes” the relations between and within the nine types in order to create a structure in which life can evolve. The enneagram itself represents such a fixation, an eternal structure—just as the universe in an eternal structure. Perhaps not eternal in a literal sense, but sufficiently long-lasting that it provides a reference point for cosmic evolution. Such fixation is obviously not pathological; it is simply a practical law of organizing things in the space-time continuum.

This kind of fixation (organization) exists on all levels of the created universe. It enables us to differentiate one thing from another, one level of reality from another, one moment from another. It enables us to develop a body with specialized organs, a mind with rational problem-solving abilities, and subtle feeling faculties that allow us to make value judgments in the moment.

Fixation is thus the complement to dynamism; both must be present for anything interesting to happen. When they are in balance, the fixed aspects of a system provide the stability needed for that system to function in an orderly way, to support (not inhibit) the dynamic aspects of the system. The process of establishing a balance between the two is itself a dynamic process that requires a moment to moment negotiation between creative exuberance and reflective self-discipline.

Thus, it is more useful (and more accurate) to see the enneagram types as *fixed*, rather than fixated, in nature, and to realize that the fixed aspect of each type is designed to provide a container for the energy of that type. Both the fixed aspect of the type (the type *structure*) and the motivation (the type *energy*) are essential for our well-being: the former provides a stable structure for the psyche and the latter provides the motivation we need to do things in life.

Seeing the types as ego defenses is simply too narrow a vision, and one that does not accord with the facts. If type were just an ego defense, then how could it be so stable?

How could it be a structure that persists throughout life? Why wouldn't it go away as the result of therapy or some other life-transforming experience?

Type is in fact an extraordinarily stable psychic feature. It does indeed persist throughout life. Its energy can be expressed in ways that are undisciplined, self-centered, or destructive—or in ways that are disciplined, creative, and constructive.

It should be noted that we cannot transcend the type via spiritual work. The desire for that kind of transcendence reflects an unrealistic idea of what such work is all about, and an overly-idealized view of spiritual life. I have made the point before that realized (enlightened) souls inevitably retain an identifiable enneagram type—they are in no way a mish-mash of different types or blank slates. This is obvious to anybody who has spent any time around such individuals. It is why they vary so much in the way they present their teachings, even within the same school—why one is austere, another friendly, and still another intellectual. Even when the teachings are identical, the methods of presentation are not. They reflect the personality of the teacher. And the personality of the teacher is much influenced by his enneagram type.

Premise 2:

Enneagram type is innate

*The nine archetypal elements of the enneagram (which we call the enneagram types or points of view) are present from birth; as such, the enneagram types are more accurately described as **temperament types** than personality types.*

I am not the first to observe that type is with us from birth; A. H. Almaas said this in *Facets of Unity*⁸ almost a decade ago, noting that

it is part of the transmitted theory of the Enneagram that each person is born with the capacity to recognize all the Holy Ideas, but with one of them particularly sensitive, strong, or dominant... This means that one's ennea-type is determined at birth, and hence is independent of one's early life circumstances.

He mentioned this idea that type exists at birth again at his IEA address in 2005, which led to a brief discussion during the Q & A, as well as a discussion in a subsequent issue of the Conversation.⁹ However, despite Almaas' claim that what he is saying is part of the “transmitted theory” of the personality enneagram, both the surprised reaction to his comments during the Q & A after his IEA talk and the responses in the Conversation suggest that this is a new and unfamiliar idea to most people who work with the enneagram. It was certainly a surprise to hear this idea put forth by a major enneagram teacher; I had never heard it discussed at any enneagram event or in any other book. And I had not noticed it in Almaas' book, because it is not

really discussed at all; there is only this one short passage. So I had obviously not noticed it when I first perused his book. It was only recently when I re-read the book more thoroughly that I noticed this passage.

What I had always heard or read was that although type is with us for life, it originates during early childhood, in response to inevitable frustrations and disappointments encountered by the young child as he comes to realize that he is not omnipotent.¹⁰

Almaas makes the same point himself. The omitted part of the quotation above makes his position quite clear. The entire quotation reads as follows:

*It is part of the transmitted theory of the Enneagram that each person is born with the capacity to recognize all the Holy Ideas, but with one of them particularly sensitive, strong, or dominant. **This is the one that is most strongly affected by the inadequacy of early experience.** This means that one's ennea-type is determined at birth, and hence is independent of one's early life circumstances. This is bound to be a controversial notion.*

The highlighted sentence clarifies Almaas' position that although type is innate, the fact that type gives us the ability to be particularly sensitive to one Holy Idea is not an advantage, as we might intuitively think. Instead, it is a disadvantage, because once we experience the "inadequacy of early experience," our sensitivity will necessarily cause us to develop distorted and fixated thinking around our particular Holy Idea.

There is a built-in assumption here, which is that all holding environments are inadequate. This is why we all have not just a type (which is innate and non-fixated), but a *fixated* type (which is the product of early conditioning): because there is no way it can be avoided.

This is a very shaky proposition, as we shall see. However, it is the only proposition that can be advanced by someone who sees that type is innate but who also wishes to remain faithful to the traditional teachings on the personality enneagram. As such, it represents a sincere effort to find a way to account for the development of fixation, so that we don't have to embrace the unpalatable idea that human beings are born fixated.

The only problem is that it doesn't stand up to serious scrutiny, as we can see by examining the ideas of Donald Winnicott, the theorist who originally coined the term "holding environment" and also the concept of "good-enough mothering."

Winnicott's Theories. The idea of a "holding environment" has to do with the notion that small infants need to be held in order to feel loved and safe. In a more metaphorical sense, the early holding environment consists of the atmosphere around the developing infant, and the extent to which it satisfies his emotional needs.

Winnicott was by nature both an optimist and a pragmatist; as such, he seems to fit the profile of Type 7w8 relatively well. He developed his theories on mother-child interactions during the 1940s and 50s during a time in which existing psychoanalytic theories of infant development focused upon the infant's need for drive satisfaction (the classical position of Freud which was later championed by his daughter, Anna) or alternatively, on the infant's conflicted phantasies about the mother (the position of Melanie Klein and her followers). Very little attention by either of these two camps was given to the actual interactions between mother and child.

This dismayed Winnicott, who as a practicing pediatrician, was actually observing mothers and babies interacting on a daily basis. He saw firsthand how interactions between parents and children played a profound role in the child's sense of well-being. When he presented his ideas to the British Psychoanalytic Society, they were not well-received, especially by the Kleinian camp. Winnicott had the starch to stand up for his heretical views, although he suffered severe ostracism as a result. In the long-term, however, his commonsensical ideas tended to prevail over the more exotic ideas of his colleagues.

One of his most important ideas was that the adequacy of the holding environment does not require perfect mothering, but simply "good enough mothering," a view that reflects his naturally optimistic view of life. The general tone of his approach is captured in the following remarks made in a paper written in the mid-1950s:

A good enough environment provision in the earliest phase enables the infant to begin to exist, to have experience, to build a person ego, to ride instincts, and to meet with all the difficulties inherent in life.¹¹

These remarks clearly reflect the idea that good enough mothering during early life helps the infant "to meet all the difficulties in life"—an idea that is quite contrary to the notion that most infants suffer from inadequate mothering or an inadequate holding environment. To my knowledge, Winnicott never advanced the view that it is impossible for an infant to experience an adequate holding environment.¹²

Thus, if we return to Almaas' assertion that type fixation develops as a response to "inadequate holding," we can see that it rests upon an assumption that is probably false. It is certainly an assumption made by Almaas, not Winnicott. But as I noted above, it is a necessary assumption for anyone who has the discernment to notice that type exists at birth but who does not wish to see human nature as inherently false, fallen, or fixated.

We might wonder where Almaas originally got the idea that type exists at birth—an idea I have never seen discussed elsewhere. Despite what he says, I can find no

evidence that it is part of the transmitted teaching on the enneagram—the teachings of Ichazo or Naranjo during the 1970s and 80s. However, given the secrecy surrounding those teachings, it is always possible that this idea was advanced at some point in Naranjo’s SAT (Seekers After Truth) group, a group in which Almaas participated.

However, it is also possible that he came to this idea the same way that I did: via a combination of common sense, historical ideas on temperament, and empirical evidence. Common sense says that individuality is innate, because we can see that individuality in young infants and even in infants before birth. However, it is a subtle individuality, in that young infants cannot speak or even move very well, which is why for several decades it was easy to think of them as blank slates. Our best source of information may be mothers, for two reasons: (a) they are close and persistent observers of young infants, and would readily notice even slight differences between them and (b) they potentially experience infant differences while the infants are still *in utero*.

Interestingly, a few hours after writing this passage, I was watching a show on quadruplets. Obviously, their mother carried all four babies at the same time, so she was able to compare differences in how they behaved. And not just after birth, but *in utero*. She was fascinated by the differences she observed before birth and how they persisted after birth. She knew the position of each baby in the womb, and soon noticed that they did not all behave in the same way. The one that kicked a lot *in utero* became an extroverted, exuberant baby; the one that moved very little is an easy-going child, etc. If this mother knew the enneagram, it is quite possible that she would be able to type at least some of the babies, despite the fact that they are only a little over a year old.

Stories about inborn differences like these must have been circulating since time immemorial. Anyone who is around infants and small children can experience these differences for themselves, and it is this kind of direct experience that probably laid the basis for early philosophical speculations about the nature of inborn human temperament, such as we see in the ancient writings on the Four Humors.

Recent empirical research also supports the idea of inborn differences, as I alluded to in the second half of Part I of this article.¹³ Studies on inborn differences in enneagram type do not yet exist, although there is a great deal of anecdotal evidence that mothers are often aware of their children’s type even before birth, or at least aware of a profound shift in their energy during pregnancy (which some mothers have attributed to the type energy of their child, which is different from their own). At some point, I imagine it will be possible to undertake a longitudinal

study that tracks differences in babies’ behavior before birth, in early infancy, and in childhood, and see the degree to which enneagram-savvy mothers can predict the type of their child (or at least describe characteristics that turn out to be consistent with a particular type) based on information gained during pregnancy or during the first year of life. I believe that if these studies are properly conducted, they will support the idea that type is innate.

Premise 3:

Type is positive in nature

As an innate and permanent features of embodied individually, each enneagram type is an inherently energy-positive and competent psychic structure; its basic nature is in no way false, pathological, or insufficient.

In the discussion under Premise 1, I already discussed why “fixed-ness” does not necessarily imply pathology, pointing out that fixation and dynamism are actually two sides of the same coin. In this section, I would like to explore the nature of type in more depth, particularly focusing on why it is so difficult for many of us to see type as positive.

By saying that “type is positive,” I mean that the energy of each type is substantive and dynamic. It is present from birth and is part of the basic structure of the psyche. Its purpose is essentially benevolent, in that it supports, energizes, and motivates us. It also gives us the kind of stable psychological point of view that is essential for any sort of sustained development over time.

This is a simple proposition. However, this simple proposition turns out to be difficult for people to grasp because of the way that the enneagram has been taught for decades: as a system for describing nine categories of ego fixation or pathology. According to the fixationist view, type is not an essential feature of the psyche. Rather, it obscures our essential nature, and is thus detrimental to our psychological and spiritual well-being. This fixationist view is synonymous with the “ego vs. essence” model that I discussed in Part II of this article.

I have already alluded to the problem of combining the idea that type is innate with the idea that type is fixated. Instinctively we recoil from accepting such a claim, because it says that there is something so basically wrong with human nature that the problem is probably unfixable. This is a deeply disturbing notion—it is really so awful as to be unthinkable, even taboo, because it would induce such profound feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

Fortunately, it is untrue. While type is innate, it is not pathological at birth. Nor does it *become* pathological (i.e., fixated) due to environmental circumstances. The

actual energy of the type itself is always pristine and pure. It is precisely what we call *essence*. So to see the types as positive, all we have to do is see them as *essence types*.

Like the idea that type is innate, the idea of essence types is not new. To my knowledge, the first place the idea of essence types is discussed in print is in Bruce Anderson's article, "Essence and Personality," published in the May 1996 issue of the *EM*.

After reviewing Gurdjieff's ideas on personality and essence, Anderson arrives at the same point anyone arrives who takes a detailed look at enneagram theory:

In the usual Enneagram description of types, there is some account of how each type was formed by earliest childhood experiences. This explanation, besides not being supported by research, is not logical. For example, not all children in "physical intrusive" families are Twos, nor do all children raised by "untrustworthy parents" become Sixes. Children born into the same environment develop different personalities" (p. 12).

(This is the same observation made by Peter O'Hanrahan in a letter published in last month's *EM* in response to Part I of this article—the fact that, despite what we may have heard, there is no evidence that certain types of early experiences produce certain enneagram types.)

Anderson goes on to ask the obvious question: "Is essence, not personality, the true type?" He obviously thinks the answer is yes. He then wonders, "What would the enneagram of essence look like?" But he does not provide an answer, observing that this is "another, much larger question" (p. 13).

In an interview with Oscar Ichazo, *EM* interviewers Jack Labanauskas and Andrea Isaacs tried to get Ichazo to talk about whether he sees the nine types as ego-based or essence-based, but they got no definitive answer. (Ichazo preferred to launch into a convoluted discussion about the benefits of Protoanalysis and its superiority to all subsequent enneagram approaches.)

In March 2000, Courtney Behm wrote that she was getting "uncomfortable with the concept of Essence, with a capital E." She also said that she hoped to discover how we can bring Essence (with the capital E) "home to our small-e existence" (p. 1). Playing the role of skeptic, she asked whether anybody has actually even seen or felt Essence. "And how would we know if you did? When we feel peaceful, is that Essence? When we are comfortable, is that Essence?" (p. 22).

These are legitimate questions. I actually think the answer is staring us right in the face, but we have trouble seeing it because we have been told that personality obscures essence. We know we have a personality, we know we have faults, and we therefore assume we must not be

experiencing essence.

But this is not true. *We are always in essence*. Logically, this must be true, because the word "essence" implies something that is so much a part of us that we can never be without it. It is the core of who we are. It is what the great non-dual wisdom traditions tell us, as well—that we are already perfect, already enlightened, already exactly where we should be.

Many of us find this answer difficult to swallow, because we look at our lives (and for that matter, our world) and see much amiss. But it is possible to make the case that our lack of perfection does not mean we lack essence—it simply means that we have not yet mastered the art of working with our essence. Why should this surprise us, if essence is truly sublime? If earth is really a school room for our spiritual and moral education, then it makes sense that we lack a complete awareness of ourselves and our potential—because we are still learning, still growing. We aren't supposed to be perfect.

Philosopher Ken Wilber discusses the nature of essence in *The Eye of the Spirit*, in an 11-page footnote¹⁴ in which he notes that essence is always present, but we have to remember that from a relative perspective, the essence we experience is essence-at-a-particular-stage, rather than essence in an absolute sense. What he is alluding to here is the idea that in every moment of life, we cannot help but experience essence—but we experience essence in a way that is appropriate for our current level of consciousness. We can evolve in our ability to experience essence—some say that we come to experience it in a deeper, richer, fuller sense—over a lifetime. This is why spiritual mentors like Gurdjieff can speak of essence development. It is because the ability to experience deeper dimensions of essence isn't a birthright but is an ability that requires cultivation.

The cultivation of essence may involve formal spiritual practices, but the energy of essence is not something that we experience only in spiritual (i.e., meditative) states. While the energy itself is pristine and may be thought of as sacred, it is not something that is confined to the realm of the ineffable. It is simply the life energy that we use in everything we do, whether we are meditating, praying, cooking a meal, driving a car, or getting drunk.

I am reminded of Brother Lawrence, whose spiritual practice included doing everything in life in a sacred way, thus bringing the sublime into ordinary life. This is akin to the principle of *ahimsa*—harmlessness—in Buddhism or devotion in Christianity. Whenever we act with dedication and devotion, essence shines through.

The idea here is that essence is in no way divorced from everyday life—it is like the sun. It is always there, whether we know it or not. But we tend to engage with it more deeply under certain circumstances.

Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi discusses the conditions that promote *flow*—the feeling that people describe as being free, joyous, “in synch”, or “in the zone.” The metaphor may depend upon the type of activity we’re talking about, but what experiences of flow have in common is a sense of deep absorption where we are focused, interested, and aware of possibilities—so much so that we typically lose track of time and space. There seems to be a creative or intuitive component to this sense of flow, as well as a sense of effortlessness, despite the fact that we originally may have had to exert a lot of effort to cultivate the skill set to reach this level of involvement, e.g., learning how to skate, run, bake, write, clean, sing, etc.

As I envision it, flow is like some sort of epiphany, peak experience, extreme synchronicity, or *kensho*—a momentary flash of realization. According to the author,¹⁵ 87% of American adults report that they have had some experience of flow; some people say it is a rare experience (happening perhaps once a year) while others report several experiences daily. It is interesting—and encouraging—that the great majority of people identify with the idea of experiencing flow, because this means that there is a widespread understanding that there is a possibility of experiencing the kind of deeply resonant communion with life that is the hallmark of human evolution.

We see a similar possibility in the discussions of expertise in *Mind Over Mind* where the authors propose five levels of expertise the highest of which—involving intuition, involvement, and experience—sounds a great deal like Csikszentmihalyi’s description of flow.¹⁶

Carl Jung’s discussions of synchronicity evoke a similar sense of anticipation, excitement, and possibility. Such an approach reminds us that life is interactive, purposeful, and full of interesting twists and turns, all of which seem to be guided by some sort of non-linear yet profound intelligence that is as mysterious as it is subtle. This view is akin to the quantum idea that life is acausal, that time and space are an illusion, and that we are not alone, but are participants in a living tapestry that is as vast as it is intricate.

Contrast these evocative, non-linear, and non-dualistic ways of envisioning human potential with the limited and dualistic view that we use when working with the enneagram. Notice how our narrow, dualistic paradigm lacks the hopeful, expansive quality of these other paradigms. It is not that we who work with the enneagram are lacking in imagination, but because—seeing the power of the system—we have been reluctant to tamper with it in any way, for fear of distorting its teachings.

But as I pointed out with Premise 1, the enneagram as presented by Gurdjieff is a powerfully positive, dynamic system. Thus, these philosophies that see human poten-

tial from a positive perspective seem to be much more in attunement with the enneagram as taught by Gurdjieff than philosophies that are negative, dualistic, and secular (materialistic) in nature.

If we can shake loose of the idea of type as a manifestation of ego (especially ego in the pathological sense)—and see it rather as a manifestation of *essence*—this approach opens a lot of conceptual doors. It will, for example, answer Behm’s question about how we move from Essence (with the capital E) to essence in everyday life. Once we see the enneagram types as essence types, it becomes possible to see that when we use the gifts of our type in a constructive fashion, we are bringing the energy of essence into daily life. This enables us to stop seeing the personality as an obstruction to essence and begin to see it rather as a *conduit* of essence—and to grasp the truth in Elizabeth Wagele’s recent comment, that “essence includes a measure of ego and personality, natural properties of being human.”¹⁷

The fact that the nine types are essence types does not preclude the possibility of this energy of essence being used in ways that don’t seem particularly enlightened. Nor does it preclude the possibility that we as individuals can feel terribly lonely or spiritually alienated.

We are not perfect people nor do we live in a perfect world. Part of the challenge of life is to learn how to be true to our inner selves while at the same time responding to the demands of outer life. This is a dynamic process involving a lot of trial and error. When we feel cut off from essence, this does not mean that we are in the grip of ego. It means that that we need to re-evaluate our approach to life.

During childhood, this is difficult. We are vulnerable when we are young, because we lack the kind of maturity, judgment, cognitive tools, and independence needed to support the essential self in a way that would be ideal. There are times when we as children may believe it necessary to deny our true feelings in order to protect ourselves, so we can “live to fight another day.” This is especially true for children living in difficult or dangerous circumstances whose survival (both physical and psychological) depends upon their ability to hide who they really are.

The problem of course is that this kind of adaptation can become a habit that we retain once the danger is past. We start to forget which parts of us are real and which are the result of adaptation. When this happens, we may begin to imagine a persona that can act as a substitute for the lost sense of self. If we imagine this enough, the false image can begin to take on a life of its own. This is the ego that we think of in the pejorative sense.

It is this unbalanced, atavistic self image we think of when we speak of ego obscuring essence. However, there

are several important things we need to remember when we are trying to reconcile ego with essence:

- Because we created this ego, we have the power to uncreate it
- Ego is actually a form of essence, not something separate from it
- Ego grows to the degree that we obsess about it (so if we want to let it go, we have to *stop obsessing*)
- Some degree of ego is simply part of life

Spiritual icon Ram Dass has wryly observed, “Through all my years of [spiritual] practice, from psychotherapy, from psychedelics, from meditation and yoga, I’ve never gotten rid of a single neurosis. They’re all still there.” He goes on to say that he now relates to these less-than-perfect parts of himself quite differently than he used to; now regarding them as quirks having no special influence on what matters most in his life.¹⁸

This is the point I would like to stress here: that it works best to reflect on ourselves without getting overly obsessed with the quirks—or giving to those quirks the power to rule our lives. If we focus upon essence, and see our type as an essence type—which it actually is—we can use the enneagram to explore our true nature, not our false self.

This doesn’t mean we can’t look at our challenges and problematic tendencies. But it does mean that we need to do it lightly—and to look at our foibles with a bit of humor (!) so we don’t get grim and heavy about the whole thing. With levity and self-acceptance, it becomes possible to make improvements without becoming despondent.

It’s also helpful to realize that the existence of conflicts can be an aid to our growth. This helps us to appreciate the conflicts that arise in connection with the type, to see how the tensions we experience allow us to get in touch with shadow aspects of the psyche. Grappling with such conflicts is not much fun, but it is through such experiences that we can potentially break through to a new level of psychic integration. (This, in fact, is what the inner triangle of the enneagram is all about; Points 3 and 6 symbolically represent the world of dualistic opposition and Point 9 represents the means by which they are synthesized and thus resolved.)

And it’s useful to look at our beliefs about the types, to ask ourselves why we are more willing to see them as negative than positive. One reason is obviously the way that most of us were taught the enneagram—as a system for identifying negative traits and motivations. But the other reason may be our own difficulty in coming to terms with the very real power of our type energy. We might think that we want empowerment, not limitation, but power is

not an easy “gift” to bear. For one thing, it entails responsibility, requiring us to be like the ox herder in the Zen ox-herding pictures—to master the ox, we need patience, commitment, and self-discipline. Also, we can misuse power. If we do, we have to suffer the consequences of that misuse; this is not something few of us relish, either. So there is a certain amount of courage that is needed to see our type energy as positive rather than negative. Nevertheless, the advantages clearly outweigh the disadvantages. When we really grasp the positive nature of the types, it’s a liberating experience. This understanding provides us with new resources for personal development, as well as making enneagram work a lot more interesting.

Premise 4: Type provides a basis for personality development

Because each type is elemental, competent, and energetically unique, it can serve as a “deep structure” or blueprint for the development of differentiated perception, conception, and action that becomes the core of the mature personality.

Type precedes personality—this is one of my main points in this essay. The nine enneagram types exist at birth and are primordially energetic in nature; while they may have qualities, these qualities are essentially *archetypal* in nature; they are not actually mental, emotional, or behavioral. They exist prior to physical incarnation and thus arise neither as the result of bodily drives nor the need to adapt to the physical environment.

By the time that an infant is born, however, the type is present. And it subsequently gives rise to the personality, in a sequence that looks something like this:

Individuals are born with their type. As they grow, they begin to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally. The way that this development proceeds is influenced by many factors—their physical constitution, the degree to which their physical needs are met, the love and support they receive, and a host of other factors. However, the basic structure of their personality—i.e., its basic energy and motivation—is determined by their enneagram type, because it is the type which determines temperament, and temperament which both structures the personality and determines its core motivation.

But what precisely is the nature of the personality to which type gives rise? This is an important question to answer, because until now, diverging ideas about personality have given rise to confusion about how to work with the enneagram.

Earlier I discussed Gurdjieff’s view of personality, which he sees as something that develops after age 4 in response to the need to adjust to the larger culture. As such, it is said

to be “false,” in that it is not “our own.”

However, this vision of personality differs from the way we think of personality today. In common usage, “personality” is a word we use to describe individual differences, whatever their source. It is not viewed by most people nowadays as something false *per se*; it is seen as something with both positive and negative potentials. Most of us would like to learn how to develop the positive side of personality and to minimize its negative side. We have the common sense to realize that personality characteristics which are an asset in some situations may be a liability in others.

When we encounter the enneagram, we are introduced to personality as something that is not only false, but which actually obscures essence (our true self). Now when Gurdjieff characterized the personality as false, he meant only that it is a form of social adaptation, rather than an innate aspect of the self. So the word “false,” while mildly negative, is used mainly to let us know that it is not “true” (innate). Gurdjieff never saw false personality as something that impeded the development of the true (essential) self.

However, when the Ichazo/Naranjo enneagram was developed, personality was conceptualized not only as something false, but as something that obscures the true self—the self that is innate (essential).

The result? A definition of personality where the word “false” takes on a much more negative connotation. As the enemy of the true self, personality is not just misguided, but positively sinister. It has no redeeming value. That is why it must be eradicated.

This was the “kill the ego” idea, as expressed in the counterculture during the early 1970s, when anti-ego sentiment was at its peak—and when the enneagram teachings were first emerging into public view (see Part II for more discussion). Those who headed off to Arica in 1970 were looking for the kind of instant enlightenment that would leave the ego behind forever.

I am skeptical that anyone on that 10-month retreat managed to achieve either instant enlightenment or ego death, although they did become acquainted with the enneagram. However, the anti-ego philosophy of the times was part of the original enneagram teachings, and it left a lasting mark on the culture of the enneagram community. Decades later, we are still using a set of enneagram teachings that sharply separates ego from essence, and that inevitably stresses the inherent incompatibility of the two.

However, if we want to get out of this conceptual cul-de-sac, all we have to do is revert to Gurdjieff’s original conceptualization of essence and personality (ego) as two entities that are distinguished mainly by their purpose: essence expressed “what is [inherently] ours” while per-

sonality expresses what we develop in order to participate in the larger culture.

However, I think it useful to substitute for Gurdjieff’s “personality” the term “persona” or “social persona,” and to use the term “personality” to describe the sum total of who we are—of how essence and persona combine to create a unique person. Why? Because this is the way ordinary people actually think of personality—as the sum total of who we are, our individuality, our gifts and flaws, our strengths and weaknesses. While we can separate out ego and essence for a theoretical discussion, for all practical purposes, they are inextricably intertwined. There is no such thing as pure essence or pure persona in real life. Thus, these two aspects of the self need to be reconciled with one another, along the lines that Jung proposes when he speaks of resolving the opposites in order to achieve the kind of synthesis that creates a sense of inner equanimity.

The term “ego” has its own problems. For purposes of clarity, I think it useful to confine our use of the term “ego” to refer to (a) to that aspect of the self that is specifically designed to negotiate everyday reality (this roughly corresponds to the way the term is used in psychoanalytic circles) or (b) as the “small self” that is intended to carry out the designs of the “large Self,” without arrogating to itself more power, wisdom, or knowledge than it actually possesses (this roughly corresponds to how we might view ego from a spiritual perspective). I do not like using the term “ego” as a synonym for personality; it is too narrow and too ambiguous. And it has pejorative connotations in the enneagram community. If we need to talk about “ego problems,” it is better to use the specific terms that describe the nature of the problem—e.g., narcissism, spiritual inflation, arrogance, ungroundedness, etc.—and to discuss them in terms that remind us that it is we who are acting, not a third party “ego entity” that is somehow separate from the self (see my article “Calling Ego an ‘It,’” for a discussion).¹⁹

So to summarize, I am now calling personality the sum total of our essence (enneagram) type plus the persona we develop to adapt to social conditions. It is obvious that the persona is developed out of our essence, because it is essence that serves as the raw material for any sort of psychic entity. It could be said that the idea that ego obscures essence comes from the possibility that we may devote so much of our essential energy to the development of persona that little is left for the development of the authentic self. In this sense, persona can come to obscure (or at least overshadow) the authentic self. But if so, this is not because persona is bad, but because it is overdeveloped or the person is overidentified with it. Thus, the need is to establish a balance between that which is authentic and that which is socially adaptive.

However, there is also the need for personality development *per se*. Personality must be developed, and its development is crucial to our growth both as individuals (seeking to develop our individual essence) and as participants in the society (seeking to develop the kind of social persona that allows us to effectively interact with others).

It is our enneagram type that lays the groundwork for this development. At birth, while the type may confer upon us a certain individuality, this is not fully-developed. We are not fully differentiated in any sense of the word.

The mature personality is, however, highly-differentiated. The degree of differentiation varies a great deal, depending upon our upbringing, education, and other environmental factors. It also depends on our personal desire for differentiation.

It is possible for the personality to become overly-differentiated, which Ken Wilber has discussed (and I have also alluded to, as well).²⁰ When differentiation becomes dissociation, an individual feels separated, alienated, and isolated. But differentiation is not the same thing as dissociation.

I talked about Wilber's notion that problems ensue when differentiation goes too far and becomes dissociation, such that we feel isolated from others and even from ourselves. It is important to draw a distinction between these two scenarios because if we don't, we may see all personality development as leading us away from experiences of psychic integration, intimacy, and oneness.

Now to take another step in the direction of integration, it is useful to understand that not only is personality not the problem, but that personality is a critical structure—not only because it permits ordinary functioning, but for four other significant reasons.

One is that it offers the means through which essence (spirit) can be expressed in daily life, so it is in this sense the milieu for all our expressive and creative efforts. Another is that it creates the kind of friction that enables us to develop our mental and ethical “muscles”—i.e., to become more ethical, disciplined, single-pointed, and self-controlled. A third is that it represents a rational stage of spiritual evolution that bridges the gap between the pre-rational and post-rational consciousness. According to Ken Wilber, this rational stage is a necessity for the stable development of post-rational (superconscious) awareness, because it provides the rational foundation we need to integrate such experiences into everyday life (without experiencing undue emotional shock, mental imbalance, or egoic grandiosity). This matters a great deal because, as the famed Zen ox herding pictures reveal, when we reach the last stage of the earthly spiritual journey, we come right back into the heart of ordinary life, where we “chop wood, carry water.”

Gurdjieff offers us a fourth reason to celebrate personality—the fact that supports and refines human culture: *Culture creates personality and is at the same time the product and the result of personality. We do not realize that the whole of our life, all we call civilization, all we call science, philosophy, art, and politics, is created by people's personality. 162*

Given these highly positive attributes of personality, one wonders how it came to have such a bad name in the enneagram community. Of course, it is because we associate the enneagram types with personality types, and personality with the obscuring of essence. However, if we take a page from Gurdjieff, who spoke of the development of personality and essence as *two individual streams of development*, we free ourselves of the necessity to denigrate personality as something unworthy of respect.

It is certainly true that personality needs proper development in order to fulfill its highest purpose. This is especially true in the West, where the emphasis is so much on individual action. Given this emphasis, combined with a relative lack of social constraints (compared to those we see in more traditional societies), we as individuals must truly learn to live by our own lights. Of course, in so doing, we are bound to make mistakes. And those mistakes may make the personality look less-than-perfect, which indeed it is.

But Winnicott is famous for reminding us of the truth we don't need perfection as parents, we only need to be “good enough”. This is as true in life as it is in parenting. So unless we want to embrace the desire for perfection the kind of zeal that perhaps only a One could appreciate, we would do well to stop and smell the roses—and to realize that in rejecting the personality because it is less than perfect, we are rejecting what is good because it is not perfect.

We would do better to look at the potentials of personality and to think about how we might properly develop them. This is not the same thing as developing an inflated ego. It is more like training a high-disciplined servant. I wrote about this idea several months ago in an article on cultivating a personality with character. By this, I mean a mature personality, the kind that in Jungian terms, has become individuated. A mature personality is a true resource, one which supports us, grounds us, and helps us fulfill our responsibilities in life. If we do it properly it is a lot of work, but work that serves as the basis for both our personal evolution and a more civilized social order.

Premise 5.

Type supports our life purpose

By providing a definitive structure that can contain, shape,

and enhance embodied individuality, type supports our ability to be receptive in the moment, creative in our thinking, and responsible for our actions—i.e., to appreciate and fulfill dharma (our responsibilities to ourselves and to life).

We know that type is intimately associated with purpose, but we often think of that purpose as emanating from an ego committed to its own survival. If we drop the idea of type as an ego defense—and accept the idea that type is a constructive psychic structure that is with us from birth—then we can explore the idea of type motivation from a whole new perspective.

This is the perspective I explored at length in my article, “The Enneagram of Life Paths,”²¹ which focuses on the role that type plays in supporting our journey through life, and especially in finding what we may call our path, calling, purpose, or *dharma* in life.

Finding one’s path in life is a strong motivator for most people, whether it’s for pragmatic reasons or soulful ones. Most people would like to know which paths are likely to work—and perhaps more importantly, which ones are not. We don’t want to be forever taking a stab in the dark, living our lives on a “trial and error” basis. If we find ourselves in a difficult situation, we would like to know ourselves well enough to work with our native energy rather than going against the grain.

The enneagram enables us to take on such challenges—to really zero in on where to go and what to do to make life worth living. Not just in the sense of supporting effective decision-making but in the sense of gaining a sense of attunement, so that there is a flow between the inner and outer dimensions of one’s life.

Although the limitations of our type can be difficult to confront, they shape and sharpen our point of view. This point of view in turn supports our efforts to find our way in life, because it shows us who we are, what matters most to use, and what roles in life make sense, given our energy, motivation, and outlook.

From this perspective, our type both hints at the *dharma* and provides the energy to fulfill it. Its limitations do not exist without purpose. Rather, they are highly purposeful and highly supportive of need to have specific experiences and to learn specific lessons in life. This assumes, of course, a larger order that exists beyond the individual, a sense of purpose that transcends the purpose of a given individual. At the same time, it assumes that each and every individual has a purpose in life, a unique role to play that can be fulfilled only by that individual, nobody else.

The focus on purpose is a key feature that distinguishes the personality enneagram from other methods of describing human personality, such as the MBTI.²² When we see this purpose as something that exists from birth, and

that is positive in nature, then it’s possible to understand the enneagram as an instrument that shows us that life itself is purposeful. And that we all participate in that purpose in some way.

This idea has great import at a time when it is so hard for so many people to look at life and find any real sense of meaning. The very geometry and design of the enneagram tells us otherwise. And when used to describe the nine types, the enneagram helps us see the purpose of our own lives, how it interacts with the lives of others, and how it all fits within a larger whole.

This idea is compelling. It gives us a powerful way to account for the purposeful nature of each type. It is more plausible to think of the types as expressions of divine intelligence and individual dharma than to think of them as outgrowths of inflated ego and egoic narcissism. Why? Because the former view is consistent with Gurdjieff’s dynamic vision of the enneagram (and that of all the perennial philosophies); the latter is not.

Exploring the idea of dharma a bit more, it is a concept that is an important part of many major wisdom traditions: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Although the meaning varies somewhat according to tradition, an idea central to all of them is dharma is central to the correct understanding of the nature of life. The word means “that which upholds or supports”; that which is upheld is the purpose and laws of existence, or, if you prefer, our duty to life or God. So it definitely implies both a sense of being “in synch” with life and a sense of ethical obligation.

The idea of linking the enneagram specifically to the idea of dharma is worthwhile for two reasons. One is that it is so natural, as I mentioned above, because the idea of purpose is central to both. However, there is another more telling reason, namely, that the philosophy underlying the idea of dharma places the individual squarely within the context of a larger order—an order that both supports the individual and is supported by him. It thus confers on life a larger purpose, and confers upon the individual the responsibility to participate in life, in exactly the way that his nature dictates.

Reflecting on the philosophy of dharma particularly matters for enneagram work. It offers us a way to see our type from a positive perspective without becoming afraid that seeing our type as positive will horribly inflate the ego.

This is not a small concern. After we have heard for four decades about the power of negative ego, it is difficult for many people to believe that it’s safe to see their type as positive. There is the implication that if they see their type as mainly positive, their ego will balloon to unimaginable proportions.

This is of course possible—we do see people who become self-centered as the result of seeing only their positive traits. But this sort of extreme narcissism is most likely to develop in the individual who has no sense of herself as part of any larger order. For the person who feels like an intrinsic part of a meaningful whole, the tendency of ego to inflate is much diminished, because we tend to see things in proportion. Thus, to the extent that we take the idea of dharma seriously, we are unlikely to act solely out of narcissistic self-interest.

A person does not have to use the word “dharma” or to specifically embrace one of the “dharmically-based” wisdom traditions to have this kind of awareness. We can embrace any sort of belief that enables us to understand that our actions do not occur in isolation but always relate to life in a meaningful way. The reason I use this concept is because the Western-based notions that are roughly equivalent—e.g., the traditional concept of duty—are intertwined with religious beliefs that hold a negative emotional charge for many people, because they are associated with fear, guilt, and the like.

The concept of dharma is more value-neutral for most of us. It evokes a sense of ethical concern and the desire to be sensitive to the world around us and respectful of other people. And it does so simply by reminding us that we are all part of life. To the extent that we can be mindful of that ethos, we can probably remember to act with some degree of sanity.

* * *

So these are the five premises upon which my view of the enneagram is based. In the last section, I talk about the advantages of adopting an enneagram paradigm that points to a positive, dynamic view of human nature.

A New Paradigm

Two years ago, I wrote my first article for the *Enneagram Monthly*, “Let’s Depathologize the Enneagram!” (Oct. 2006). In that piece, I pointed out that the current ego vs. essence paradigm we use to study the enneagram is too negative, too narrow, too divisive, and insufficiently coherent. At the same time, I’ve also been presenting elements of an alternative paradigm that is broader, more positive, more holistic, and more coherent. I have written more than a dozen articles exploring these ideas from various angles.

As I was developing my ideas, one of my earliest intuitions was that type must be innate—that it must be with us from birth. It was a cornerstone of my approach. But I didn’t talk about it right away, for two reasons. One was that I needed to explore the idea in sufficient detail that I could write about it coherently. The other was that I needed to lay the groundwork before presenting this idea, because I knew it would be controversial, just as Almaas

noted when he first mentioned it eight years ago.

However, I did mention the idea that type was innate in my Sept. 2008 *EM* article, “The Enneagram of Individuality,” but only in passing. Interesting, at exactly the same time, Bea Chestnut was publishing an article with the opposite thesis: that type is largely the product of early conditioning, as predicted by object relational (neo-Freudian) theories of various stripes. It was the publication of Chestnut’s article that prompted me to take the bull by the horns and set forth the thesis that type is with us from birth and to point out the theoretical weaknesses inherent in using Freudian theory to account for the development of the nine types.

It had always seemed to me that enneagram theory was heavily steeped in psychoanalytic theory but I had not explored the topic in depth. When I decided to do so, the result was the first two parts of this article. Part I was a critique of using object relations theory to support the idea that type is the product of maladaptive conditioning. Part II was a historical exploration into the Freudian roots of the personality enneagram, in which I tried to show the extent to which many key assumptions about the types which we might think are divinely-sourced are actually loaded with Freudian and neo-Freudian assumptions about the development of human personality. We see this interpretation in many teachings on the enneagram, especially the formative teachings of Claudio Naranjo.

In Part III, I have presented an alternative paradigm which makes the following key points:

- *The enneagram is a dynamic system*
- *Our enneagram type is innate*
- *Type is positive in nature*
- *Type provides a basis for personality development*
- *Type supports our purpose in life*

The first point—that the enneagram is a dynamic system—creates a context for the other four points. If we think of the enneagram as an inherently dynamic system, how difficult can it be to see the enneagram types as innate, positive, foundational, and meaningful?

Not too difficult, I hope. But I realize the paradigm presented here is quite different from the view of the types as ego distortions or departures from essence. For those who have become used to the idea of the types as disabilities (instead of abilities), I imagine that it is not easy to see them in a different, more positive light.

In any case, it can be difficult for a positive paradigm to trump a negative paradigm. There is just something about the dark side of human nature that can exert a certain negative fascination, even on scientists. For example,

when I studied cognitive psychology, I read a lot of studies on human decision making. Even though just over half the studies done on decision making are interpreted by the investigators as showing that human beings show irrationality in decision making (while just under half show the opposite—that humans are basically rational decision makers), the “pro-irrationality” studies are cited *five times more often*.

Why is this? It’s hard to say. Perhaps negative ideas just sound much more intriguing than positive ideas; they seem to have the power to fascinate us and hold our attention.

But when it comes to our own lives, how many of us actually find it productive to focus on the negative rather than the positive? According to the research findings of positive psychology, people who see things from a positive perspective are more likely to care about others, to be content, and to engage in work that is productive and creative.²³ They are also less likely to experience a heart attack during surgery, to recover faster from surgery, to have a better response on a number of measures after an HIV diagnosis, a better immune response in old age, and to experience better overall health in college.²⁴ Thus, current research shows that taking a more positive approach to life brings a greater sense of well-being, both physically and psychologically.

This research contravenes the widespread belief among enneagrammers that focusing on the positive aspects of individuality (as reflected in our type) is likely to bring about negative consequences such as narcissistic ego inflation. Instead, the exact opposite appears to be true. This is why the field of positive psychology is rapidly gaining momentum at the same time that the influence of Freudian psychology is waning.

People today—especially young people—seek an optimistic vision for the future. They are open to a positive vision of the enneagram. I know, because I have talked with them about it. When I teach the enneagram from a hopeful perspective, people are receptive—young people, old people, and everybody in between.

I sometimes wonder just how many people we lose because we teach the enneagram from a pathological perspective. It’s hard to tell, because we never hear from them. They are the ones who leaf through our books or seminar flyers and then decide the enneagram is not for them, because it sounds too frightening or depressing. How many of these people would be interested in the enneagram, if only the enneagram were presented as a resource for developing their gifts?

The initial excitement people felt about the enneagram in the 1970s and ‘80s has now leveled off; it no longer at-

tracts the interest it did then. To find new audiences for its teachings, enneagram teachers go to other countries. While spreading the enneagram teachings far and wide may be a good thing, we have to ask ourselves whether we have really reached as many people as possible in the countries (such as the U.S.) where the enneagram has already been taught for more than two decades. Why isn’t the demand for enneagram teachings expanding? Why has the enneagram community seemed to lose momentum during the last decade? I think it’s simply because the way we teach the system is out of step with the times.

It doesn’t have to be this way. We are perfectly capable of stepping out of our 1960s anti-ego paradigm and working with the system in a way that speaks to the needs and interests of people in the 21st century. We have a great system that can clearly foster better self-understanding, relationships, and social tolerance. It can help parents raise children, teachers understand students, teams work together towards a goal, and all of us reflect more deeply on the purpose of our lives. It can help us surmount social and cultural barriers because it shows us that we all have something in common, whatever our country, language, or customs: we are all one of nine elemental kinds of people. We are all individuals with special gifts, abilities, and responsibilities. And we are all connected, all linked together as a whole.

The enneagram graphically depicts these ideas in a way that is wonderfully visual and easy to understand. As such, it has the natural ability to attract the interest of people striving for a better life via enhanced self-insight. But not if it is put forth mainly as a system for delineating character flaws or psychopathology. Casting human character in such a negative light does little to show people the power of the system, especially in times of darkness and difficulty, when what we seek is hope and illumination.

Ultimately, too much emphasis on pathology will sink the system—at least as an approach that can gain the interest of a mainstream audience. The only way to regain that interest is to show people how the enneagram can help them achieve the goals that matter to them. Not the goals that we think *ought* to matter (according to some kind of lofty spiritual, political, or social ideal), but the ones that really do matter—like finding love, creating harmony in the family, doing work that fulfills us, and understanding what makes us happy in life.

Of course, there are already people working with the enneagram with these goals in mind. But their efforts tend to be hampered by a paradigm which was never designed to support this kind of work, because of its foundational idea that the nine types represent character pathologies—pathologies that develop in response to childhood wounding. However, such an approach cannot account for the

existence of type-like attitudes and behaviors from the earliest stages of life, even *in utero*. If type were actually some sort of personality pathology that arrives between ages 4 and 6, how could infants possibly display type-related traits from birth onward?

They could not. But they do! Given this fact, we have to find a way to reconcile that information with the enneagram teachings we have inherited—teachings that were developed during an era when people vastly overestimated the role of environment in shaping human nature. Those of us raised and educated during that time (the 1940s-70s) may find it difficult to throw off the effects of what we were taught, both about human nature and the enneagram. But we really have to make an effort to do this, because it is not longer acceptable, either socially or scientifically. If we can't manage to pull this off, we'll be like old hippies trapped by our Sixties ideals, unable to grasp the fact that life has moved on and that the post-Sixties generations are dealing with a completely different set of problems and priorities.

As applied to the enneagram, this means moving beyond the limited view that the types are merely fixations, defenses, or vices. Because if we combine this belief with the fact that type is innate, we have to conclude that we are actually born with the “bad seed” of type already implanted within us. This is like saying that human nature is inherently neurotic, narcissistic, atavistic, or even just plain evil. Is this really what most of us believe?

I know I don't.

But the only way out of this Catch-22 is to broaden our view of type, so that it is not defined by reference to its negative potentials. This does not mean that type does not contain negative potentials. Of course it does—as long as human beings are not perfect and possess free will, we will have the ability to both use and misuse whatever energy we possess. But it is a very different thing to see the nine types as motivational energies that can be potentially misused versus defining the types themselves as categories of misuse.

When we can see the enneagram as Gurdjieff originally envisioned it—as a system for describing life and its dynamic processes—and the types as innate energy potentials, this makes it possible to work with the enneagram in a much more exciting, creative fashion. Such an approach has six notable advantages:

- It will open our minds (and hearts) to new possibilities and help us avoid getting stuck in conceptual ruts by turning the enneagram into what systems theorists call an *open system*—one which is essentially dynamic rather than static.
- It will promote a greater sense of individual respon-

sibility and ethical awareness by emphasizing type assets and how to use those assets with restraint and responsibility.

- It will promote a greater sense of community, interdependence, and global responsibility, because it allows us to focus more on the relationships between the types and the fact that all the types exists within a Circle of Oneness.

- It will allow us to expand the spiritual work we do with the enneagram to include not only the efforts we make to transcend our type (to get beyond seeing life only from our individual perspective) but to *use* our type (its energy and gifts) to breathe spirit into the activities of ordinary life.

- It will give us the insight we need to find our particular dharma or path in life, which will in turn enhance the lives of those around us.

- It will make the enneagram attractive to a much wider range of people—the young, parents, educators, people making career decisions, group organizers, and anyone else seeking a positive approach for developing self-insight, better relationships, and the ability to make wise career choices.

This is an exciting platform, one that is likely to appeal to a mainstream audience. The main disadvantage I see with adopting such an approach is that it means relinquishing previous assumptions, which is not so easy for any of us to do. But it is easier if we think of ourselves as perpetual students of the enneagram, rather than experts. *None of us are experts on the enneagram*, no matter how long we have studied it, how many years we have taught it, or how many teaching certifications we've received. The enneagram is so vast that what any of us knows is only a drop in the bucket. The best we can do is to continue diligently exploring the system, talking with others about our observations, and most of all, remaining receptive and open to new information.

This is the role that true spiritual teachers (and other great leaders) adopt: that of a student ready to learn. Such an attitude also helps us remain alert to the changing needs of people unfamiliar with the enneagram, so that we can adapt our approach for presenting the enneagram teachings according to the changing needs of the people who are encountering the system for the first time.

In the early 21st century, this means presenting people with an enneagram that gives them hope and inspiration. People today are full of fear about the future; they see a world of shrinking resources, potential plagues, and terrorist threats. They are tired of fear and hungry for hope; they aren't sure that their lives have any real meaning. This is why there is so much escapism, addiction,

and the desire to avoid thinking about the deeper issues in life. But it's not that people are selfish, irresponsible, and uncaring about the world around them—it's that they lack guidance or the tools and understanding necessary to make a change.

The enneagram can provide people with such a tool. Even in its present form—with its teachings framed in mostly negative terms—it is a powerful change agent. Just think of how much more powerful it could be when presented as a positive, life-affirming, and open system.

This is the enneagram I want to write about and teach. *This* is the enneagram that I want to see as the focus for our developing enneagram community.

NOTES

1 Chestnut, Bea. "Understanding the Development of Personality Type: Integrating Object Relations Theory and the Enneagram System." *The Enneagram Journal*, Summer 2008, pp. 22-51.

2 In *Part I*, I specifically objected to the idea that the neo-Freudian objects relations approach offers a good model for interpreting enneagram teachings, especially when it comes to explaining the nature and development of our enneagram type. Although I discussed specific flaws in neo-Freudian theories of personality development, my broader critique was based on the idea that these theories are rooted in a negative, neurosis-based theory of human nature. In *Part II*, I "deconstructed the Freudian enneagram"—that is, broke down the influences affecting the way we see the enneagram and the types today, focusing on the key role played by biologically-reductive Freudian ideas in combination with the anti-ego rhetoric of the 1960s to create the Freudian enneagram—an enneagram describing mainly fixations, defenses, and categories of mental disease. I also discussed its relationship to the "ego vs. essence" model put forth by both Oscar Ichazo and Claudio Naranjo that serves as a basis for the enneagram teachings passed on by Naranjo during the 1970s and 80s, particularly pointing out that it is very different from the Gurdjieffian "personality (ego) and essence" model. In the Ichazo/Naranjo model, ego is the enemy of essence; in Gurdjieff's model, it is not—ego and essence develop independently of one another.

3 p. 287 in Blake, A. G. E. *The Intelligent Enneagram*. Shambala: 1996.

4 Ibid, pp. 280-81.

5 p. 317 in Ouspensky, P.D. *In Search of the Miraculous*. Harvest: 1949/2001.

6 Ibid, p. 203.

7 The difference between the current article and others I have written is that here I provide a more in-depth, systematic argument for the position that type is an in-

trinsic and beneficial feature of the psyche that is not the outcome of environmental factors .

8 Almaas, A. H. *Facets of Unity: the Enneagram of Holy Ideas*. Diamond Books: 1998.

9 *The Enneagram Monthly*, September 2005, pp. 11-13.

10 See, e.g., pp. 336-337 in Riso, Don. *Personality Types*: Houghton Mifflin: 1987; pp. 20-22 in Jaxon-Bear, Eli. *From Fixation to Freedom*. Leela Foundation: 2006; pp. 34-35 in Dobson, Theodorre & Hurley, Kathleen. *My Best Self*: Harper: 1993; p. 29 in Naranjo, Claudio. *The Enneagram of Society*. Gateway: 2000.

11 This quotation is from Winnicott's 1956 paper, "Primary Maternal Preoccupation," cited on p. 230 of Rodman, F. Robert. *Winnicott: Life and Work*. Perseus: 2003.

12 As a theorist who developed his ideas at the height of the pro-"nurture" period, Winnicott had a more or less "tabula rasa" model of infant consciousness. Thus, when he tried to develop a theory to account for the origins of adult neurosis, he conceived of idea of a true vs. false self, neither of which was present at birth. He felt, rather, that the true self developed in response to good-enough mothering while the false self developed in its absence.#

13 *Enneagram Monthly*, Oct. 2008.

14 pp. 365-377, in Wilber, Ken. *Eye of the Spirit: an Integral Vision For a World Gone Slightly Mad*. Shambala: 2001.

15 p. 199 in *The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millenium*. HarperCollins: 1993.

16 See Chapter 1 in Dreyfus, Hubert; & Dreyfus, Stewart. *Mind Over Machine: The Power of Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer*. Free Press, 1986.

17 p. 12 in Wagele, Elizabeth. "Essence," in *The Enneagram Monthly*, Feb. 2007.

18 p. 71 in Epstein, Mark. *Going on Being: Buddhism and the Way of Change*. Broadway Books: 2001.

19 Rhodes, Susan. "Making Ego an It," *Enneagram Monthly*, June 2007.

20 Rhodes, Susan. "The Enneagram and Ken Wilber's Integral Philosophy," *Enneagram Monthly*, Nov. 2008.

21 Rhodes, Susan. "The Enneagram of Life Paths," *Enneagram Monthly*, Jan.-Feb. 2007.

22 Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

23 Taylor, Shelley E.; & Brown, Jonathon D. "Illusion and Well-being: A Social Psychological Perspective on Mental Health." *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 103, No. 2, March 1988, pp. 193-210.

24 Taylor, Shelley E. "Optimism/Pessimism." An online paper prepared for the Research Network on Socioeconomic Status and Health, available at: <http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/Research/Psychosocial/notebook/optimism.html>