

SLEEPING WITH THE ENEMY

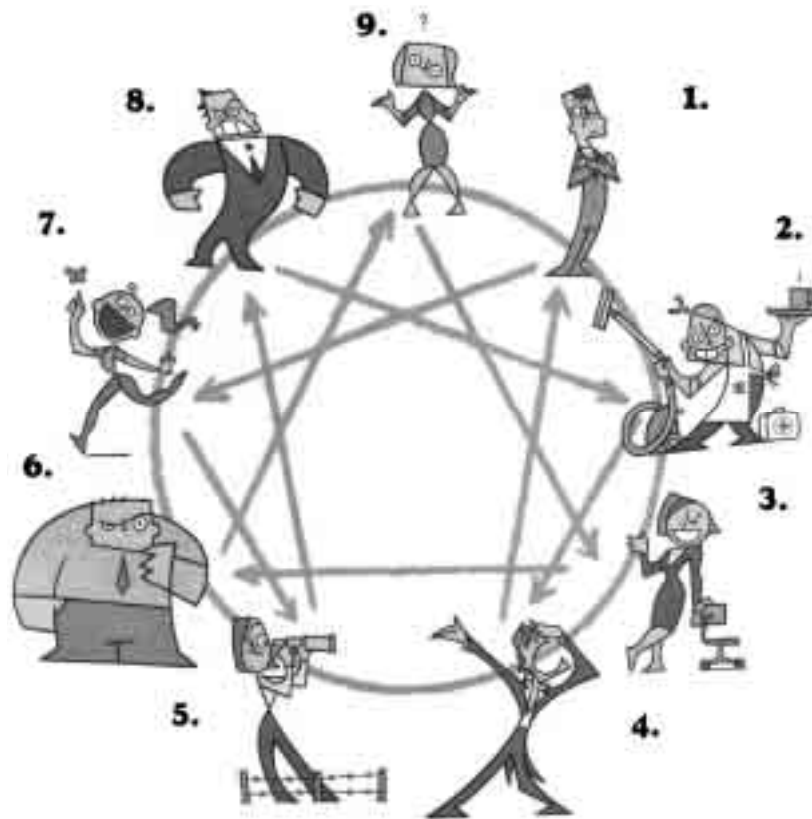
The Enneagram as a Tool for Reclaiming Wholeness, Health and Freedom

Gerry O'Neill

THE ENNEAGRAM IS AN ANCIENT spiritual tool that has been taken up and further developed by modern psychology as a way to understand human motivation and behaviour better. It has also found favour in various religious traditions as a means to enter more deeply into what lies behind the cognitive veils of doctrine that simultaneously reveal and hide ultimate reality.

At its most fundamental level, the Enneagram invites people to wake up to the possibility that they are sleeping with the enemy. The enemy is the self or, to be more precise, the personality that distorts and fails to reveal our essence. The Enneagram points to an unconscious relationship that may exist between the personality and the true self. In bringing this relationship into the light of awareness it can assist with the greater integration and proper functioning of different parts of the psyche. Of course the personality is not simply the enemy: its role is vital in human development. It reaches maturity and serves its highest calling when it reveals more fully our deepest self. The relationship between the personality and the true self is called to be one of love in which each helps the other to grow into its fullest potential. The biblical command to love your enemy takes on new meaning and insight when viewed through this lens. The question addressed in this article is simply this: *how do I love my enemy so that it is faithful to my truest self?*

The Enneagram system posits that each person is born with three native intelligences—head/right thinking, gut/right action and heart/right relationships. When the three intelligences are serving their proper functions and working together in an integrated fashion they become the means by which the true self is revealed. However, in the processes of birthing and engagement with the world, distortions occur within the



patterns of intelligence. These distortions initially help a child to feel safe, but ultimately lead to compulsive ways of being and acting in the world. Each of the nine types or energies represents a particular pattern of distortion in native intelligences. They are:

1. the perfectionist
2. the helper
3. the achiever
4. the tragic romantic
5. the observer
6. the loyalist
7. the adventurer
8. the boss
9. the mediator

You will find that I use the terms 'type' and 'energy' interchangeably here. While the reader may find this distracting, I do it for a number of reasons. 'Type' is a helpful descriptive term and is often used by Enneagram theorists. It has, nonetheless, negative connotations. Many people doing the Enneagram feel that it may result in 'pigeon-holing' and consequently is not conducive to growth. Also, in the emerging

ecological consciousness of today, I find the term 'energy' more consistent with our understanding of the human person. Many current writers on spirituality have drawn attention to the unfolding revelation of God in the story of creation itself.¹ It seems to me that the Enneagram captures this notion well in its account of the unfolding revelation of persons as they tap into the energy of their native intelligences. It is intriguing to think of human evolution as the continuing story of God first announced in the Big Bang of creation.

One way of expressing the basic insight of the Enneagram is that much of human suffering, brokenness and lack of freedom emanate from childhood emotional wounding. Every person is affected by the environment into which he or she is born. Part of that affect is to feel vulnerable. In order to protect itself the human organism suppresses certain needs so that a more urgent need is met. In other words, the organism sacrifices part of itself in order to survive. For example, the Nine energy in the Enneagram represses its desire to express its needs so that it maintains maternal love.

The feelings that are repressed in early childhood so that other needs may be secured do not vanish. They are forced out of conscious awareness to inhabit a deeper, darker place. This emotional drama is buried in our psyche and leaks out in ugly forms: the buried feelings emerge as passions that control our behaviours in unconscious but powerful ways. In this context passions are affective distortions leading to compulsive and reactive ways of responding to stimuli. Passions are also referred to as the 'root sins' of the types. This language gives a clear insight into the powerful negative influence that they exert on human behaviour. Each Enneagram energy is manipulated to some degree by its corresponding passion: One/anger, Two/pride, Three/deceit, Four/envy, Five/greed, Six/fear, Seven/gluttony, Eight/lust, Nine/sloth. For example, the suppressed anger of the One energy is often manifest in passive-aggressive behaviour. The fear inherent in the Six energy may express itself in excessive compliance or, in the case of the counter-phobic Six, in rebelliousness. And the gluttony of the Seven energy may show itself in starting many projects but in finishing few. Passions have the capacity to restrict our freedom to choose our responses in a way that leads to mechanistic behaviours and a diminishment of our humanity.

¹ See for example the writings of Diarmuid O'Murchu, Brian Swimme, Margaret J. Wheatley, Lee Smolin and Aileen O'Donoghue.

Despite these effects, it is vital to see childhood wounding as a normal part of human growth and development, and to ensure that it is not used as an excuse to blame parents who do and give their very best in the complex and demanding task of rearing children. Don Riso puts it well when he writes:

No matter how fortunate we have been in childhood, each of us has been damaged. One of the facts of human existence is that no one escapes childhood without having been deformed in some way. The necessity of finding a way of 'fitting' into the circumstances of our lives means that some parts of us must be sacrificed.²

Understanding the process of childhood wounding and how the various defence mechanisms employed to protect ourselves become factors that limit our potential is vital to self-understanding and growth. In order to embrace change and sustainable healing it is necessary to address the root issues rather than just their symptoms.

Understanding Passions

Each personality type or Enneagram energy is an unconscious attempt to escape our childhood wounding in different ways. Healing will only occur when we journey towards our woundedness and face it squarely instead of fleeing from it. The story of the disciples on the Road to Emmaus illustrates the point. After they encounter the risen Christ and recognise him in the breaking of the bread, they turn around and go towards the place they were fleeing—Jerusalem. We too need to confront the frightening places within ourselves if we want to live life more fully and freely.

Since our passions control our behaviours to a greater degree than cognitive distortions do, it is sensible for healing to start with them. The key is love. It is essential for growth that love touches the core of our being and is not deflected by our personality. God sees and loves us in the full reality of who we are, but it is difficult to experience and accept that love if we reject part of ourselves in a litany of: I am not good enough; I am not worthy; I am flawed; I am weak; I am unimportant; and a hundred other deprecations.

² Don Riso, *Enneagram Transformations: Releases and Affirmations for Healing Your Personality Type* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 125.



The Prodigal Son, by Rembrandt

Rembrandt's painting of the *Prodigal Son* is a wonderful illustration of this truth. The younger son kneels in utter vulnerability towards his father and is touched by a love that sees and accepts all of him. It is through his woundedness that he discovers love, and the new life emerging from this encounter is beautifully evoked in the way his face recalls that of a new-born child. His gluttony may have brought him to his knees in a pig-sty but it also brought him home to experience unconditional love.

All of the Enneagram energies or types can make a similar journey. It is a journey home to ourselves. Its goal is not to 'fix' ourselves but to accept the richness as well as the limitations of who we truly are. This journey may also be expressed in more practical terms. It is the journey from reactivity to proactivity. Once a passion is named, accepted and embraced it becomes more benign. A person who is aware of his or her passion will not be controlled by it but can decide freely how to respond to a stimulus. The exhortation expressed in Deuteronomy, 'See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity Choose life' (30: 15, 19), only makes sense when we are truly free to make that choice.

Cognitive Distortions

One way to love the 'enemy' is to challenge negative beliefs and thoughts and replace them, over time, with more life-giving ones. People's deepest negative beliefs about themselves are a reaction to childhood wounding, and are not the truth. It may be helpful to give some examples of typical negative messages and suggest mantras to repeat that may assist in rescripting them into more life-giving beliefs.

Energy	Negative Message	Mantra
1	It is not acceptable to make mistakes.	There is life in the mess.
2	It is not acceptable to have your own needs.	I am lovable.
3	It is not acceptable to have your own feeling and identity.	I am not my successes.
4	It is not acceptable to be too functional or happy.	I am grateful for what I have.
5	It is not acceptable to be comfortable in the world.	The world is a safe place.
6	It is not acceptable to trust yourself.	It is better to act.
7	It is not acceptable to depend on anyone.	I have enough.
8	It is not acceptable to be vulnerable or to trust.	I acknowledge my gentle side.
9	It is not acceptable to assert yourself.	I am important.

Given that negative beliefs are attached to childhood wounding and reinforced by life experiences, it is reasonable to assume that they will be resistant to change. It is therefore important to give one's mantra time and the discipline of regular practice to allow it to take root.

The False Core

Stephen Wolinsky discusses cognitive distortion using the concept of the *false core*. He explains:

How I see the Enneagram is that each one of the fixations has one primary belief, one belief that forms the false core, and every movement, every thought, every emotion, everything that you do or say, or think or feel, is either in resistance to the false core, re-enactment of the false core, re-creation of the false core, or reinforcement of the false core.³

The false core represents the primary motivating belief that anchors each energy's fixation (or cognitive distortion). In Wolinsky's thinking each Enneagram energy creates a characteristic distraction in order to divert attention away from the disturbing and self-limiting message anchoring the false core. The real difficulty is that the false core distractions are merely symptoms of its functioning: true freedom may only be reclaimed when the false core itself is confronted. Once it is exposed to awareness its symptoms will disappear, opening up new and more appropriate ways of being in the world. As the article puts it:

You stay in the false core, work with it, dismantle it, until it dissolves. When it dissolves, your psychology has little or no impact on your subjective experience.⁴



Stephen Wolinsky

³ Andrea Isaacs and Jack Labanauskas, 'A Conversation with Stephen Wolinsky', *Enneagram Monthly*, 3/3 (March 1997), 19.

⁴ Isaacs and Labanauskas, 'A Conversation with Stephen Wolinsky', 19.

In order to encourage greater awareness of one's false core and its associated distractions it may be helpful to tabulate how they typically play out.⁵

Energy	False Core	Distractions
1	There is something wrong with me.	trying to be perfect and/or trying to perfect the world. Often leads to exhaustion and feelings of resentment.
2	I am worthless.	seeking flattery, false pride and wanting to create dependence. May lead to burn-out and feelings of resentment.
3	I have an inability to do.	doing too much, self-deceit and vanity. May lead to getting out of touch with the inner life and having difficulty with intimacy.
4	I am inadequate.	melancholy, depression, a sense of betrayal or envy. May result in failure to act on insight and creativity.
5	I am nothing.	hoarding ideas, thinking and observing too much. May lead to isolation from the outer world.
6	I am alone.	fear, ambivalence and feelings of physical weakness. May lead to getting out of touch with thinking and personal agenda.
7	I am incomplete.	seeking lots of experiences and filling time with planning and anticipation. May cause exhaustion and confusion.
8	I am powerless.	acting too powerfully and suppressing vulnerability. May produce an impression of being domineering and callous.
9	I am not important or lovable.	compensating for inner emptiness by seeking affection and avoiding any kind of conflict. Often leads to living vicariously through others.

The same irony is apparent in Wolinsky's framework of the false core that exists with the passions. The flight from ourselves in the form of specific

⁵ The table is based on material from Isaacs and Labanauskas, 'A Conversation with Stephen Wolinsky', 19.

distractions is a coping strategy to avoid the distress produced by the false core, and yet it prolongs suffering and prevents us from experiencing our essence, which can only be accessed by self-confrontation.

Repressed Intelligences

Once the native intelligences of head, gut and heart are in balance and are working interdependently, they allow the true self to emerge. However, in the process of childhood wounding one of the native intelligences gets repressed so it is unable to develop properly. The two other intelligence therefore have to do the work of three, becoming overworked and co-dependent on one another. One assumes the dominant role and the other acts to support it.

An important key to healing and wholeness is to work on the repressed centre so it can do its fair share of work and, in so doing, allow the other centres of intelligence to disengage from one another and play their proper roles.

Dependent types (Two, Six and One) have a repressed head or *thinking* function. The Two energy responds automatically to the needs of the other and immediately 'helps'. The One energy sees something 'wrong' and immediately jumps in to fix the situation or person. The Six's dependence takes a different form. Instead of reacting automatically to the person or situation right in front of it, the Six energy looks to an external authority or rules and regulations to guide it. Balance and wholeness can be reclaimed in this triad by slowing down and allowing time for the thinking function to have its say. In this new-found space boundaries may be recognised, motivation clarified and freedom of response exercised.

Withdrawn types (Four, Five and Nine) have a repressed gut or *doing* function, which distorts their way of being in the world. The Four energy withdraws into feelings and uses thinking to amplify the intensity of those feelings. The Five energy withdraws into thinking and uses feeling to identify powerfully with ideas and concepts. The Nine energy withdraws into self-forgetfulness by literally going to sleep or pursuing trivial activities. Balance and wholeness can be reclaimed for these energies by discerning what a situation is asking of them and acting in the most appropriate way, so as to become more involved with people and the outer world.

Aggressive types (Three, Seven and Eight) have a repressed *feeling* function. The Three energy aggressively pursues excellence and success

in the outer sphere and tends to sacrifice the feeling function. The Seven energy aggressively pursues happiness and avoids pain to the detriment of the feeling function, especially in relation to others. The Eight energy aggressively pursues control and the exercise of power and often rides rough-shod over the feelings of self and others. Wholeness and health depend on expanding the feeling function so that power, success and hedonism are balanced with healthy relationships and intimacy.

Loving the Enemy

I began by suggesting that we may be 'sleeping with the enemy'. But we can be transformed if we stop identifying with our false selves and instead give allegiance and psychological air to our deepest selves. Real victory in human growth and development is the private victory whereby the personality claims its rightful purpose as the faithful servant to the true self and not its mask. Saint Cyprian suggested in the third century that the best way of getting to know God is to know oneself. And Saint Augustine noted some one hundred years later that these two knowings are indivisible. There is a risk of betraying our deepest aspirations as human beings and setting in motion the process of our own disintegration if we do not stay awake to the dangers posed by an inflated ego.

Gerry O'Neill taught for thirteen years in the North of Ireland before emigrating to Australia at the age of 37 with his wife, Gay, and their three children—Natalie, Mark and Megan. In Australia he lectured at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University, was a consultant for Catholic Education in Perth in professional development and formation, and was director of mission at Aquinas College before moving to St John of God Health Care as group director of mission. He is currently is regional manager of formation for SSJG Ministries Inc. He has studied the Enneagram for over twenty years and has facilitated the programme in the past five years. He has a masters degree in Education from the University of Ulster and a masters in Theology from Notre Dame University in Fremantle, Western Australia.