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Enneagram, a Type of Collective Identity?

The answer to the question “who are you?” will hardly ever let us hear a response like: “I am a lazy but sociable person, have a good relation with my father but not with my mother, experience challenges in getting into a close relationship with women because – regardless of the fact I feel superior to women – I fear being controlled by them.” Instead, we are more likely to hear something like “I am an atheist homo-sexual German sales manager of Italian descent.” Indeed, in order to explain our identity to others, we hardly describe our personality or character traits but instead mainly identify as defined by belonging to different social groups. Whereas a social or collective identity undoubtedly may offer a positive impact on the behaviour or perceived status of the individual within society, it is also symptomatic of a number of weaknesses. All too often, people instrumentalise their belonging to a social group in order to find collective strength so as to compensate for their personal weaknesses.

For example, many nationalists ‘supplant’ their own individuality for the sake of that of the nation and spend a large part of their time glorifying its history, de-

Frederik Coene



fending the independence of their statehood, insisting on using their national language and reviving (or more often reconstructing and reinventing) folklore and traditions. (Of course, such nationalism should not be confused with the closely related concept of patriotism).

Inordinate nationalistic missionary zeal in life all too often is a result of instability on the individual level, e.g. as feelings of self-worth may be low, there may be a need to find compensation on the collective level to demonstrate the significance of one’s existence. Instead of working on their own insecurity, some may focus on a (false) sense of achievement of their nation to which they personally did not contribute (i.e. they are not the heroic knights mentioned in history books, nor the authors of 17th century poetry, or play in the national soccer team which won the World Cup, etc.).

Collective identity, according to leading scholars like Henri Tajfel, is constructed as an ‘in-group’ versus an ‘out-group’ (i.e. ‘we’ vs. ‘they’). It not only serves to describe oneself but also to label others and determine our relationship to them. Here too, ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 21

The Enneagram and the Tree of Life *States of Consciousness*

When I listened to Rabbi Howard Addison’s inspiring presentation during the Baltimore IEA conference, something in me said “HOME!” So I started studying the Kabbalah (thank you, Howard!). What struck me almost immediately was how the Kabbalistic Tree of Life solved a number of questions for me I always had in working with and thinking about the Enneagram. Questions like, “What exactly is meant by Spiritual and by Essence in the context of the Enneagram?” Every teacher seemed to mean something different. It varied from “everybody knows it already: it is in us” to “this is an esoteric state of consciousness that we can only reach after many years of training (preferably in my school), if at all.”

Do we reach this desired state by discarding or transforming the Type completely, or will we always have a Type, no matter how illuminated we get? The higher state panels I saw seemed quite psychological to me. Where was the Spiritual?

Hannah Nathans

How deterministic was the Enneagram system? What about Free Will? Was the Inner Observer the same as the Higher Self? Where should I place this Essence we had lost?

By studying Kabbalah, all of a sudden I had a frame of reference for all these questions. I would like to share this with you.

Doctrine and Experience

Every religion has a *form side*, the side of dogmas, laws, rules, commandments and prohibitions, and a *mystical side*, the side of direct experience of the Divine. The form sides differ greatly; the mystical sides show remarkable likenesses. At the form side, we as ordinary people need an intermediary to speak with God; at the mystical side, we don’t need that. Historically, the official church has not always liked that, for obvious reasons. In several reli- ...CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

In This Issue

Consciousness
Michael Damian
page 4

Psychological Bypassing #2
Carl Marsak
page 7

Typing w. Tarot of the Enneag.
Susan Rhodes
page 11

Innovative E. & E. of Prototype
Susan Rhodes
page 19

Let's assume that you, like most people I know, are interested in the enneagram to help you understand your personality with precision and accuracy and to extend your understanding of others. Maybe it will help you determine what jobs suit you and why, what sort of people you are likely to get along with and who to avoid and why. You want to know where your strengths and weaknesses lie and how best to cope with individuals you find profoundly different. We can all benefit if we refine our fight-or-flight response so that our physiological reactions that occur in response to perceived harmful events, are less likely to be triggered by wrongly interpreting other's words, behaviors or the motives of the people we deal with.

Most differences are not just a matter of where we differ in our opinions, but how we perceive the world. Our past experiences, education, cultural setting all affect how and what we perceive through the filter of our temperament, enneagram type etc. Learning about equally valid but genuinely different world views will make it easier to be forgiving of behaviors and attitudes we find disagreeable.

To deal with people effectively you may need to recognize and accept truly diverse viewpoints and skills that are necessary to make the complex systems of society function. For example, people who place value on order, structure, history and discipline usually are less inclined to experiment with creative freedoms or explore new things. We can't have square circles, so we gravitate either towards the more structured or more free choices in life. A balance between the two is of course optimal and will help us to become more accepting and willing to consider the possibility that others bring valuable, albeit different, traits to the table.

Living means also learning and refining our understanding by using all tools available. Some tools are intuitively available by cultivating an awake and balanced state of mind, others may need to be tested and evaluated on a large scale using applied psychometrics, advanced statistical techniques, factor analysis or such. There is room for improvement in both, the intuitive and the scientific understanding as well as including studies of the effect of biological, cultural, linguistic, or social influences as they filter through our personality.

Since the early 70's and into the mid to late 90's, the understanding of enneagram personality types was leaning towards the assumption that each of us is driven (afflicted or held captive, as in "fixation") by our dominant type's passion. Then, in the last two decades a more balanced and positive view began to emerge along the lines of seeing type as a particular archetypal energy, qualitatively neutral, but in a pattern/style designed to function within one of nine sets of "cohesive" trait clusters we call type. Psychometric specialists use adjectives that describe feelings and modes of manifesting in the world — using mostly statistics for individuating groups that can be identi-

From the Editor

fied cross-culturally. Most tests for determining enneagram type are approaching it either from listening to our intuitive feeling about the flavor of the energy, or summing up many adjectives and assuming that the biggest cluster is most indicative of our passion/type.

In this Issue:

Frederik Coene looks from a different angle at "Enneagram, a Type of Collective Identity?" We rarely describe ourselves by how we live and feel, internally, but rather by what groups we most identify with. For example, we use nationality, profession, hobby, social status as more defining than what preoccupies us when we have to make choices of which motivations win most of the time. Frederik is well positioned, as a diplomat working for the European Union, to interact with fellow diplomats that represent their country or interest professionally, i.e. with a narrow range of wiggle room which requires all their skills to focus on achieving their task. This is a setting where their governments limit personal freedom of expression to whatever is permitted within prescribed bounds. Still, the individuality will always try to emerge through the imposed agenda.

We are all too familiar with the conflicts between what we want to do, say or think and what we can do in any given situation. So we must see the study of our type, temperament and personality as inseparable from the context or the environment. After all, who we are will have a certain chemistry with the situations we are in and it helps to understand which parts are truly "me" and which are situational or imposed by the environment. Frederik draws attention to the pitfalls we may find in our environment, and those we may fabricate ourselves.)

Hannah Nathans described the basic ideas how "The Enneagram and the Tree of Life, *State of Consciousness*" and how they manifest in practical life. She follows up with "Three Levels of Learning, Three Levels of Consciousness." These two articles were apparently ahead of their time, not getting adequate attention. Timing is as important as contents and her ideas were so good as to deserve to be revisited. This reminds me of a funny story the comedian Victor Borge told: a creative inventor went to work to design a formula for a mass-produced popular soft drink. His first concoction he called 1-Up, it flopped. His next try was 2-Up. It did not go well either. He gave up after four more tries, his last was 6-Up... "darn! He never knew how close he came..."

Hannah describes the two sides every religion has -- the "form or dogma" and the "mystical" side.

Systems like the enneagram also have two sides. There is the practical psychology side concerned with the relationship with oneself and with others and the spiritual side that indicates the consistent model and concrete frame of reference for spiritual growth.

Hannah also says that our growth can be characterized as going through three stages. Behavioral changes are at the first order of learning, the second order requires observation of patterns, re-framing or dis-identifying; and transformation is the third order where we invoke the higher ideas and virtues that establish us in a higher state of consciousness.

Michael Damian is going deeper into the "Art of Freedom: *Consciousness*" while we pay attention to the practical everyday requirements. He reminds us to stay in touch with what is truly essential, i.e. the larger context within which we experience our self-hood. We may think it is how we perceive it, but in the back of our minds a nagging doubt tells us there is more to this picture. Using Michael's own words: "When we derive our identity from mental contents and body image we entertain a delusion of great proportions. Though we recognize that our mind is often filled with dissatisfaction, fear, and frustration, we are generally unaware of the cause. We do not realize that we are experiencing the symptoms of mistaken identity."

Our delusion is all the more pernicious because we can scarcely conceive that we are ensnared in it. Despite all the misery it creates, our identification with mind patterns as who and what we are feels entirely convincing and normal. It has been said that no one is so hopelessly enslaved as one who falsely believes himself to be free. This is our human condition. It is a twilight dream-state, filled with shifting inner scenes and moods that torment us for their lack of a reliable touchstone of truth.

For those living near the Bay area, Michael has meetings in several locations. Check out his website for place and time. They may be in Mill Valley or Portola Valley CA, usually on Saturdays and Sundays or in other locations to be determined. Please check his website (see ad on page 4) for events.

"Building Bridges, in the German Speaking Enneagram World" is part of our outreach effort to expand awareness to some of the exciting developments that are going on outside of the USA. For reasons of language and/or cost of pre-internet communication options exchanges were limited to books and publications. The *EM* subscriptions, for example, received a boost when we started the very affordable PDF version by email at the same low price anywhere in the world.

Every culture and group of languages develops distinct characteristics that appeal to somewhat different personalities who in their turn come up with applications that reflect national quirks and

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For subscription and advertising rates see back cover.

Enneagram, a Type of Collective Identity?	Frederik Coene	1
The Enneagram and the Tree of Life: <i>States of Consciousness</i>	Hannah Nathans	1
From the Editor.	Jack Labanauskas	2
The Art of Freedom: <i>Consciousness</i>	Michael Damian	4
Building Bridges, in the German Speaking Enneagram-World.		6
Psychological Bypassing and the Suppression of the Sublime <i>Part 2</i>	Carl Marsak	7
	<i>in Enneagram Theory and Practice</i>	
Typing, Using the Tarot of the Enneagram	Susan Rhodes	11
The Innovative Enneagram -- The Enneagram and Prototype Theory	Susan Rhodes	19
Teacher's Listing		23
Subscription Forms and Ad Rates		24

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cultural conditions. The enneagram is universal in addressing the same nine passions, defense mechanisms and styles, but each group or region will contribute its unique vision... obviously.

Carl Marsak in "Psychological Bypassing and Repression of the Sublime: *in Enneagram Theory & Practice Part 2*" starts with a brief summary of Roberto Assagioli's life and work. Assagioli is surprisingly little known (by enneagram practitioners and transpersonally oriented therapists) considering his profound contributions of a spiritual vision that can provide a welcome antidote to the tendency to psychologically bypass.

The general tendency where psychological bypass occurs manifests through ignoring or confusing biological or metaphysical instincts. The end effect is leaving unresolved practical issues behind while assuming that they will take care of themselves as we merrily proceed to happier and higher realms of consciousness. Alas, more often than not the unresolved issues don't just disappear, instead they fester.

In a way the present work is a companion piece and bookend to the previous one (*Em* issue # 228 "The Regret of the Basic Fault"). "Many of us have significant unhealed wounds that need to be addressed, one way or the other. What we have been examining is the fact that there are several negative consequences to getting stuck in psychological bypassing, the most salient one being that we run the risk of short circuiting and sacrificing our ability to understand and participate in our own spiritual evolution. After all, from an *esoteric*

perspective our task is not to become psychologically sophisticated primates, but rather to transform ourselves (with a lot of help!) into spiritual initiates, adepts and masters looking forwards and upwards, expanding our consciousness into ever deeper levels of being and wider realms of becoming."

Susan Rhodes in "Typing, Using the Tarot of the Enneagram" is coming up with a brilliant original way to expand the major arcana of the Tarot to comply with numerological aspects of traditions that are based on multiples of 3 and 9. Tarot's major arcana of 21 plus the Fool who can be either zero or 22, is obviously structured on the magical and quirky number 7, and as such, the classic Tarot was used mostly i.e. in the past couple centuries, (since the so called Marseilles deck was popularized by Eliphas Levi and spread by Gypsies) as a divinatory tool for mundane questions and predictions. However, the Tarot has a deeper core of symbolism that was either lost or purposely concealed by leaving out some essential features that would place it into higher realms of use on a par with spiritual concepts. Who knows, it may be too soon to tell, but the Enneagram too, as we continue to discover, has broader and deeper secrets that still remain to be uncovered. Susan's adding 6 additional cards to the 21 of the major arcana bringing it up to 27, is still a work in progress, but Susan seems to be on to something...

As we go deeper into the structures of both the Tarot and the Enneagram and compare some of the shared tenets with millenarian sacred scriptures, we

keep finding more relationships that contain meanings and implications yet to be explained. Keep at it Susan! The writers of those renowned scriptures we love to mention did not assume to have spoken the last word on everything, just on what they had understood up to that point in time.

Susan Rhodes has two companion pieces apropos the focus of attention Frederik Coene brings to the influence and possible pitfalls Collective Identity can bring to all studies of personality including the enneagram. Her "The Innovative Enneagram" and "The Enneagram and Prototype Theory" address some of these points.

That brings up an old bugaboo about typing that in my view goes something like this:

After we tally the majority of our traits and settle on a type to our satisfaction, we may redirect our search for answers towards confirmation of what we found rather than continuing questioning. The mind's natural habit of seeking patterns now takes over by paying special attention to traits within us that fit in with the pattern confirmation. Traits that contradict or don't fit our expectations, are set aside into the "catch-all" closet where all unanswered questions are put on hold until triggered by some event or another. For example, an impressive authoritative expert or script might contradict our assumption of type.

We may or may not get shaken out of our comfortable belief and explore the new alternative. Too often have I experienced unexpected changes to feel comfortable with certainty... •