

### Enneagram Psychology (1)

The Advaita 'method' can be described as a process of negation: noticing what is going on in the inner world and saying, '*neti, neti*,' not this, not this. But before we can even say 'not this' we need to be awake enough to know what is actually going on. The Shankaracharya is unequivocal about the need to dispel this state of ignorance and indicates that as well as the practice of meditation the method requires as much observation and awareness of our inner world as we can muster.

This kind of 'serious enquiry' is possible for us, essential even, if we are to fulfil the individual promise we believe in, and there are psychological methods now available which are more or less designed for individual enterprise. One of these is based on the enneagram, which Dr Roles so frequently confirmed was the basic blueprint for all true knowledge.

Briefly, and leaving out much of the detail, Dr Roles' colleague, Rodney Collin-Smith, in the 1950's took the knowledge of the System and the enneagram to Mexico and, after his death, it filtered down in different forms to the countries of South America. In 1971 a young Chilean doctor, Claudio Naranjo, one of the members of the original Esalen Institute in California where the new trans-personal psychologies were being formulated, began using the enneagram to describe the basic range of conditioning which obscures the essential centre of human nature.

This method suggests that the unique character which distinguishes us as individuals is something like a filter – like the coloured filters used for theatrical lighting – and is formed by a ruling *passion* (a habitual emotional response) and a corresponding *fixation* (a mental attitude). These come together to perpetually shade and colour the pure light of consciousness. This process produces our individual *type* of character—the way we relate to the world and the people around us. Something, in other words, very like the 'chief feature' of the original System which, unless we become aware of it, always contrives to keep us asleep.

The enneagram is used to relate these fundamental ways of reacting to the world, the basic types of human character or personality, which are said to have been set down by Evagrius Ponticus, one of the leading figures of the 4th century Christian church. Evagrius was one of the first to record and systematise the oral teachings of the desert fathers (one of which he became) so that aspirants in search of enlightenment could identify the particular strengths and weaknesses of their individual type of character. The nine basic characters (each with three sub-types, making 27 in all) can be equated with some accuracy to the types now established by mainstream psychology, and along the way they were picked up by an early Pope and designated as the 'seven deadly sins'.

The fundamental characteristic, the seed from which all psychology develops, is described as 'spiritual laziness', *accidie*, but its deeper meaning is simply 'forgetting'. All the various character strategies are said to spring from this initial forgetting just as all the notes of a musical octave have a specific relationship with the original 'Do'. We forget who we really are (Atman) and so to fill the frightening void we construct a limited individuality, a character, from the external conditions in the world around us and with which we come to wholly identify.

The shock of birth, the inexpressible fears and confusions caused by what happens to us as babies and small children, all these conspire and coalesce to create a substitute self that can stand up to a dangerous world; this is the general understanding of all psychologies today. But only quite recently is it becoming accepted that this character, or personality, overlays and obscures the very 'Self' of which it so feels the lack.

All nine types are different manifestations of this forgetting—they are, in one sense, ways to forget that we actually *have* forgotten who we are—but we react to this forgetting differently, according to our type. In one it may induce fear, in another, anger, or regret or guilt, and each particular emotion will be accompanied by a corresponding mental attitude that colours and directs how we think about ourselves. The chief characteristic is usually very well disguised. An ‘angry’ type, (Type 1) for instance, often manifests as a perfectionist; cool, responsible, hard working, rather ‘buttoned-up’ and setting themselves very high standards; sometimes irritable, judgmental, controlled and often controlling. Sensitive to criticism, but especially self-critical and judging themselves harshly, this type may seem oddly melancholy under a surface sharpness. Order, cleanliness or any form of *correctness* can become compulsive in the pursuit of perfection..

As such a child develops, the character is formed by the infant’s internal and inexpressible anger at forgetting becoming focused externally onto a situation of being unseen or disregarded—perhaps in rivalry with siblings—and then manifests outwardly as a determination to excel and so pre-empt criticism by doing nothing wrong. This childish anger at being unrecognised is in turn suppressed, hidden away under the mental fixation of who we imagine we are, (the superior, righteous perfectionist) an image that must be sustained at all costs. The original anger has become too painful to face up to and so becomes displaced even further into an anger at themselves. Even this is often not felt as such but is likely to be projected resentfully onto the people around them who fall short of the perfect ideal, and this further validates the self-forgetting and the censoring of emotion. And so the circle of suffering goes around, its driving force effectively concealed from view.

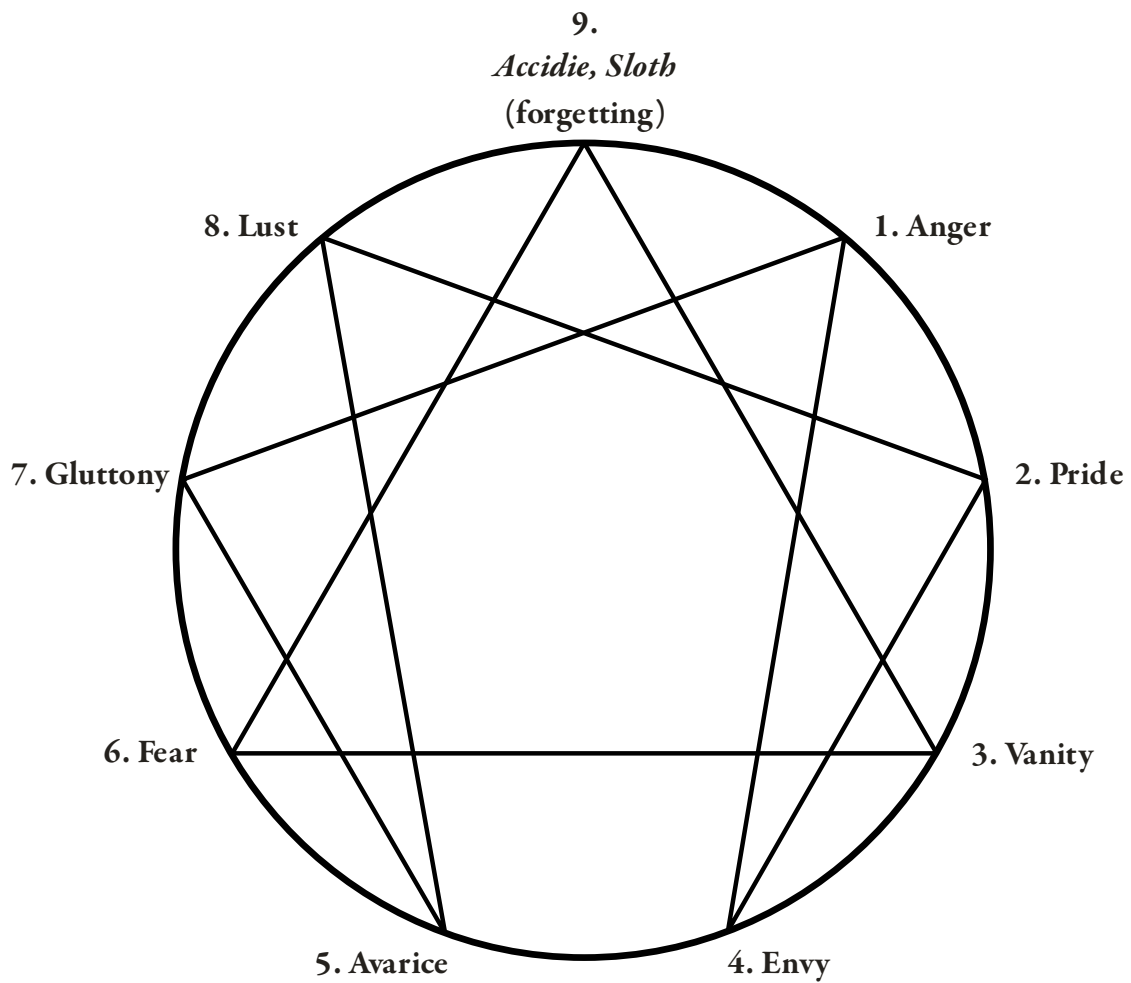
This is a bare outline of just one possibility, but it can be seen that such a mindset, when applied to meditation or spiritual discipline, may produce a high level of dedication but no really transforming effect. The practice will be diligent and admirable but may serve only to make the ivory tower that protects and insulates the individual even more impregnable to the very influence they tell themselves they are trying to embrace.

The main point of arriving at such an understanding of one’s type is not to eradicate but to integrate. We can never do away with our personality, and there is no need to, for it is an essential part of our human existence. But it can, with knowledge and generosity, become a help rather than a hindrance, relinquishing its position on the centre of the stage to allow the rightful and essential Self to take its place. Even the realised man has a personality, but it serves to channel his influence, not block it out. With enlightened self-knowledge, negative aspects can drop away, often effortlessly as shadows in sunlight, and positive qualities become freely allowed to develop their full potential.

All this is not to suggest we should become obsessed by a self-indulgent introspection, ‘sharing’ our neuroses with our friends and whining on about our tragic childhoods, but if we look honestly at our lives and at ourselves it will probably become clear that some kind of work like this needs to be done. We need to awake to what we are not so that we can ‘die’ to it and be reborn.

This enneagram character-type system has become widespread over the last twenty years and in doing so aroused a lot of popular interest and attracted a bandwagon of more or less convincing commentators and practitioners with no first-hand knowledge of the tradition from which it came. Much of the available literature is quite facile and uninteresting but the two books noted below give a reliable introduction.

Type	Passion	Expressed as desire for	Strategy/fixation	Obsession	Basic fear	Basic desire
1	Anger	Perfection	Resentment	Getting things right	Corruption, evil	Goodness, integrity, balance
2	Pride	Freedom	Flattery	Helping, Giving	Unworthy of love	Unconditional Love
3	Vanity	Approval	Deceit living for appearances	Achievement, performance	Worthlessness	Value to others
4	Envy	Origin	Melancholy	Individualist	Being ordinary	Uniqueness, authenticity
5	Avarice	Control	Stinginess	To know, understand	Uselessness, helplessness	Competence
6	Fear <i>anxiety, guilt</i>	Faith	Cowardice	Loyalty	Isolation, vulnerability	Safety, Security
7	Gluttony	Pleasure, diversion	Scheming, pretending	Getting one's own way, narcissism	Boredom	Experience of life
8	Lust wanting more	Truth	Vengeance	Challenger	Loss of control	Self-protection, autonomy
9	Accidie, Sloth (forgetting)	Love	Indolence, self-forgetting	Peacemaker	Loss, annihilation	Stability, peace of mind



The particular understanding of the enneagram that Dr Roles and others developed from Mr Ouspensky's guidance, and which contains a wealth of invaluable insight that has never reached the public domain, may very well help develop this very interesting and accessible system of self-knowledge. It is only one way, of course, but it stems originally from our own source<sup>†</sup> and offers another possibility for helping our practice and understanding of the Shankaracharya's teaching.

*From my point of view, the importance of the Enneagram is simply to understand what the Shankaracharya is saying; his stories; his guidance which I have now accepted without question. ... With the help of the Enneagram there need now be no difficulty about language at all. The Enneagram, like music, or a work of objective art, contains a universal language. (FCR)*

G.B.

<sup>†</sup>Gurdjieff refers to 27 types in *Beelzebub's Tales*.

Reading:

1. A short, accessible introduction: *The Enneagram*, Karen Webb. Thorsons. ISBN 0-7225-3191-5
2. For the whole story: *Character & Neurosis—An Integrative View*, Claudio Naranjo. Gateways/IDHHB, Inc. ISBN 978-0-89556-066-7.