

**THE ENNEAGRAM OF SOCIETY:
HEALING THE SOUL TO HEAL THE WORLD**

Claudio Naranjo, M.D.

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Reviewed by Beatrice Chestnut

In the slim volume that is *The Enneagram of Society*, Claudio Naranjo accomplishes several profound and important tasks: he provides a concise, yet multi-faceted summation of the Enneagram's "passions," he reviews the circle of the nine basic characters associated with the passions, he provides a provocative account of the "disturbances of love" rendered by the nine personality patterns, and he highlights nine "ills of the world in the light of the Enneagram." This last piece constitutes Naranjo's "Enneagram of Society."

At the heart of this dense yet readable book, Naranjo's core purpose emerges as the promotion of the idea that if we can become aware of our individual sins or pathologies or unconscious habits, we can become more enlightened collectively about the corresponding ills of our larger society. And if we become more conscious of how our global society is essentially dysfunctional in ways we've gradually fallen asleep to, we can more actively improve the human institutions that form our world. Thus, Naranjo argues that the awakening of individual consciousness is a necessary first step toward the enhancement of the conscious collective, and provides a clear if complex map for discerning both the individual and collective blocks to greater awareness and transformation.

Widely regarded as the key figure in the dissemination of the Enneagram in the last forty years, Naranjo brings a unique resumé to the job of communicating the Enneagram that no other seminal Enneagram teacher alive today possesses. He learned the Enneagram as protoanalysis directly from Oscar Ichazo, he spent time as a member of a Gurdjieff group, and he has studied ancient Christian and other spiritual and esoteric sources of the Enneagram. As a psychiatrist and a pioneer in Gestalt therapy, he also brings a wealth of psychological expertise to his Enneagram interpretations, having worked as a therapist and studied a wide range of psychoanalytic thinkers, including Karen Horney, a leading theorist in the field of character. He had years of psychoanalysis himself and was a key player in the human potential movement. In addition, as becomes obvious while reading *The Enneagram of Society*, he possesses a deep knowledge of character

as it has been conveyed throughout history in myth, classical spiritual works, literature, and popular culture.

The first thing to say about this text is that it is definitely not for Enneagram enthusiasts who are content to explore only the positive potentials of the Enneagram personality types, focusing primarily on the “strengths” and “gifts” of the nine styles. One needs a strong stomach and a total willingness to face the potentially ugly truths of one’s unconscious habits to engage with and appreciate Naranjo’s treatment of the nine types. People who would rather not hear about their “sins” and “pathologies” in straightforward, graphic terms, will not enjoy this book.

And, interestingly, Naranjo knows this and addresses it explicitly. He labels the last section of his review of the types, “Facing the Truth.” Here he states that “one of the most outstanding gifts of Gurdjieff” was his “capacity to confront people with their hard truths.” Similarly, he explains that Ichazo, who according to Naranjo called himself “master of the sword,” saw himself as being engaged in a “day-to-day war against the *ego*,” seeing the main goal of his work as “ego-reduction.” Naranjo cites the opinion held by some that “it is better not to think about the bad aspects of oneself and to concentrate on what is positive,” and he counters it by saying, “such an attitude can only come from individuals who do not understand the enormous transforming value of this knowledge, which, leaving aside the care that these people take with respect to their image and their self-importance, is used to examine oneself and not merely to increase one’s culture or congratulate oneself.” He repeats his aim as being to facilitate the self-knowledge of his readers and reminds us of a message Gurdjieff also communicated, that “one cannot know oneself without outside help.”

I dwell on this aspect of the book both to discourage specific readers from investing time in something they are sure to dislike and to emphasize the refreshingly relentless way that Naranjo speaks to deep psychological and spiritual truths related to the Enneagram. I admire the fact that he cares more about waking people up to their defensive patterns than protecting their egos. He isn’t afraid to use the words “sin” and “pathology” or to offer unflattering examples of characterological behavior. He speaks clearly and honestly to adults who truly wish to transform while knowing that transformation never comes easily.

For those who can appreciate Naranjo’s blunt, yet thorough and multi-dimensional approach to the Enneagram passions and personality types, this book holds many riches. From the first chapter, titled, “Passions, Pathologies and Neurotic Motivations,” we learn that he will pull no punches. Naranjo compares and contrasts spiritual ideas about the meaning of sin with psychological ideas about dysfunctions and pathologies, weaving together religious conceptions with psychiatric definitions as a way of introducing the core issues of the Enneagram types. Drawing from his experiences with Ichazo and the Gurdjieff work, as well as knowledge gleaned from his psychological background, he provides a concise

yet in-depth account of the evolution of his understanding of the Enneagram passions and personalities.

In this first section Naranjo also provides some valuable information about the interrelationships among the “sins” of the Enneagram types. He discusses the significance of the passions of the three core points, showing how Ichazo’s map relates to key psychological theories, and invoking figures such as Gurdjieff, Goya, Dante, Oscar Wilde, and Evagrius to support his interpretations. He then shows how the logic of each Enneagram point’s passion is the result of the interaction of the passions of the two neighboring points. For example, “pride shares with vanity falsification and emphasis on one’s own image, and it shares with anger, since pride adopts, as does the angry person, an expression of self-assertiveness and superiority.”

Drawing on a diverse set of historical referents, Naranjo explores the meaning of each of the passions in-depth, ultimately suggesting that the ordering of the passions on Ichazo’s Enneagram went further than, and improved upon, the models from antiquity. To support this assertion, he underscores the links and unidirectional paths between points of the Enneagram, also indicating how these links are affirmed by the psychodynamic literature.

At the end of this first chapter, he further delineates the links between Ichazo’s Enneagram and modern psychological descriptions of different syndromes, shadow traits, and behavioral aberrations. He concludes with a detailed discussion of how each personality type corresponds to particular psychological disorders and personality characteristics recognized by the scientific world, including DSM-III categories as well as ideas from notable authors such as Horney, Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, and Karl Abraham.

Many people may already be familiar with Naranjo’s presentation of the nine Enneagram personalities, which he has related in books such as *Ennea-type Structures* (1990) and *Character and Neurosis* (1994). However, the character sketches Naranjo provides in this second chapter of *The Enneagram of Society* struck me as much more comprehensible and potentially more accessible to the layperson than the earlier accounts.

In line with the previous chapter, he uses the passions as the jumping-off point for his character descriptions. Several aspects of this chapter are worth highlighting. First, it begins with an informative discussion about the issue of “characters” vs. “pathologies” vs. “personality disorders.” And while clarifying important distinctions between these concepts, he repeats his argument in support of the value of understanding pathologies when learning about the Enneagram types. He considers the conventional definitions of sanity and pathology and addresses the idea that within each personality type people may have different levels of pathology versus integration, “from psychosis, passing through neurosis, to the diverse grades of evolution toward sainthood (a condition of ego transcendence).”

Here again he speaks to the fact that as Enneagram literature and books are kindling a growing interest in the general public, “there are those who criticize an orientation that insists too much on what is pathological.” And he again suggests that this represents an internal barrier to growth within these critics: “it seems to me that this protest generally reflects a resistance to self-questioning and a preference for a pleasant and innocuous, light way of getting information that is so typical of our age, which has rebelled against the traditional insistence of Christian culture on sin.” In the subsequent paragraph, he states, “the value of [focusing on] these [potentially desirable] behaviors for the individual is much less than the value of recognizing their limiting and conditioned nature and how they are part of a parasitic aspect of the personality, which will have less power over one’s life if it is better known.” He then supports his point by paraphrasing Gurdjieff: “when a machine knows itself, it becomes responsible for its acts and can no longer be called a machine.”

Continuing to address the meaning of the structure of the Enneagram, he includes a short section early in chapter two on “Symmetry and Polarity in the Enneagram” before beginning his passion-based descriptions of each of the nine personality styles. He notes the “symmetry between the left and right side of the enneagram” in terms of social introversion vs. extroversion, also contending that these two groups also constitute a polarity of rebellion/seduction. He also posits the existence of a polarity between the upper and lower parts of the Enneagram of characters, speaking of this as a polarity of *tough-mindedness* and *tender-mindedness* (emphasis Naranjo’s), and also between groups of characters who are “poor of spirit” in that they are in contact with lack (4 and 5), and those who turn a deaf ear to inner hurting and so feel more satisfied (7, 8, 9, 1).

In exploring the characters of each of the nine personalities, Naranjo starts from the passion or key sin of the type, expanding his discussion into a detailed account of each of the human types from the point of view of Ichazo’s Protoanalysis. He presents the types in terms of the main personality traits and how each style of being defends against “becoming aware of the world.” In doing this, he complements each portrayal with quotations from “the most ancient of classics: Theophrastus, the successor of Aristotle,” and also old Italian caricatures that were part of the cultural movement known as the *Commedia dell’Arte*.

In the introduction to his third chapter, “The Disturbances of Love,” Naranjo explains that although his intention is to describe the “illnesses of love” in light of sins in the tradition of Dante Alighieri’s *Divine Comedy*, his theme is a reciprocal one: “how neurotic motivations constitute an obstacle for love.” In doing this, he shows “how love is impeded and falsified in each of the character neuroses and what the related problematic consequences are.” This reminded me of something very powerful I once heard during a talk by Australian Enneagram teacher David Burke. A longtime student of esoteric Christianity, Burke said that our Enneagram personality structures represent a way of pushing away or defending against love. Having been very affected by my experience of the truth

of this poignant idea, that my particular constellation of unconscious habits that the Enneagram system describes so well is the means by which I avoid allowing myself to be loved and to fall in love, I was also very interested in Naranjo's account of how the "sin" of each type and the corresponding character traits actually prevent real love from occurring.

After an investigation into the meaning of love and the different forms of love, titled, "The Unnamed Mystery," Naranjo presents the problems each personality has with the experience of love, stressing the ways each type focuses on substitute forms of love or pseudo-love. He describes each character's typical approach to "love" in terms of their passion and key traits, and also in terms of three kinds of love: self-love (related to childlikeness and focused on desire), love of other (maternal love, projected onto others), and love of God or the Divine (paternal love). I found these explorations fascinating. I also found it difficult to argue with Naranjo's characterizations of the ways each type approaches and experiences "love" from the personality or 'false self' perspective. Just as we have learned to understand that our personality types represent an effort to provide a substitute for a lost aspect of essence, Naranjo shows that our natural human quest for love also entails an unconscious search by the personality for lesser, more easily attainable, ersatz forms of "real love". As in his depiction of the passions and the characters, his straightforward account of how we pursue the wrong kinds of love in the wrong ways is also intended to wake us up to these automatic habits and invite the possibility of turning away from false substitutes and opening up to real experiences of love.

I found Naranjo's last chapter to be revelatory. In the first section, "An Enneagram of Society," he states his preference for discussing "ills of the world" as opposed to "social pathologies," because he prefers the popular expression to the more academic one. He purposely invokes the metaphor of illness to describe what he sees as social dysfunction in our society on a large scale to "develop the view of society as an organism that characterizes the modern formulation of the science of systems." Naranjo's main point here is that individuals and societies are both complex entities with diverse elements, and that "individual pathologies...have their corresponding social pathologies." He thus connects his previous chapter on disturbances of love with this one, saying, "we intuitively comprehend the relevance of diverse experiences of 'sick love' with social metaproblems." Naranjo shines a spotlight on the manifestation of the passions within the larger collective as a way of drawing attention to the "social phenomena that constitute basic forms of interference with the potential of humanity."

Beginning with the inner triangle of the Enneagram, Naranjo examines authoritarianism, mercantilism, and the inertia of the status quo as representatives of societal ills masquerading as legitimate and necessary forms of social organization, and shows how they correspond to the key issues of types Six, Three, and Nine. To me, this section was the most profound and amazing

part of the whole book, and for seasoned Enneagram students, it will perhaps be the most novel. In very clear terms, he explains how the experience of fear leads to hierarchy, and how the existence of authoritarian hierarchies leads to an “overtendency to surrender one’s own authority.” He argues that this stems from the original situation of childhood, when we were dominated or tormented by our parents, and shows how this creates a situation in which fear as a passion leads to the existence of “the bossy and the bossed” in the social world. He points to hierarchies from throughout history to support his argument: the army, the Church (at one point), and the notorious case of Nazi Germany. In modern society, he contends, “we do not value courage like the ancient Greeks; we value humility, obedience, ‘behaving well,’ because this is what the authorities want.”

Although there is not space here to do justice to all of Naranjo’s characterizations of the nine “social pathologies,” I believe his most important contribution in this chapter is in unveiling some invisible, unquestioned assumptions about the institutions of modern culture that have the effect of stifling human growth. Discussing the harmful aspects of authoritarianism, Naranjo proposes that the most visible aspect of authoritarianism is “ordering and being ordered.” This begins with the family of origin and is transposed onto the larger society as we become alienated from our own power, give too much power over to others, and become dependent on “pseudo-parental figures...seeking protection in the benevolence that is conceded by and is expected from a parent.” Once authorities assume this mantle of power, Naranjo argues, they put on an act of benevolence to enable them to exploit and control people more efficiently.

To support his idea that authoritarianism’s detrimental effects are hidden behind ideologies designed to legitimize it, he cites the fact that not too long ago it was forbidden to be Marxist, on the basis that Marx had “questioned the need for and the goodness of the State.” In this, he reveals our implicit tendency to naively believe that everything is all right, dangerously ignoring the existence of an invisible power structure governed by people interested in maintaining dominance and control.

Just as Naranjo underscores authoritarianism as a social ill around which we have developed a collective unconscious, he also provides evidence that mercantilism and the inertia of the status quo harm us in ways we do not see. Highlighting the role and consequences of competitiveness and “living for fictitious values,” he argues that mercantilism leads us to prioritize money over love and value success over art, God, other people, and even our own well-being. Discussing the covert damage caused by the inertia of the status quo, he points to the automatic nature of social life, in which our institutions become fossilized and society “loses its capacity to evolve.” Using the education system as an example, he argues that this institution fails to fulfill its function of furthering the development of individuals. “The heart is not educated, people are not educated to live, they are not guided toward being themselves, the spirit – what we are – is not developed.” His reasoning is that the institution of education has

become immense, highly bureaucratized, and immovable.

Naranjo goes on to illustrate six other “social ills” that correspond to the remaining individual pathologies he articulated in chapter one. Although less developed than these first three, each of these social problems usefully conveys Naranjo’s sense of how these unconscious patterns manifest on the collective level and how they inhibit the growth of healthy human consciousness.

In closing, *The Enneagram of Society* is a powerful book, offering unvarnished truths about spiritual understandings of sin and corresponding psychological conceptions of pathology that lie at the center of the Enneagram personalities. It vividly demonstrates how these core human problems affect us on the individual and the collective level, and what we can do about it. If you like your Enneagram insights to be positive and upbeat, this is not the book for you. But if you have a strong desire to be further awakened to your own inner obstacles to life and to love, no matter how painful a road that might be, reading this book will be a rewarding experience.

Finally, I think Naranjo’s investigation into the mysteries and requisites of love, and his focus on understanding and addressing societal metaproblems, represents an extremely valuable contribution to the Enneagram literature. We are currently facing a major state of global emergency, and I believe, as Naranjo does, that the path to survival and the essential realization of our human potential lies in becoming more aware of ourselves individually and collectively, with the hope that greater numbers of conscious individuals will create a tipping point resulting in a more conscious and humane social world. I think Naranjo intends this work to catalyze this all-important awakening, to create more understanding and openness to real love, and to initiate serious reform of social institutions, and I hope it does.