

**THE ENNEAGRAM: FUNDAMENTAL HIEROGLYPH
OF A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE**

Katrina Stevens

The Australian Institute for Enneagram Studies

Context

I first learned the Enneagram in 1997 as an attendee at the Australian Enneagram Community (AEC) founded by David Burke in Brisbane, Australia, in 1994.

David's introduction to the Enneagram occurred a decade earlier in the context of his theological studies at the Australian Catholic University, under the tutelage of Tony Hempenstall, C.F.C., a former student of Jerry Wagner.

The Panels, as they are known locally, were established after David gained his Certification as an Enneagram Teacher, with Helen Palmer and David Daniels in the United States.

In the 16 years and 576 panels that have ensued and with thanks to the 25,000 people who have attended the program, the work in self-observation that the AEC embodies and the continuous and rigorous testing and refinement of the framework and its implications, quite probably represents one the longest and most comprehensive longitudinal studies of Enneagram personality type and the passions in the modern era.

As a member of the AEC for more than a decade and a Registered Certified Enneagram Teacher with the Australian Institute for Enneagram Studies since 2003, I have attended many hundreds of David's lectures on the Enneagram and worked for a time as his research assistant, while he was compiling his doctoral thesis.

Abstract

Using the diagram as its integrating device, this article embeds the framework in its ancient lineage and offers a broad synthesis of its rich and multidisciplinary heritage.

This article's basic premise is that the Enneagram diagram concentrates and communicates meaning above and beyond its psychological application. The article focuses on understanding and interpreting the mathematical elements of the diagram, utilizing in the first instance an ancient stream of mathematical thought known as Arithmology, as a way to explore the implied philosophy, theology and spirituality of the framework.

I have taken this approach primarily because it is a fascinating course of study; human curiosity renders us innately attracted to that which is hidden, and we rise to the challenge of cracking a good code. Through our secular education, we have been led to believe that the study of mathematics is a rational, logical, scientific, and therefore respectable way to understand the world. Most of us are fluent enough in the language of mathematics to participate in conversation about its existence around us and its relevance to our lives.

It is my argument that the Enneagram diagram visually summarizes the divine ordering of the universe and our place within it. If this is indeed the case, the theoretical interpretation I present makes a compelling argument for the worth of the Enneagram framework well beyond its capacity to describe human behavior and has far-reaching implications for its use with individuals and communities.

The Enneagram Diagram

“A fundamental hieroglyph of a universal language.” – Gurdjieff¹

The diagram as we know it was first introduced to the West by George Gurdjieff, a Greek Armenian, in his earliest Moscow and St. Petersburg groups in 1914² and to Europe in 1922 when Gurdjieff established the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man in Paris.³

There is no real consensus as to specifically where Gurdjieff got the Enneagram and its accompanying diagram, though he readily acknowledged that it had been preserved in secret for a very long time. The general agreement is that he seems to have come across it as a “Seeker for Truth” somewhere in the East (Asia, the Mediterranean, Egypt, India, and Tibet).⁴

Gurdjieff never taught the Enneagram as a way to understand personality types. Rather he presented the Enneagram diagram as a dynamic model for understanding and synthesizing three universal laws⁵.

A glance at the Enneagram diagram will reveal that it is made up of three distinct elements, the first of which is a circle with the numbers 1 to 9 circumscribed around its circumference. The circle which divides the plane on which it is drawn into the finite and the infinite (the inside and outside areas of the circle respectively) in turn encompasses two flow diagrams⁶ which are read from the outside in: the first flow diagram is formed by lines that connect the points 1–4–2–8–5–7 and 7 back to 1 on the circle’s circumference; the second flow diagram forms a triangle by connecting the numbers 3–9–6.

¹ Ouspensky: 1949, p. 294.

² Ginsburg: 2005.

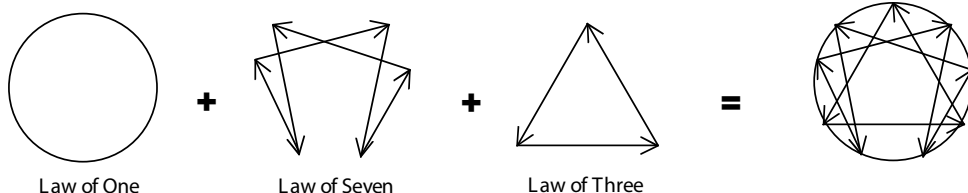
³ Webb: 1980.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ouspensky: 1949.

⁶ Burke: Unpublished.

The philosophy of the Enneagram is represented diagrammatically by these three elements: The circle represents The Law of One; the six-pointed flow diagram represents the Law of Seven and the triangle, the Law of Three.



History of the Enneagram

David Burke's exhaustive research into the origins of the Enneagram, first presented at the 2000 International Enneagram Conference, has conclusively traced the Enneagram framework to the Christian contemplatives living in the Nile Delta between the 3rd and 8th centuries CE and specifically to the written accounts of the nine passions by Evagrius of Pontus⁷ (346-399).

Evagrius was a highly educated classical Greek scholar. He was also a brilliant, young, Christian theologian renowned for his charisma, his intellectual capabilities and his incisive writing skills. He was a colleague and friend of influential church leaders of the time,⁸ and serving as Archdeacon, was in attendance at the Second Ecumenical Council⁹ in 381 CE, where the last portion of the Nicene Creed¹⁰ was formulated. Less than a year later he found himself in an extenuating personal situation¹¹ which ultimately led him to flee the Court of Constantinople.

Travelling first to Jerusalem, then the Nile Delta, and later the Egyptian desert¹², Evagrius found his way to an ascetic¹³ community—the existence of which he had previously been unaware. He lived the remainder of his life as a hermit

⁷ Burke: 2008.

⁸ Specifically as trusted friend and confidant of the Cappadocian Fathers Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa. Harmless: 2004, p. 313

⁹ Also known as the First Council of Constantinople. Harmless: 2004, p. 313

¹⁰ Church doctrine dealing with the nature of the Holy Spirit, whose fruits: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22) closely correlate to the virtues espoused by Evagrius.

¹¹ Evagrius was engaged in an affair with the wife of a high imperial official.

¹² Harmless: 2004, p. 313

¹³ The adjective *ascetic* is derived from the Greek *asketikos* meaning "rigorously self-disciplined" and *askein* "to train for athletic competition..." The desert monks were spiritual athletes of sorts; they were rigorously self-disciplined in the application of their spiritual method. As a noun it has come to mean "one of the early Christians who retired to the desert to live solitary lives of meditation and prayer."

surrounded and supervised by Coptic¹⁴ monks - the Christian descendants of the Ancient Egyptians.

It is unlikely that Evagrius made up the framework to which he gave such an educated and articulate voice—it is too sophisticated to have been developed in a single lifetime¹⁵. His great contribution to the development and dissemination of the framework we now call the Enneagram, was the absolute precision and profundity with which he painstakingly documented the teachings of the ascetics.¹⁶ As a result, Evagrius is readily recognised by scholars as “one of the most important names in the history of spirituality, one of those that marked a decisive turning-point and called forth a real spiritual mutation.”¹⁷

If logic demands that Evagrius did not devise the spiritual framework he was expounding, it is reasonable to assume that it was transmitted to him, in the very least, through the oral wisdom of the monks living in the Egyptian desert at the time. Indeed, the *Systematic Collection of the Apophthegmata Patrum*¹⁸ records Evagrius’s initial despondency at encountering “illiterate Copts” in the desert whose spiritual development far outstripped his own. He asked his spiritual director: “How is it that we, with all our education and wide knowledge get nowhere, while these Egyptian peasants acquire so many virtues?” The Abba’s answer was revealing: “... these Egyptian peasants acquire the virtues by hard work.”¹⁹

Although the oral tradition clearly predated Evagrius’s presence in Egypt,²⁰ it was not at all at odds with his sophisticated understanding of Christian theology. This would seem to suggest that perhaps the two philosophies have a common or, in the very least, a complimentary ancestry.

¹⁴ “Copt” is an English word which stems from the Arabic word Qibt or Qypt, itself derived from the Greek Aigyptios (Αἴγυπτος) meaning Egyptian. The language of the Copts at that time was Demotic. Written using predominantly letters from the Greek alphabet, it is probably best known amongst those interested in Ancient Egypt as being one of the three languages present on the Rosetta stone.

¹⁵ Burke: 2008.

¹⁶ Harmless: 2004, p. 322 William Harmless in his outstanding *Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, notes that while Evagrius was not the first to create such a list (similar lists appear for example in Origen and the New Testament), he was the first to articulate the ascetic experience so clearly. His originality stems not from the list itself but from the profound descriptions he provides of the *logismoi* and his insights into the psychology of their interplay.

¹⁷ Bouyer: 1982.

¹⁸ The *Apophthegmata Patrum* is an anthology of anecdotes from and about the ‘Desert Fathers’. Its stories and sayings focus on monastic leaders active from the 330s to the 460s. The text itself comes from a later date, probably the late fifth or early sixth century. The aphorisms and anecdotes are illustrative of the spiritual life, of ascetic and monastic principles, and of Christian ethics, attributed to the more prominent hermits and monks of the Egyptian deserts during the fourth century. Harmless, William. (2004). p.19.

¹⁹ Harmless: 2004, p. 313

²⁰ Burke: 2008.

Asceticism in Egypt

At the commencement of the 1st century CE, Jewish philosopher Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20 BCE - 50 CE) describes a group of ascetics living by Lake Mareotis, close to Alexandria, Egypt, in circumstances that parallel the ascetic communities that Evagrius describes almost 400 years later.²¹ The names given to members of the group Therapeutae (men) and Therapeutrides (women) were derived from the Greek word *therapeuo*, “to heal”²² and the type of healing the members of the sect carried out was concerned primarily with mastery over the passions and the healing of the soul.²³

...they possess an art of medicine more excellent than that in general use in cities (for that only heals bodies but the other heals souls which are under the mastery of terrible and almost incurable diseases, which pleasures and appetites, fears and griefs, and covetousness, and follies, and injustice, and all the rest of the innumerable multitude of other passions and vices, have inflicted upon them (Philo, para. 2).

The Therapeutae and Therapeutrides lived simply, chastely and happily. They renounced their property and were dedicated to the contemplative life. Their daily practices consisted of fasting, meditating, praying, working and contemplating, all of which was done in their isolated cells, each with a separate sanctuary and enclosed courtyard. On the seventh day, they came to together to form a sacred assembly and to share a simple meal.²⁴

Evagrius is often referred to as heir to the pioneering work of Anthony of Egypt, the traditional founder of Christian monasticism (c 251–356).²⁵ However, it seems more likely that, after arriving in Egypt, Evagrius was initiated into an ascetic community, similar to or perhaps descended from the those described by Philo in 10 CE. These communities existed well before the advent of Christianity, and from which Anthony must also have proceeded, since he, too, is shown to have had a highly refined understanding of the nature of the framework and the passions.²⁶

It seems too, that at least some of the ascetics were not illiterate, and that the tradition incorporated a written history. In his description, Philo reports they

²¹ Philo was a Jew from an aristocratic family that had lived in Alexandria for generations. His account of the Therapeutae make it clear he knew of the group from personal experience. Unfortunately, Philo is the only extant source of information about this community. Fortunately, he provided a very detailed description of their lifestyle. Louth: 1981.

²² And from which words such as therapy and therapeutic derive.

²³ Philo para 2

²⁴ Philo para 30

²⁵ See for example Cowan: 2002, p. 94.

²⁶ Athanasius' *Life of St Anthony* describes a similar systemization. See for example, Wallis: 2005.

possessed ‘scriptures’ and sacred writings which they read and contemplated.²⁷

Is it at all possible that these texts, the ascetic communities and by association the Mystical Theology of Evagrius of Pontus, together with the philosophical roots of the Enneagram, have their foundation in some form of Egyptian religious tradition?

Foreign Occupation of Egypt

Egypt has a long and turbulent history of foreign occupation. The Persians occupied Egypt as early as 525 BCE. They were succeeded 200 years later by the Greeks under the leadership of Alexander the Great. Then, with the defeat of the once-mighty Ptolemaic navy at Actium and the death of Cleopatra VII, the last of the Ptolemies to rule, Egypt was subsumed as part of the Roman Empire under Augustus Caesar in 31 BCE.

While the Persians and Greeks were primarily interested in the development and assurance of trade and were relatively tolerant of the religious practices of the Egyptians, the Romans in contrast enforced a violent regime intended to fully subjugate the Egyptian population. This was achieved by aggressively dismantling the Egyptian culture, including its religion, and by persecuting anyone who practiced it.

During their occupation, the Romans destroyed the temple complex of Karnak—the traditional seat of power of the Egyptian Pharaohs and the heart of the Ancient Egyptian Religion.²⁸ This included the destruction of schools and places of higher learning that flourished both there and in the nearby twin cities of Luxor and Thebes. The educated class—the mathematicians, philosophers, theologians, politicians, artists and scribes, together with the priestly class—the ascetics, monks, priests and priestesses—were persecuted, and many fled to the only habitable places in Egypt where they would be safe to continue their practices: the Nile Delta and the Egyptian desert.

Christianity

During the reign of Augustus Caesar, Jesus Christ was born, and the New Testament reports that Jesus and his family lived for a time in Egypt. If this is true, it is possible, as Jewish refugees, that Jesus and his family encountered, lived amongst and learned from an ascetic community similar to those described by Philo in 10 CE.

²⁷ “...they take up the sacred scriptures and philosophise concerning them, investigating the allegories of their national philosophy, since they look upon their literal expressions as symbols of some secret meaning of nature, intended to be conveyed in those figurative expressions. They have also writings of ancient men, who having been the founders of one sect or another, have left behind them many memorials of the allegorical system of writing and explanation” (Philo, para. 28).

²⁸ Karnak is the world’s oldest and largest extant temple complex.

Like the Therapeutae, Jesus too was a healer, and the Gospels report that he performed a large number of miracles during his three-year ministry. Some 36 unique²⁹ miracle events appear in the New Testament and of these, only five are not miracles of a healing nature.³⁰

Certainly there are other strong correlations between the teaching and ministry of Jesus and the detailed report that Philo gives on the lives of the Therapeutae. Jesus, for example, gave his disciples the “power and authority to drive out demons and to cure disease.” He instructed them to discard their material possessions; to live, where possible, communally; and when they were not welcome, to simply move on, “shaking the dust from their feet.”³¹

After Jesus’s death in 33 CE, Christianity began to flourish, if only secretly at first. Many of the concepts espoused by Christianity were already familiar to the Egyptians.³² The “new Jewish sect”, only later known as Christianity, seemed to be such a good fit with the religious philosophy of the Egyptians that by the time of the Great Diocletian Persecutions (303 - 310 AD), there were whole cities in Egypt that had been Christianized.³³

It is against this background that we must consider that Evagrius learned the “Enneagram,” or some version of it, when he fled to the Egyptian desert around 383 CE. Thereafter, he had a decisive influence not only on Syriac and Byzantine mystical theology, but on Western ascetical and mystical teaching as well.³⁴

Half a century later, when Islam swept through Egypt, the religious tradition of the Egyptian desert was absorbed into the Islamic Empire. It is readily recognised that this absorption resulted in the development of a mystical branch

²⁹ Unique in the sense that I have not counted the same stories listed in more than one Gospel multiple times.

³⁰ The five miracles of Jesus that do not include a healing or a cure are: Turning water into wine Jn 2:1–1; Feeding the 5000 Mt 14:13–21 Mk 6:34–44 Lk 9:12–17 Jn 6:1–15; Calming a storm at sea Mt 8:23–27 Mk 4:35–41 Lk 8:22–25; Converting bread and wine into his Body and Blood Mt 26:26–30 Mk 14:22–26 Lk 22:14–20 1 Cor 11:23–26; Walking on water Mt 14:22 Mk 6:45–52 Jn 6:16–21.

³¹ Luke 9:1–6

³² Familiar concepts include but are not limited to, for example, the death and resurrection of a god, the idea of the judgement of souls and a utopian afterlife for the pure of heart.

³³ Though Diocletian’s name is associated with the last and most terrible of all the ten persecutions of the early Church, the so-called Diocletian persecution can be attributed to the influence of Galerius. Three edicts (303–304) marked successive stages in the severity of the persecution. The atrocious cruelty with which these edicts were enforced, and the vast numbers of those who suffered for the Faith are attested by Eusebius and the Acts of the Martyrs. We read even of the massacre of the whole population of a town because they declared themselves Christians (Eusebius, loc. cit., xi, xii; Lactant., “Div. Instit.”, V, xi). The edicts were enforced for a further seven years after Diocletian’s abdication. Catholic Encyclopedia: newadvent.org/cathen/05007b.htm

³⁴ Von Balthasar: 1965, p. 183.

of Islam—Sufism—the mystical tradition through which Gurdjieff reputedly learned the Enneagram framework.

To See or Not to See

Of the 31 miracle stories detailed during Jesus' healing ministry, half address "driving out demons" (generally regarded to be manifestations of the passions³⁵) and/or curing blindness. Of all the medical conditions and maladies that might have existed or been brought to the attention of a healer, this concentration of afflictions seems quite extraordinary—unless you view it through the lens of Philo's account of the Therapeutae:

[The Therapeutae] heal souls which are under the mastery of terrible and almost incurable diseases...which [the] passions and vices, have inflicted upon them. (Philo, para 2) [They are also] taught to see without interruption...until they see the object which they have been earnestly desiring (Philo, para 10-11), [that being], love, which far surpasses all the gifts of fortune, and conducts them to the very summit and perfection of happiness (Philo, para 90).

But then, the passions, one's ability to "see" and fulfilment have, philosophically, always been linked.

Lao Tzu, author of the *Tao Te Ching*, in 600 BCE opens the seminal text of Chinese Taoism by addressing the very same issues. First, he observes that:

...the Nameless gave birth to the universe and the infinite variety of things that populate it. All of creation yearns to return to its Source to find completion and fulfilment³⁶.

He follows immediately with an explanation as to why the passions render "completion and fulfilment" unobtainable for most:

...Craving things blinds us to their source. Those who are free of the passions observe the signs of the Making...Those who crave the passions, are blinded to the signs.³⁷

This same admonition is echoed more than half a millennium later, embedded in Matthew's Gospel:³⁸ "How evil and Godless are the people of this day! ...You look at the sky and predict if it will be fine or if it will rain but you cannot see the signs of God?"

³⁵ See for example, *The Philokalia*, Volume V: Gregory of Sinai: "Passions precede demons, while demons follow passions." This interpretation of demonology appears to be consistent through time and across cultures.

³⁶ Burke: 2008. *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The admonition, incredibly, appears twice within the space of only a few chapters. In both chapters 12 and 16 of Matthew's Gospel, some Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign to prove the presence of God. Jesus admonishes them sharply for their inability to discern the presence of God around them.

You can begin to understand the critical and urgent nature of being able to decode the Enneagram diagram in order to comprehend the full extent of its significance. Hidden within the Enneagram diagram, in plain sight for those who can see, is a dense philosophy, together with a prescription and a map for achieving completion and fulfillment.

The remainder of this article is dedicated to putting forward a case for the interpretation of the Enneagram diagram and its accompanying philosophy.

Deciphering the Enneagram Diagram

Although neither Philo's account of the Therapeutae nor Evagrius make any overt reference to a diagram to support the framework of the passions they were teaching, both incorporate in their ritual and philosophy a strand of mathematics we now refer to as Mystical Mathematics.^{39 40} Esoteric and religious in its heritage, in the West, the tradition was first documented by the Pythagoreans in the 5th century BCE⁴¹ and disseminated through the recognised philosophical sources of traditional doctrine—the Platonists, Neo-Platonists and Gnostics of the first and second centuries AD.⁴²

That Mathematics, philosophy and theology go hand in hand may seem strange to us in the modern age but until the "Enlightenment," this had always been the case. This is evidenced for example, in the recent (early 1980s) discovery of ancient religious manuscripts in the Egyptian desert in circumstances very similar to the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts in 1945.⁴³ What followed is a story of international intrigue and document dismemberment that is still being pieced together. Of particular interest to us, however, is that the find was comprised of four ancient codices written in Coptic and Greek and included, perhaps surprisingly, (along with the only extant copy of the "Gospel of Judas") a Mathematical Treatise—most of which is now held at Princeton University, though the contents, recognised as being "unique," are yet to be released.

³⁹ Philo clearly uses mathematics to embed a deeper meaning in his descriptions of the rituals of the Therapeutae: "...[they] assemble at the end of seven weeks, venerating not only the simple week of seven days, but also its multiplied power, for they know it to be pure and always virgin; and it is a prelude and a kind of forefeast of the greatest feast, which is assigned to the number fifty, the most holy and natural of numbers, being compounded of the power of the right-angled triangle, which is the principle of the origination and condition of the whole" (Philo, para. 65).

⁴⁰ Similarly, Evagrius in the Prologue to *De oratione* is at pains to deliver a message that is embedded in mathematical elements: "... I have divided my book on prayer into 153 chapters... it combines a triangular and a hexagonal figure. The triangle symbolizes spiritual knowledge of the Trinity; the hexagon symbolizes the order of a world created in 6 days. The number 100 is square, while the number 53 is both triangular and spherical, since 28 is triangular and 25 is spherical... So you have a square figure to express the 4-fold nature of the virtues and also a spherical number, which represents the time's circular movement and so represents true knowledge of this age and world."

⁴¹ Waterfield: 1988.

⁴² Webb: 1980.

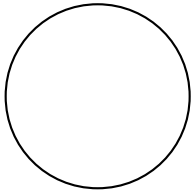
⁴³ www.abc.net/au/rn/spiritofthings/stories/2007/1929849.htm

Mystical Mathematics

The basic premise of mystical mathematics is that mathematics embeds and communicates meaning above and beyond practical or quantitative applications and is considered to be a reflection of the divine ordering of the universe.⁴⁴ Plato, for example, considered the mathematical sciences to be prerequisite studies for aspiring philosophers and theologians. He reasoned that studying the Quadrivium (geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music/harmony) inevitably led students to discover the existence of truths that were considered to be “transcendent.” Thus, seemingly common mathematical symbols or activities became instruments for intellectual or spiritual contemplation; mathematics served as the bridge between the visible, transient world and the invisible, transcendent world. Plato believed that by practicing mathematics, the mind got used to turning from “sensible” particulars to abstract concepts.⁴⁵

In this tradition, the Enneagram diagram may be considered a geometric and arithmetic representation of a continuous, universal unfolding that conforms to mathematical principles. Contemplation of the diagram’s elements can reveal to the dedicated enquirer universal truths to which they are usually blind.

The Law of One



Law of One

All creation emanates from, exists within and will return to a single source.

“For the human spirit caught within a spinning universe in an ever confusing flow of events, circumstance and inner turmoil, to seek truth has always been to seek the invariable.” – Robert Lawlor⁴⁶

One of the beliefs of the Ancient Egyptian religion—which we’ll also address in its Greek guise below—was the idea that the universe was governed by a single force: Ma’at.

Ma’at referred to the fixed, eternal order of the universe, both in nature and in human society. It was considered by the Egyptians to be the most fundamental of all natural forces, and was believed to have existed from the beginning of time. Any disruption of Ma’at was inherently harmful, and people were expected to behave in accordance to Ma’at, not contrary to it. After death, one’s soul would

⁴⁴ Koetsier and Bergmans: 2005, p. 13.

⁴⁵ Cuomo: 2001.

⁴⁶ Lawlor: 1982.

be weighed against the feather of Ma'at, and if the soul were heavier (with bad deeds), suffering in the afterworld would ensue.

Neither of these concepts is unfamiliar to us, but let us first consider the former. The idea that the universe is in a constant state of change and that there is underlying order in the change, forms the foundation of Western intellectual thought. Ancient Greek philosophers called this concept the Problem of the One and the Many.

The Problem of the One and the Many attempts to reconcile the fact that we live in a world that seems to be full of finite, changing, individual things (the Many) with the realisation that unless there is some sort of unchanging, universal, unifying principle (the One) behind these things, existence would simply be random, chaotic, and meaningless.

The models of nature and the universe put forward by ancient Greek philosophers Heraclitus (540–475 BCE) and Parmenides (540–470 BCE) created the foundation for all subsequent speculation in metaphysics. Heraclitus believed that the many contrary things were really One: “It is wise to agree that all things are in reality one thing and one thing only,” and Parmenides was an early proponent of the duality that exists between perception and reality. He argued that physical sensory experience was illusory, and that our perception of the physical world and its multiplicity was erroneous. This argument was taken up by Plato, who maintained that the world was of “One Being”: an unchanging, ungenerated, indestructible whole or Ultimate Reality.⁴⁷

The Circle

The Law of One is represented in the Enneagram diagram by the circle. Circles make a profound statement about the nature of the universe. Expanding from a dimensionless center to an infinite number of points on the circumference, a circle implies the mysterious generation of everything from nothing. Of all the geometrical shapes, the circle encloses the most space for the smallest perimeter, the most enclosure with least exposure and is symbolic of maximum creation using minimal resources.⁴⁸

For ancient mathematical philosophers the circle symbolized The One and the Greek term for *The One*—*Monad* from the roots *monas*, “Oneness” and *menein*, “to be stable”—encapsulates the principles represented by the circle.⁴⁹

Much like a wheel, the circle also represents nature’s universal cycles and rhythms which are all-pervasive in the unfolding of the universe and everything that exists within it. Life cycles and astronomical cycles are excellent cases in point.

⁴⁷ Russell: 2005.

⁴⁸ Schnieder: 1994.

⁴⁹ Waterfeld: 1988.

Neo-Platonism

The philosophical tradition of the Law of One continued in Neoplatonic writings from which the Enneagram formally draws its philosophical foundations. Neoplatonism was the last of the secular philosophies of ancient Greece. Often described as “mystical” in nature, it developed outside mainstream academic Platonism. Although Plotinus (204–270CE) is the central figure of Neoplatonism, his teacher, Ammonius Saccas (175–242 CE), a laborer who worked on the docks in Alexandria, was reputedly the founder of the Neoplatonic School.

Porphyry (c.232–c.304), Plotinus’ student, biographer and “editor” of “The Enneads” (and, incidentally, biographer of Pythagoras) reports that Origen of Alexandria was also a student of Ammonius Saccas. As a philosopher, Origen is famous for composing the seminal work of Christian Neoplatonism, *On First Principles*, which was very influential, especially among the ascetics, particularly Evagrius.⁵⁰

Alexandria

During the first three centuries of the first millennium CE, Alexandria was the gateway to Egypt and one of the most prosperous and sophisticated cities of the Roman Empire. It stood at the crossroads of the “known” world, linking the Mediterranean with the rich Nile Valley, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean beyond. Alexandria was a commercial crossroads and an ethnic melting pot. It had visitors from around the Roman Empire and from far beyond its borders, such as Arabians, Persians, Indians and Chinese.⁵¹

Greek trade with China was facilitated in particular by the “Silk Road,” an overland trade route that stretched 8,000 kilometers from China to the Red Sea and brought both commercial and cultural exchange.⁵² It seems likely that while working in the milieu of the Alexandrian docks, self-taught philosopher Ammonius Saccas would have come into contact with Eastern Philosophy in general and the classic Chinese text, the *Tao Te Ching*, in particular.⁵³

At about the same time that Heraclitus lived in Greece, Lao Tzu, author of the *Tao Te Ching*, wrote of the same universal pattern or ordering principle upon which Heraclitus styled the *Logos*, encompassing the idea that behind all material things and all change in the world lies one fundamental, universal principle which gives rise to all existence and governs all things. Lao Tzu referred to this fundamental universal principle as *The Way* or *Tao*.

Plotinus used this same fundamental principle in his metaphysical schema. In their formative periods, the theological traditions of Christianity, Islam, and

⁵⁰ Louth: 1981, p.74.

⁵¹ Harmless: 2004 .

⁵² William Harmless (2004) suggests Buddhism came to Egypt from India, while Zoroastrianism travelled west and had a significant influence on Judaism.

⁵³ Burke: Unpublished.

Judaism all turned to Neoplatonism for a language to articulate their own religious visions. Plotinus affirms the philosophical underpinnings of the Law of One, expounded above:

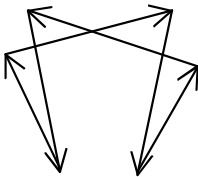
The One is the absolutely simple first principle of all. It is both “self-caused” and the cause of being for everything else in the universe (Plotinus: 5.3.14).

In reference to the Enneagram diagram, the area of a circle defined by the act of drawing it on the page represents both *The One* and the created universe which it brought forth and which, as we shall see, unfolds according to certain universal laws. In an attempt to define more accurately the concept of The One, Plotinus adds an extra dimension:

The One or the Good, owing to its simplicity, is indescribable directly. We can only grasp it indirectly by deducing what it is not (Plotinus 6.8; 6.9.3).

As Plotinus so succinctly concludes, the Divine is beyond the conceptual capacity of the human mind. It is, in fact, indescribable; we can only deduce its awe-inspiring quality by eliminating from it, what it is not.⁵⁴ In this instance, what it is not, is finite (as is, for example, human life or the behaviors described by the personality types), and therefore The One must be infinite. The Infinite is represented as what is outside the Enneagram diagram and the mathematical implication on the philosophy of the Enneagram is crucial.

The Law of Seven



Everything in the universe is in a continual state of transformation.

Law of Seven

Observe always that everything is the result of a change, and get used to thinking that there is nothing Nature loves so well as to change existing forms and to make new ones like them (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, iv. 36).

The Law of Seven reiterates the basic premise of the Greek Pre-Sophists, who reasoned that the only constant in the universe was change. Heraclitus (c.540 BCE) in particular argued that permanence is an illusion. Although things may appear to remain stable and the same, they are actually in a state of constant flux

⁵⁴ For a comprehensive discussion on negation in Mystical Theology, refer to Louth: 1995, pp. 35–40.

and an endless process of becoming. He eloquently wrote, “No one can step twice into the same river, nor touch mortal substance twice in the same condition.”⁵⁵

Furthermore, Heraclitus reasoned that the process by which one thing changed into another was not unregulated and lawless; rather, the way in which it unfolded was “. . .rhythmical and kept within the bounds of definite proportions.” That is, although everything is subject to change, change occurs in a uniform, cyclic way and nothing is ever lost or destroyed⁵⁶—only its form is changed. In Buddhism this is referred to as the Law of Impermanence.

In the developed world, where we claim material comfort as a right and technology shields us from nature’s processes, it is sometimes difficult to discern cycles in our lives. But cycles exist all around us. The earth turns on its axis so that the sun rises in the morning and sets at night, returning again the next morning. The moon changes every 28 days, in the process, marking a month. In concert with the moon, the oceans rise and fall with the tide in a constant ebb and flow. The earth completes a full circle of the sun every 365 days. The seasons come and go.

The Hindus teach that the Great Cycle began when the Unknown breathed forth the universe and will end when it is turned in on itself. Cycles are a procession from and return to the Unknown.

On the Enneagram diagram, the numbers 1–4–2–8–5–7 and 7 back to 1 are connected in a repeating cycle of seven stages.⁵⁷ This internal connection of numbers represents what Gurdjieff referred to as the Law of Seven. The Law of Seven, he said, “describes every transformative process in the universe, from the life of a cell to the life of a solar system unfolding in . . .seven successive steps.”⁵⁸

The number seven abounds in mythology, mysticism and superstition. In ancient mathematics, the number seven was considered to be sacred and was always a symbol of transformation. It was called “Telesphoros,” because, “by it, all in the Universe is led to its end.” In *Mystical Mathematics*, seven is always a symbol of eternal rather than of manifest things.⁵⁹

Unlike the regular six-sided hexagons we see in snowflakes or the practical tessellations of honeycomb, nature has no use for seven as a structure. Instead we see seven appear as independent aspects of a whole. For example, the rainbow reveals itself as seven bands of visible light, and there are seven

⁵⁵ Russell: 2005.

⁵⁶ This conservation of energy is one of the foundation principles for all science disciplines, finding application for example in the Bernoulli Equation (fluids), Voltage Law (electric circuits) and in the First Law of Thermodynamics.

⁵⁷ Point One is both the beginning and end of the cycle, hence there are seven stages, not six.

⁵⁸ William Segal in Shirley: 2004.

⁵⁹ For a more detailed explanation on the mystical nature, see for example, Schneider: 1994, or Waterfield: 1988.

geometric classifications to which all crystals belong, though there are no crystal formations that are seven-sided.⁶⁰

Since a regular seven-sided polygon cannot be constructed using only the three tools of the geometer (compass, pencil and straightedge) the shape—or more accurately, the sequence denoted by linking 1-4-2-8-5-7—is unlikely to be associated with geometry. Understanding the sequence requires an investigation into a mathematical and philosophical tradition that embraces number theory rather than the geometry of the ancient Greeks.⁶¹

The Law of Seven refers to a cycle of change that repeats, and the number 142,857 itself is a cyclic number.

The term cyclic refers to the invariance of the digits obtained in the multiplication of 142,857 by any number below the magic number 7.⁶² Note that in each of the answers below, though the initial digit varies, the digits and the order in which they appear are constant. They have a ‘carousel-like’ property, like luggage circling a baggage claim in an airport.⁶³

$$142,857 \times 1 = 142,857$$

$$142,857 \times 2 = 285,714$$

$$142,857 \times 3 = 428,571$$

$$142,857 \times 4 = 571,428$$

$$142,857 \times 5 = 714,285$$

$$142,857 \times 6 = 857,142$$

This is significant, in terms of understanding the philosophy of the Enneagram. Though the digits carousel, each successive answer is greater than the one before. That is, though the cycle repeats, it does so at a higher level each time, much like a spiral staircase. We refer to this movement - from each point to the next, 1-4-2-8-5-7 and 7 back to 1, beginning the cycle again at a higher level than the

⁶⁰ Skinner: 2006.

⁶¹ Although Alexander the Great’s empire stretched as far as India in the 4th century BCE, Indian mathematics borrowed little geometry or philosophy from the Greeks, and the great contribution of the Indians to mathematics was undoubtedly their ability to play with numbers. By the 5th century, like the Greeks and the Egyptians before them, the Indians were using a base-10 number system that incorporated place-value notation. Their system of numbering from which the modern notation is derived was, however, much less cumbersome and allowed them to develop and use rudimentary algorithms to add, subtract, multiply and divide sans abacus—something the Greeks could not do. Arab mathematicians refined Algebra during the Golden Age of Islam (8th–13th centuries). For a full treatment on the subject refer to Seife: 2000.

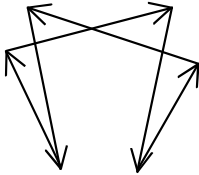
⁶² Ecker: 1983.

⁶³ Hodges: 2007.

previous cycle—the Cycle of Transformation.⁶⁴ We argue, like Gurdjieff, that if the Law of Seven is a universal law, then it must apply not only to observable phenomena, but also to human psychology and on a cosmic scale, in the unfolding of the universe.

The flow of the Cycle of Transformation—following the arrows around the Enneagram diagram—is akin to The Way described in the *Tao Te Ching*.

The Cycle of Transformation



Law of Seven

The Enneagram describes seven sequential steps that must be passed through in order to complete a single cycle of change. The Cycle of Transformation describes the succession of stages by which transformation occurs.

Evolutionarily, human beings are apprehensive of any imminent change to their circumstances or environment. The Enneagram describes nine ways that human beings attempt to exert control over their immediate environment in order to avoid change and conflict. For each of us there is one stage in the Cycle of Transformation that we believe is more critical to our personal survival than the others. There is one set of behaviors with which we are more familiar and more practiced at implementing than the others. That stage is represented by our personality type. Rather than move through all of the stages required for personal or organizational transformation, we become fixated on that stage.

If you look closely at the lines that represent the Law of Seven on the Enneagram diagram, you will notice two things: (1) the direction of the arrows summarizes a complete cycle of change 1–4–2–8–5–7; and (2) the so called “stress point” for each of the types follows the direction of the arrows away from the personality type and onward in the cycle of transformation. Clearly, surrendering the personality is stressful, and that is why the next point in the cycle from our personality type is sometimes, perhaps erroneously, called our “Stress Point.”

While modern Enneagram teachers use the arrows on the Enneagram diagram to demonstrate how a person’s behavior can alter under certain circumstances—describing them as “stress” and “security” points—in reality, the arrows represent a much broader philosophical challenge: The personality, by controlling the available resources and immediate environment, is designed to ensure personal survival. Moving away from the habitual behaviors and onward through the Cycle of Transformation, although seemingly inviting chaos and disorder, is a conscious and rational choice that will ultimately lead to personal growth or transformation.

As David Burke has astutely observed and discussed in many lectures on the topic over the past decade:

⁶⁴ Burke: Unpublished.

In some modern schools of thought about the Enneagram, it is reasoned that the human journey should be toward comfort and security; therefore, students of the Enneagram are encouraged to “travel” or “journey” against the arrow. For example, a Two is encouraged to be more Four-like, or an Eight more Two-like. However, it is unlikely that there is a set of circumstances or a place in the world where, if we see an arrow, we immediately think, “I ought to go in the opposite direction.” Why would such a precise and brilliant esoteric system, refined over thousands of years, have arrows requiring us to travel against them in order to reach fulfilment?⁶⁵

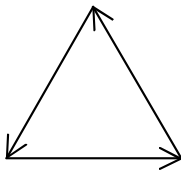
Moving against the arrows, in terms of our behavior, represents a regression through the process or a moving away from maturity. It is a regression back to comfort, security and habitual response. The point immediately back from our own type, in terms of the arrows’ direction, is often called the Security Point because it is where you feel safe. It is, however, a point of existential regression. The so-called stress point must be, by definition, the opposite.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine in detail each of the stages in the Cycle of Transformation; however, listing their designation provides a succinct introduction to their function within the process.

The Cycle of Transformation⁶⁶

- 1 – Housekeeping
- 4 – Identity
- 2 – Alignment
- 8 – Action
- 5 – Analysis
- 7 – Celebration & future planning

The Law of Three



Law of Three

**For every action, there is an equal & opposite reaction—
brought to equilibrium by a third, balancing principle.**

⁶⁵ Burke: Unpublished.

⁶⁶ Burke: Unpublished.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction—
brought to equilibrium by a third, balancing principle.
“The Triad is the form of the completion of all things.”
—Nichomachus of Gerasa

The triangle which connects 3-9-6 represents the Law of Three, an archetypal principle that transcends culture and time. There were Three Wise Men; Three Little Pigs; Three Musketeers; and three days before the Resurrection. Cerberus was a three-headed dog guarding the entrance to Hades; you have three strikes, then you're out!⁶⁷ The most famous group of three, of course, is the Holy Trinity.

In contrast to the circle, which encloses the greatest area within the smallest perimeter, the triangle has the opposite property: enclosing the smallest area for the greatest perimeter and is best understood by considering its synergy. None of the triangle's parts are individually extraordinary but when they come together, they form the strongest, most stable of all the polygons—the only polygon structurally rigid by virtue of its geometry alone. A triangle is a statement about relationship and balance, and as a symbol of divinity, it is present in nearly every religious tradition.

Three is related to words like “through” and “threshold” and to the prefix trans—as in transact and transform. It extends over the threshold—past the limits of opposing opposites to incarnate a creative resolution. The occurrence of three as representative of transaction (or as transformation) is a common occurrence in superstition, fairy tales, mysticism and religion.

No enduring resolution of any kind is possible without three aspects—two opposites and a third arbitrating presence. Three sets into motion a triangular cycle. Gurdjieff called this effect the Law of Three which, he says, is the basis of all phenomena: a force advancing, a force resisting the advance, and a force reconciling and fulfilling the interaction of the first two. The three forces together form a trinity which creatively produces a new phenomenon.⁶⁸ In the 17th century Sir Isaac Newton formalized this principle with his third law of motion.

A chemical reaction is an excellent example of the effect of the Law of Three. When two or more substances interact to form new substances, the process by which this occurs is one of action, reaction, and result.

Historically, philosophers have always been captivated by the presence of opposites in nature. Heraclitus (c.540 BCE), who made the general problem of change his central theme, observed not only that all things were in a state of perpetual flux, but that a conflict between pairs of opposites⁶⁹ was an intricate part of that change. However, beneath the conflict of opposites, he believed there was an underlying unity—or “balancing principle,” which he referred to as Logos (see Law of One).

⁶⁷ For a comprehensive introduction to the philosophy of the number 3, refer to Schneider: 1994.

⁶⁸ Shirley: 2004.

⁶⁹ For example, good/evil, light/dark, hot/cold, wet/dry.

This philosophy is remarkably similar to the yin-yang of classical Chinese philosophy, which describes an underlying unity of life through the interplay of opposites. From a Taoist point of view, polar opposites are not seen as being in conflict; rather they are interdependent and complementary—each creating the other.

Just as one side of the mountain does not remain sunny all day, but gradually becomes shady as the sun moves across the sky and lights the other side, so also do the two forces of yin and yang constantly move and interact. When one energy becomes full and complete, then the other begins to grow and ascend.⁷⁰

This philosophy can be found in the Pair of Opposites of Buddhism and in medieval Christianity, i.e., the *coincidentia oppositorum* of Nicholas of Cusa. Hegel's Dialectic breaks this idea down in terms of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

The Triangle of Transaction.

The direction of the arrows on the inner triangle of the Enneagram diagram creates a flow chart that describes the transaction that must necessarily occur at each point in the Cycle of Transformation before the process can proceed to the next point. There are several schools of thought as to where the transactional process actually begins and why. The element they all have in common however, is that the transaction must, logically, unfold in the direction of the arrows.⁷¹

The Proactive Force (do, like the Threes). Each move from one stage in the Cycle of Transformation to the next must necessarily begin, with a heartfelt, positive, proactive, productive force—a 'can do' approach to getting things done. That being the case, this part of the transaction is informed by how the most proactive and productive type on the Enneagram, the Threes, would approach any new task. They would, for example, come armed with a list of jobs that need doing or tasks that need to be completed. Roles, goals and key performance indicators are addressed, and the focus is squarely on producing measurable outcomes intended to outperform the competition.

The Discerning/Mediating Force (establish processes, like the Nines). As the phase matures, the transaction evolves from focusing simply on "getting things done" to "getting the *right* things done *properly*." It is a subtle shift; and the ability to minimize conflict, discern right from wrong, to establish structure and routine and "bed down" processes are all key elements for "grounding" each stage in the cycle. A certain level of consistency and "perpetual motion" develops at this stage.

⁷⁰ www.taoism.net/enter.htm

⁷¹ Burke: Unpublished.

The Reactive Force (question it, like the Sixes). It is easy to see how the processes established in the previous phase of the transactional process could, if they remained unchallenged, continue to operate unchecked and ad infinitum (that's what they are designed to do). If that were the case, the Cycle of Transformation would grind to a halt. The most important contribution the Reactive Force makes is to vigorously challenge the thoughts and processes that have been established in the previous phase and to generate enough reverse thrust to set in motion the move to the next stage in the cycle.

The energy of the Sixes is cognitive and contra. It is marked by critical thinking and the interrogation of content, people and processes in the search for problems, inconsistencies and threats. Counter-thinking unrelentingly tests, questions and argues the established way and is intended to unhinge and derail establishments, processes and patterns of thought and behavior. This facility, coupled with political stratagem, keen foresight and an ability to plan effectively for the future propels the Cycle to the next point on the flow diagram, and the transactional process begins again.

How Many Cycles Lead to Completion?

In Hinduism, the continual evolution through the Cycle of Transformation which continues after death, is described as reincarnation. The goal of reincarnation, however, is not for the endless transmigration of the soul from being to being; rather, it is to free the soul entirely to achieve "completion" or union with the Infinite or Void.

In how many Cycles of Transformation must one participate before attaining "completion?" The answer is simple. The metaphorical number of transformation is, as discussed above, seven.

$$142,857 \times 7 = 999,999$$

This introduces us to another number pertinent to the Enneagram: Nine.

Surprisingly, nine is a number easily missed in discussions relating to the Enneagram diagram. It is the number of personality types described by the framework. It is also the number of digits that circumscribe the circle.

In the base-10 system, nine is the final number that has a specific identity. The ancient mathematical philosophers, such as Iamblichus, called nine "the horizon" or "the finishing post."⁷² Schneider eloquently describes nine as, "lying at the edge of the shore before a boundless ocean of numbers that repeat in endless cycles the principles of the first nine digits."⁷³ Nothing lies beyond the principles of nine, which the Greeks called the *Ennead*.

Nearly every tradition, from Northern Europe and Africa to shamanic Siberia, Asia and the Americas, uses the number nine to express an ultimate extent, journey or duration.⁷⁴

⁷² Waterfield: Trans. (1988).

⁷³ Schneider: 1994.

⁷⁴ Balmond: 2008.

In ancient Egypt, it was said that the initial act of creation produced a group of nine gods and goddesses, known now by their Greek designation: The Ennead. According to Homer, the city of Troy was besieged for nine years. Odysseus (Ulysses) wandered for nine years before he finally returned home. In Christian symbolism, there are nine orders of angels in nine spheres of heaven; Novenas, said for special intentions, are repeated over a period of nine consecutive days; and at the ninth hour, Jesus yielded up his spirit and died.⁷⁵ Nine represents the boundary between the mundane and the transcendental infinite.

It is readily accepted that the psychology of the Enneagram describes in intricate detail the full extent of human behavior, grouping it into nine classifications. The philosophical implication of there being nine, not four, or five, or sixteen personality types, is the dual notion that (a) something must lie beyond the nine observable, repetitive, finite and habitual patterns of human behavior, and (b) something is stopping us from seeing and experiencing exactly what that might be.

Infinity

By definition, the only thing that can lie beyond the finite known is the infinite, which mathematicians and philosophers will readily admit is indefinable and hence unknowable, at least intellectually.

The most accurate way of defining *infinite* is a two-part process known as the “*via negativa*”—Latin for “negative way.”⁷⁶ Not negative in the pejorative sense, but negative in the opposite sense—like a photo negative. That is to say, in order to satisfy the definition of infinite, something cannot be finite.

The second part of the process requires deducting from the definition of the former, anything that can be described by the latter. A sort of affirmation by negation similar to the method of inquiry utilized in game of Twenty Questions, the difference being all the answers would be “No.”

In Greek, this type of “knowing” is called Apophatic. Its opposite is called Cataphatic. A cataphatic understanding is one that is cognitive, objective, measurable, describable, definable, rational, logical, sensible and intellectual. The apophatic is that which is not cataphatic.

Wisdom literature across cultures and through time has traditionally utilised an apophatic approach to “knowing” the Infinite, which is beyond the capacity of “ordinary perception.” The *Tao Te Ching* makes this point: “The Making is ineffable. Words are wasted on its pursuit . . . Seek wisdom without knowledge.”

⁷⁵ Mark 15:25-39

⁷⁶ Although the *via negativa* is often associated with Christianity, Louth (1981 p. 19) considers Philo Judeus of Alexandria, a Jew, whose writing pre-dated Christianity, to have a credible claim to being called the Father of Negative Theology. The theme of God’s unknowability is frequently iterated throughout the writings of Philo. Negative Theology is also present in other theistic religions.

⁷⁷The ancient wisdom of the Tao, echoed by mystical theology across the theistic religions, implores us to shed the shackles of the known in order to achieve completion and fulfilment in the Divine: “Be not bound by conventional learning. . .surrender self-interest, eliminate desire and craving; seek to know rather than to know.”⁷⁸

In the Enneads, Plotinus too, advocates for the apophatic:

Our thought cannot grasp The One as long as any other image remains active in the soul. . . .

To set free your soul you must. . .lay your mind bare of ideal forms and forget even yourself. (6.9.7)

The concept however, finds its most eloquent expression in the words and works of Christian Neo-Platonist Pseudo-Dionysius:

If only we would lack sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge. For this would be really to see and to know. (MT 2:1025 A)

In the Enneagram context, this refers to a willingness to abandon our habitual ways of perceiving, interpreting, understanding and behaving in the world for a truth that lies beyond the capacity of the human mind to define or understand It.⁷⁹

If the Enneagram is simply a psychology that describes human behavior, albeit in intricate detail, then those of us who relentlessly pursue an intellectual understanding of its complexities do so at the risk of remaining blissfully unaware that our attention is focused on finding out everything we can about what is inside the circle, as it were, instead of what lies beyond the limitations of the human condition. That being the case, we remain prisoners to our intellect, not unlike those described by Plato who were amazed and mesmerized by the shadows cast on the walls of a cave—unaware that truth and reality lay beyond the cave itself.

Students and teachers of the Enneagram have a propensity to become mesmerized by the remarkably accurate descriptions of each of the personality types, as well as with the philosophy taught by the Enneagram framework.⁸⁰ There is a propensity to believe that a well-researched, objective cataphatic understanding of the framework IS the TRUTH and will lead us to completion and fulfilment. This is not the case. The Infinite can only be experienced in the apophatic sense.

⁷⁷ Burke: 2007. *Tao Te Ching*, Chapters 5 + 10.

⁷⁸ Burke: 2007. *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 19.

⁷⁹ Burke: 2007. *Tao Te Ching*, Chapter 25.

⁸⁰ The author readily admits she is no exception to this generalization.

Love as the Absence of the Passions

In the Bible, John's first Epistle written in Ephesus describes this apophatic experience of the Infinite as love: "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love".⁸¹ Utilizing this understanding, we are able to determine by way of negation exactly what love is and what it is not. Love is not the personality; by definition, it must be everything that exists beyond the personality. Yet simply knowing this and being able to define, observe, measure and demonstrate what love is not (i.e., the personality in action) will not ensure that we can participate in love, in the apophatic sense. Indeed, as noted above, an obsession with understanding and cataloguing the personality as an end in itself will impede our ability to experience love.

As Evagrius despaired upon arriving in the desert, an experience of love and by extension, the Divine, is much more difficult than the simple accumulation of knowledge and experience. The reason for this is that according to Evagrius, the passions that drive the desire to act contrary to the Making are survival strategies that enter our consciousness involuntarily.⁸² Unless we learn to observe and manage them, we may never find ourselves in a position to transcend the limited, habitual and alienating experience of the personality.⁸³

Readiness for transformation—the ability to move past the horizon to achieve union with The Infinite—is signalled by the *absence* of the passions.⁸⁴ It is a theme taken up throughout history by the Mystics, exemplified, for example, in the anguished cry of 13th Century Islamic poet and mystic Jalal ad-din Rumi:

O Beloved,
Take me!
Liberate my soul,
Fill me with your love.
Release me from these two worlds!
If I set my heart on anything but you
Let fire burn me from the inside.
O Beloved,
Take away what I crave!
Take away what I do,
Take away what I think,
Take away what I feel,
Take away everything that takes me from you

⁸¹ 1 John 4:8

⁸² Harmless: 2004.

⁸³ Burke: 2008.

⁸⁴ Readiness to experience the Infinite is signalled by the presence of apatheia, which is described variously as an unshakeable calm or the absence of suffering. For a fuller treatment on the topic, refer to Burke: 2008.

Mysticism

In understanding Mysticism, the Enneagram serves us well, lending us a nomenclature and philosophy together with a language associated with explaining and understanding the human journey. By describing the nine types, the Enneagram describes nine distinct ways that human beings avoid love and ensure their personal survival by taking control of the environment in which they find themselves and the resources at their disposal. Habitual and predictable patterns of behavior protect us from the perceived uncertainty of The Making as it unfolds around us. Tragically, however, while the personality seemingly aids our personal survival, its expression (evidenced by the presence of one of the nine passions) is a profoundly alienating experience that destroys our ability to seek and live a meaningful life, not separated from ourselves, from others and from the source of our creation.

Meaning and fulfillment in our lives are dependent on being able to manage the personality, since the presence of emotional pathology precludes a loving interaction or relationship. It is only when we are able to “turn the personality off”—if only momentarily and temporarily—that we have the opportunity to “find” ourselves, access our unlimited potential, and participate in *The Way* as it ebbs and flows around us.

Personal transformation in the form of spiritual progress may be made only if and when we relinquish *our will* (the personality) for the *Divine Will*. The irony, of course, is that the stress brought by that transition through the “Cycle of Change” is accompanied by an opportunity for freedom via transcendence—an irony likely not lost on Jesus, when he fell to his knees in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified, praying “Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done.”⁸⁵ Spiritual transformation of the self brought about by following a strict spiritual method is the major emphasis of Mysticism. Yet, Evagrius did not consider apatheia to be the goal of the ascetic life, but evidence that the individual was ready to enter into a transformational union with The Infinite.

Conclusion

Simply studying the Enneagram framework will not lead to personal, spiritual or communal transformation. This common misconception was predicted by Gurdjieff. While he considered the Enneagram to be “the philosopher’s stone of the alchemists,”⁸⁶ he asserted that without instruction from “one who knows,” it would remain incomplete, theoretical in form, and impossible from which to make any practical use.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Luke 22:42

⁸⁶ Ouspensky: 1949), p. 294.

⁸⁷ Shirley: 2004.

In Ouspensky's book, *In Search of the Miraculous*⁸⁸, Gurdjieff is quoted as having given this sharply worded warning on the diagram's metaphysical symbolism: ". . .in the hands of the incompetent and the ignorant, and however full of good intentions, the symbol becomes an instrument of delusion." John Shirley believes that this is true of the Enneagram. . . . "and so it has proved. Always in search of a new gimmick, certain individuals have latched onto Gurdjieff's Enneagram symbol and turned it into an industry of vague reassurance."⁸⁹

The Enneagram of the 21st Century is but a fragment of a once brilliant and comprehensive ancient philosophy that has informed the spiritual development of human beings for more than two millennia.

Recovering the Enneagram's mystical purpose requires that we liberate the Enneagram from its psychological and intellectual constraints. A comprehensive understanding of the Enneagram demands that Enneagram teachers are able to interpret the Enneagram diagram and are willing to discover what lies beyond simply observing and describing each of the Types.

Jewish Philosopher, Rabbi Hillel (70 BCE–10 AD), writing at about the same time that Philo described the Therapeutae outside Alexandria, summarized the urgency to observe and manage the passions thus:

Watch your thoughts, lest they become words.
Watch your words, lest they become actions.
Watch your actions, lest they become habits.
Watch your habits, lest they become your personality.
Watch your personality, lest it become your destiny.
If I am not for myself, who will be for me?
If I am only for myself, what am I?
And if not now, when?

References

- Balmond, C. (2008). *Number 9*. London: Prestel Publishing Ltd.
- Bouyer, L. (1982). *History of spirituality, Vol 1: The spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers*. New York, NY: Seabury Press.
- Burke, D. (2007). *Tao te ching*. Salisbury, South Australia: Boolarong Press.
- Burke, D. (2008). The Enneagram of Evagrius of Pontus. *The Enneagram Journal* 1(1), 77–102.
- Calter, P. A. (2008). *Squaring the circle: Geometry in art & architecture*. New York, NY: Key College Publishing.
- Cowan, J. (2002). *Desert Fathers*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.

⁸⁸ Ouspensky: 1949.

⁸⁹ Shirley: 2004.

- Cuomo, S. (2001). *Ancient mathematics*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ecker, M. W. (1983). The alluring lore of cyclic numbers. *The Two-year College Mathematics Journal*, 14 (2), 105–109. Retrieved from: www.jstor.org/stable/3026586
- Ginsburg, S. B. (2005). *Gurdjieff unveiled: An overview and introduction to the teaching*. London: Lighthouse Editions.
- Harmless, W. (2004). *Desert Christians: An introduction to the literature of early monasticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hodges, A. (2007). *One to nine: The inner life of numbers*. London: Short Books.
- Iamblichus. (1988). *The theology of arithmetic*. (R. Waterfield, Trans). San Francisco, CA: Red Wheel/Weiser. (Originally written 4th Century AD).
- Kline, M. (1972). *Mathematical thought from ancient to modern times*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Koetsier, T. and Bergmans, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Mathematics and the divine*. Amsterdam: Elsevier B.V.
- Lawlor, R. (1982). *Sacred geometry*. New York, NY: Thames & Hudson.
- Louth, A. (1981). *The origins of the Christian mystical tradition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Louth, A. (1995). *The darkness of God*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Ouspensky, P. D. (1949). *In Search of the Miraculous*. Florida: Harcourt.
- Philo Judeus of Alexandria: *De vita contemplativa*.
- Russell, B. (2005). *History of Western philosophy*. (Reprint) Oxon: Routledge.
- Schwaller de Lubicz, R. A. (1950). *A study of numbers: A guide to the constant creation of the universe*. (C. Bamford, Trans.). Rochester, NY: Inner Traditions International.
- Seife, C. (2000). *Zero: The biography of a dangerous idea*. London: Souvenir Press.
- Sinkewicz, R. E. (2003). *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek ascetical corpus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schneider, M. (1994). *A beginner's guide to constructing the universe*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.
- Shirley, J. (2004). *Gurdjieff: An introduction to his life and ideas*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Wallis Budge, E. A. (Ed). (2005). *Life of St. Anthony*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.
- Webb, J. (1980). *The harmonious circle*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Whitehead, W. F. (2006). *How nature and number evolve 142857; The magic square of 142857; and How 142857 squares the circle—Pamphlet.* (Reprint). Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.

Waite, A. E. & de St. Martin, C. L. (2005). *The mystical philosophy of numbers.* Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing.