

**NINE LENSES ON THE WORLD:  
THE ENNEAGRAM PERSPECTIVE**

By Jerome Wagner, Ph.D.

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*Reviewed by Dale Rhodes*

*Nine Lenses on the World* is an excellent compilation and arrangement of a master teacher's work, clearly written from the high side of Lens Five, the Perspective of Wisdom. The book applies a variety of psychological, spiritual and practical personal growth models and demonstrates how each may enhance our understanding of the Enneagram. It is loaded with rich content that was available previously only through Wagner's training program or articles in other publications. While an appropriate text for students new to the Enneagram, *Nine Lenses* also provides seasoned readers, clinicians and teachers a plethora of new ways to present the Enneagram. This is sure to be the new blue book that illustrates how the Enneagram is practical for everyday life, greatly because of its shared history with wisdom traditions and modern psychology.

Wagner was the honored keynote presenter at the IEA conference last year, presenting an entertaining "Enneagram as Rosetta Stone" program that educated and delighted participants. *Nine Lenses* is an even deeper showcase of what this experienced early pioneer of the Enneagram offers in historical view, synthesis and teachings. A master trainer in organizations and university classrooms, he has also assembled a wide variety of material from credible academic and respectable professional sources. Wagner exhibits great skill in synthesizing and applying these specific theories and models to the Enneagram, and he has an ease in explaining the implications. While some authors are currently asserting credibility for the Enneagram in disciplines such as interpersonal neuroscience, Wagner's *Nine Lenses* provides an original and thorough examination of the Enneagram types through the lens of specific cognitive behavioral, psychological and spiritual development theories.

For readers who require scholarship along with practicality, Part 1 of *Nine Lenses* bolsters the Enneagram's validity through applications from the works of psychologists Rogers, Perls, Spranger and Winnicott as well as more contemporary experts like Covey and Palmer (on habits) and Barker (on paradigms). Also integrated throughout are the works of familiar Enneagram authors such as Ichazo, Naranjo, Maitri, Almaas, Condon and others. In one chapter you will find original ways to view the Enneagram system through the works of psychologists Adler and Horney, business writer Covey, and at the same time be led to correlations with Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises. All

applications to the Enneagram are explained fully and are well defended for the skeptics among us. For example, in describing the three centers and instincts, solid examples are drawn from the seemingly different worlds of Organizational Consulting and Spiritual Consulting (p 170-173). Wagner's ability to teach the Enneagram as a practical, transformative and interdisciplinary tool runs this way throughout the book.

Years of scholarship and facility with the Enneagram and Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®) are clear in Wagner's early justification for typology. This short section of *Nine Lenses* is a good defense for everyone interested in any typology, explaining personality systems as "useful fictions" that may help one find more predictability in the world (p 15-18). Reading this is a helpful reminder to Enneagram teachers and enthusiasts that they are not always preaching to the choir.

Throughout *Nine Lenses* runs the title metaphor of eyeglass lenses as a way to understand types. The theme is used effectively on the lovely book cover, in chapter graphics, and when illustrating the benefits of examining our lenses, not just looking through them. The connecting points of one's type structure are also explored this way, as either unhelpful additions or corrective lenses which can affect our worldview negatively or positively.

It is refreshing that the chapters on the types in Part 2 of *Nine Lenses* present virtues, core values and the positives before exploring many of the challenges. There is something kind and accessible in the titles Wagner chooses for each lens. They are identified not by a noun but by an adjective describing a perspective (i.e. the Perspective of Beauty, 4). The type-specific perspective is more present in some and less so in others. Yet this is not a light book on just the positive Enneagram; it is the full meal deal, complete with sweet honey and all the bitter herbs you can fit on your plate. Each chapter is a well crafted formulaic exploration into how the psychological type structures develop and how they may remain fixed or expand beyond habitual patterns.

New and useful material for many Enneagram readers will be the book's view on each personality lens having a pattern of schema compensation, schema maintenance and schema avoidance (applying the work of Beck & Young). Also well explained is how each type has distorted principles, areas of avoidance, blind spots and foci of convenience, but each possesses paradigm proficiencies, perceptual acuties and paradigm shifts to other positive perspectives when in resourceful states.

Especially helpful are the explorations about every lens having a root in the defense mechanism of reaction formation, i.e. living out an elevated "I am" identification and a degraded "I am not" area of avoidance. The descriptions of type through this theory alone are extensive and useful to all readers. Each type is described using various applied systems (such as how each type has a paradigm, is in an avoidance of one quality, relies too much on one core

value), making for a very clear way to understand the Enneagram and to teach diverse audiences. This will be very helpful to the reader who is psychologically interested, but sometimes may be a bit intellectual for the introductory reader.

I was grateful that the great humor Wagner demonstrates in person serves to teach throughout the book. New ways to view the Enneagram are often explained through everyday examples that are enlightening, funny, and frighteningly close to our own experience. There are few teachers who can so skillfully instruct as well as entertain. Case in point is Wagner's explanation of the enneatypes as "projections and projective identifications" through the metaphoric lens of "waste management" (p. 48):

If you want to avoid certain parts of yourself, you can repress them into your unconscious and bury them alive. If you want to distance yourself even farther from these unacceptable elements, you can throw them out of your basement and put them in the garbage. The nearest available receptacles are usually other people. This is the art of *projection*.

If that doesn't seem enough and the projected qualities still seem upsetting and disturbing to you, you can augment your waste management procedures by processing your garbage after you've thrown it out. That means you deposit your disorders in others, then either encourage them to deal with their alleged detritus, or wage a campaign to clean them up yourself. This is the technique of *projective identification*.

The book's extensive table of contents lays out an engaging map of what is coming, much more detailed than you will find in most texts. I found the concise self-reflections in the chapters very important rest periods that helped me assess if I had understood his points, theories and practical applications. Indeed these highlighted sections are good teaching points for those who lead classes, workshops and retreats. I felt like I entered a dialogue with the material about how each personality structure is formed through idealizations, polarities, avoidances, schemas, defense mechanisms, etc.

There are good summaries of the rich content in most chapters which contribute to the enjoyment and ease of reading the material. The chart presented at the end of Chapter 8 explains the theories on schema maintenance, avoidance and compensation very well. Filled with very dense material on everything from Holy Ideas to lens distortions, Chapters 4 and 5 could have used summaries. Chapter 7's summary seemed to present more data rather than to offer a conclusion. After the type chapters there follows a reference list, bibliography and a wide variety of interesting resources. It might have been helpful to include here a solid section of online resources, recommendations for the reader's next steps, professional training or local community involvement options.

For new readers seeking to identify their type, I expect they will first jump to use the concise rating assessment at the beginning of each type's chapter. For the seasoned reader and teacher, the book reads from cover to cover as a clear progression from an early history of the system to current dynamic psycho-spiritual and practical applications.

Finally, *Nine Lenses* is generous in new content, theory and page count. It is clear when you sit with this book that a conscious effort has been made to make it easily readable, with lovely fonts as well as paragraph spacing that gives rest to the eyes. It is a visually and intellectually enjoyable book to read, one that invites you to engage in the Enneagram experience with new lenses focused on perspective itself. If you are reading this review, then *Nine Lenses on the World* should be on your shelf.