ENDLESS FORMS MOST BEAUTIFUL
ESSENCE, TELEOLOGY, AND THE ENNEAGRAM

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Introduction

It is often said that the Enneagram is rooted in ancient wisdom traditions, and these roots are often touted as one of the reasons why the Enneagram is such a powerful system for understanding ourselves and others. However, some of the philosophical assumptions underlying the traditional teaching of the Enneagram face significant challenges from more-modern philosophy and science. This article will look at some of those assumptions: *essentialism* (the belief that things, including humans, have an *essence* that is a fundamental property of the thing) and *teleology* (the belief that design and purpose are immanent in nature). I will explain the philosophical and scientific problems with those views, and offer an alternative perspective, *methodological naturalism,* that I believe not only avoids those problems but strengthens our understanding of the Enneagram and the aspects of human nature that the Enneagram addresses.

I hope this article is the beginning of a conversation in the Enneagram community, and encourage anyone interested in doing so to provide feedback and critiques of the article or ideas contained herein in the IEA's online "Nine Points Magazine" (www.ninepointsmagazine.org).

Essentialism

In "A Moveable Feast," Ernest Hemingway writes about visiting Sylvia Beach's Paris bookstore, Shakespeare and Company, and walking out with books by Dostoyevsky, Lawrence, and Turgenev under his arm. Being an unrepentant Hemingway geek, I made Shakespeare and Company a must-see destination on my first trip to Paris a few years ago, and I planned to walk out with books by the same authors as an homage to my literary idol. Unfortunately, the cramped Left Bank bookstore had no Dostoyevsky or Lawrence in stock. I did, however, manage to buy a slim Signet Classic edition paperback of Turgenev's "Fathers and Sons" that now sits safely on the "Hemingway" shelf in the fiction section of my home library. This copy sits unread (I have a copy bought from a used bookstore in Philadelphia for reading), but treasured nonetheless. When I hold the book, it makes me feel emotions I can't quite put into words. I keep it safely on a high shelf so my children can't reach it, and I would be devastated if something were to happen to it. The copy I bought in Philadelphia, on the other hand, is worth only the two dollars I paid for it. Logically, I know my treasure is just a paperback book, exactly like thousands of other copies of the book. Emotionally, however, the book feels like it has innate qualities that separate it from a copy that would look exactly the same to someone else.

This may seem irrational, but I'm guessing the reader also has objects that evoke similar emotional responses. We all have the ability—in fact, the tendency—to impute objects with value based on factors beyond the rational; we assume they have "essential" properties that we can't see or accurately explain but really believe are there.

We think this way because we are all "intuitive essentialists"; that is, we are all prone to believing things have some inherent, "essential" quality. There are two broad ways to think about essentialism: 1) the innate, intuitive, "naïve" essentialism that we inherit as part of our evolutionary heritage and 2) the philosophical Essentialism grounded in Plato, of believing that essential properties are a foundational component of reality and that essential ideals or forms exist in another realm.

As cognitive psychologist Bruce Hood puts it, at an early age children "are committed essentialists who see core properties everywhere. They think that there is something inside that cannot be changed. They don't know what it is, and they would be hard pressed to describe it." (Hood 2009, p.146) This naïve intuitive essentialism is a cognitive capability that helps us make sense of the world and allows us to put things into categories—tables are tables and not chairs, for example. We may not be able to truly define how a chair is different from a table (try it sometime, no definition is completely adequate), but we intuitively believe that there is a certain "chair-ness" that makes a chair a chair and not a table. Our essentialism shapes the way we comprehend the world.

This naïve essentialism leads to "biological essentialism," the belief that the essence of a species remains unchanged over time; cats are cats and dogs are dogs, and they are each their own thing because of their essence.

Plato, as he describes in his allegory of the cave (Blackburn 2006, pp.95-102), believed that the world of experience is illusory because only that which is *eternal* and *unchanging* can be real and that the world of experience is in a state of flux and thus in some way false and deprecated. Therefore, there must exist some Realm of Forms or Ideals that contains a perfect version of a thing, and that all other versions are imperfect reflections of the original. These Ideals apply not only to physical entities, but also to mathematics and qualities such as beauty, truth, and justice. Thus, all cats that exist in our realm are imperfect variations of an Ideal Cat, all triangles are imperfect forms of the Ideal Triangle, and essential aspects of human nature are reflections of Ideal aspects that exist in some other realm.

Biological essentialism ran into a problem with the publication of Darwin's "On the Origin of Species;" the idea that there is an eternal and non-changing "essence" of cat is inconceivable in the light of evolution.

Before Darwin identified the means by which biological species change over time (random mutation and natural selection), it was reasonable to think in terms of species in the Platonic sense—Plato was not irrational to believe that cats were as they had always been, and that each individual cat possesses an essential element that makes it a cat; there was no evidence to the contrary. After Darwin,

however, it is hard to imagine even Plato as a biological Platonist. We now understand that cats (and every other living thing) have evolved from ancestors that were, in their time, very different from today's cats and that the line of ancestry passed through many different phases of creatures over the millennia and would generally be considered to be different species. It is contradictory to claim that different things have the same essence; thus there can be no Ideal form of a biological species.

(In fact, most biologists would say that the idea of a "species" is just a useful fiction, that all life exists on an interconnected continuum where each generation is almost impossible to distinguish from previous generations but over vast periods descendants eventually end up being very different from their distant cousins. Darwin himself wrote that "No one definition has satisfied all naturalists; yet every naturalist knows vaguely what he means when he speaks of a species" (Darwin 1859 p. 52).

Essence and the Enneagram

Platonic Essentialism heavily influenced early development of the Enneagram. It is common in Enneagram circles for people to make a distinction between "personality" and "essence," to assert that there is a "real" self and a "false" self, and to claim that the path of growth entails reducing our attachment to the ego and returning to, or remembering our Essence. Almaas states that each of us has a personal "essence" (Almaas 1988, p.36), that Riso and Hudson say is a spark of the Divine (or non-personal Essence) (Riso and Hudson 1999, p.27), and Davis adds that we fall asleep to our true nature and lose contact with the aspects of Essence (Davis 1999, p.96). The Enneagram helps us understand the dynamics that cause that loss of contact, points the way back, and provides assistance on remembering our "true spiritual nature" (Riso and Hudson 1999 p.28).

These ideas of Essence(s) have their origin in Plato, who wrote about Ideals or Forms, a concept that was embraced by Oscar Ichazo as he formulated his ideas on the Enneagram (Ichazo 1991).

Plotinus, the third century CE Neoplatonist and author of "The Enneads," was influenced by Aristotle (to whom we shall return shortly) and expanded on Plato. He talked about "the One," the ineffable source of all reality that along with "Intellect" and "Soul" made up the "triumvirate of divinity" (Stokes 2002, p.43). The One is beyond all being and non-being, it is non-intentional, it is beyond conception, and it is the source of all that is, rather than merely the sum of all that is. The challenge when trying to explain such concepts is always that language is inadequate in capturing the ineffable and therefore one must rely heavily on metaphor and "direct perception." The challenge that Plotinus faced still haunts the Platonic perspective today; while Essence is indivisible, it must be carved up into chunks (at least linguistically) if you want to discuss it. Thus we end up talking about discreet aspects of a whole using terminology that is by definition inadequate. Here, for example, is Almaas:

Each of the aspects of Essence is a Platonic form, eternally and primordially itself. Love is always and eternally love, so is peace, so is joy, so is intelligence, and so on. Each cannot be anything else, cannot evolve and cannot devolve. It cannot be contaminated and cannot be improved upon. (Almaas 2004, p.136)

Ichazo, writing in the foreword of Almaas's "Facets of Unity: The Enneagram of Holy Ideas," is very clear that the concept of the Holy Ideas are rooted in Neoplatonism:

The Holy Ideas have to be envisioned as nine rays projected by the Divine One and Holy Mind [Plotinus's "The One" and "Intellect"] and when they are present together, the pleroma [fullness of divine qualities or powers] and their original, natural, unborn, and immortal state is unveiled and realized. (Almaas 1998, p.viii)

To communicate these Platonic ideas, these authors also use words such as *Presence*, *Being*, *Spirit*, and *Soul,* which seem to be discrete qualities of an interwoven whole (much like the Christian idea of the Holy Trinity, which is also heavily influenced by Plotinus). These may work well as metaphors that spur growth but we run into a problem if we believe that they exist as truly Platonic Ideals in some other realm.

Granted, Essentialism, when applied to human nature, is a more subtle concept than biological essentialism in general. It is simple (and reasonably accurate) to argue that there are inherent aspects of human nature, but we have to be careful about claiming that those aspects are truly Platonic in the sense that they are eternal and exist in some other realm. We do inherently have basic limitations and capabilities. We are, within a range, limited in our physical abilities and attributes (we can't fly unassisted or breathe underwater, for example) and most of us have some capacity for love or altruism, but viewing any aspect of human nature as truly Platonic—perfect, eternal, "unborn"—is not philosophically supportable for the same reason that biological essentialism is not: Humans have evolved from non-humans who had natures that were very different from ours; Plato believed that the Forms are eternal and unchanging; therefore aspects of human nature cannot be Platonic Forms. (We shall return to this line of reasoning shortly.)

Does this really matter, one might ask? Is it pedantic nitpicking to bring up the potential problems of embracing Plato's idea?

I believe it does matter. The emphasis in the Enneagram literature of "real" and "false" selves can be interpreted as similar to, for example, some approaches to Buddhism that suggest we already possess fully formed Buddha-nature and just need shed our ego-centric conditioning to be enlightened (in fairness, not all Buddhists hold this view and numerous teachers from other traditions make this same kind of assertion). Alan Watts, for example, talked about the "Buddha baby," (Kegan 2002), the state of enlightenment we all possess in our infancy but from which we become estranged. All we have to do, according to Watts, and

admittedly no easy feat, is to get beyond our conditioning and our "true," enlightened nature will spring forth fully formed. As Kegan points out, this view is to mistake subjective states for objective states, that even when it involves our supposedly higher qualities there is a maturation that needs to occur through hard work over time (Kegan 2002). There are no free lunches, even in spiritual work.

People who make the "naive Buddha baby"/"true self-false self" error, believing that higher states exist *a priori* and fully formed can actually remain trapped in one stage of their development, thinking their affective impulses represent enlightenment. I have heard people talk about this at Enneagram gatherings, talking about how "Essence" is waiting to be remembered and that Essence in all it's highest forms will rise to the fore if we can only kill or silence or even "clarify" the ego. Ken Wilber has a very good term for this way of thinking, calling it the "pre/trans fallacy." (ReVision 3[2]. Reprinted in Wilber 1998, p.153) Wilber identified this concept as he sought to correct what he identified as errors in his own thinking:

Because the point, remember, is that this Romantic view depends upon the notion that the infant is immersed in an actual God-consciousness or a fully present *Ground, which is then literally repressed, sometime during the first or second year of life.* But this view makes no sense whatsoever*, and has no developmental validity, if the pre-egoic structure itself is anything less than God, because it is supposed to be the actual repression of God-consciousness, by the two-year old, that drives the subsequent developmental scheme. If the original embedment of the infantile self is not* fully *in touch with God-consciousness or Ground-consciousness, then this developmental view falls apart altogether.* (Wilber 1998, p. 153. Emphasis in original.)

The "pre/trans fallacy" is the mistake of believing that by returning to something more primordial we are somehow returning to something more "real" or in some way "higher." In other words, some developmental stages are pre-rational (i.e., immature, unsophisticated, undeveloped) and others are trans-rational (i.e., nurtured, developed, reasoned through). It is the difference between the naïve and subjective, but still unconditioned, state of the baby and the objective and unconditioned state of the zen master that Kegan differentiates (Kegan 2002). The baby is not an enlightened being who forgets that his enlightened state and needs to recapture it; the baby is merely an immature adult-to-be.

A very practical example of the problems that may arise when we make the pre/trans fallacy would be believing that our intuitions or emotions represent some "higher truth", when at times they are merely the result of our immaturity or lack of development. People may be unable to distinguish between immature emotion, and mature emotion that comes through hard spiritual and psychological work, or between naïve intuition ("gut" feelings based on cognitive

biases, for example) and expert intuition that is developed through long practice. The failure to make this distinction leads to a postmodern "flatland" where "my truth" is equal to "your truth" and nothing is "untrue." Unfortunately, when nothing is untrue, nothing is *true*, either.

Further, making the pre/trans fallacy can lead one to embrace ancient "ways of knowing" just because they are ancient; romanticizing alleged secret knowledge when the reality is often that ancient societies were just doing the best they could with the technology they had, and they fall far short of modern capabilities and insights. Failing to recognize when advances of science, philosophy, and general knowledge have rendered some such traditional practices obsolete, or even demonstrated how those practices are dangerous, leaves one mired in an emotionally appealing but retrogressive Edenic fantasy.

(It is also a mistake to dismiss ideas just because they are ancient; all ideas, ancient and modern, need to be weighed on their own merit.)

Despite Almaas's invocation of Platonic Ideals, he seems to avoid falling into the pre/trans fallacy trap in his book "Essence," where he writes:

The baby's essence does not have the immensity, the depth, and the richness of the adult's experience of essence. It is generally lighter, in a sense, more diluted." (Almaas 1986, p. 84)

Almaas therefore implies that Essence is not fully formed or matured, but when referring to the Holy Ideas in the introduction to Almaas's book, Ichazo states that they are in an "original, natural, unborn, and immortal state." (Almaas 1998, p.viii). Often when I hear people talk about Essence or the Holy Ideas, they seem to be confused by the multiple descriptions and trapped in the pre/trans fallacy, assuming that Essence will spring forth fully formed once the ego is worked on. It is confusing when teachers refer to these qualities of human nature as Platonic, implying *a priori* perfection and completeness, in one place but then say that they are not fully developed in another. It seems to be an attempt to hold to a metaphysical stance while acknowledging the realities that seem to contradict this stance. I think we would do better to let go of the Platonic Forms as one the underpinnings of Enneagram theory and take a more naturalistic perspective.

Let's now move on to the second philosophical assumption underlying much Enneagram teaching: teleology.

Aristotle and Teleology

Aristotle split from the views of his teacher Plato regarding Essence and believed that while "certain metaphysical categories—such as quantity, quality, substance and relation—were applicable to the description of all phenomena" (Stokes 2002, p.12), no one philosophical principle could explain all phenomena and that each entity or category needed to be understood by its own axioms and principles.

Aristotle also believed that everything had some final purpose (or *telos*) and that each entity, animate or inanimate, was here to fulfill that purpose. (Stokes 2002 p.12) Man's purpose was to reason, for example, and therefore we should strive to reason well. The implication here is that *telos* is implicit and predetermined, that we must figure out the purpose of the things in the world if we are to interact with the world effectively. This, naturally, led to a teleological perspective regarding the universe—that we and everything else in the universe are fulfilling some sort of *predetermined end,* or, in a more recent iteration of this view, that we are engaged in some kind of creative co-evolution with some supernatural force and heading in a predictable or predetermined direction. The implication of teleology is that it assumes a predictable fixity; i.e., that it may be possible to know the direction that evolution is taking.

Teleology is on display throughout the work of Almaas. For example:

It is obvious that the fixation has to do with a blind spot of not seeing that there is a universal plan, that there is an evolution that has its own momentum, its own direction, its own plan; we don't need to meddle with it. If we can see that, then just letting ourselves trust and be in the present, whatever we do, is the Holy Work. (Almaas 1998, p.163)

A slightly different take on teleology seems to be pushing its way into the Enneagram teachings these days, primarily due to the influence on many in the Enneagram community of Ken Wilber and the Integral movement. Wilber posits that there is some creative force at play in the universe that pushes evolution forward. Wilber calls that force "Eros" and writes:

That drive—Eros by any other name—seems a perfectly realistic conclusion, given the facts of evolution as we understand them. *Let's just say there is plenty of room for a Kosmos of Eros* (Wilber 2006 emphasis added, p.236)

Further, building off her own interpretation of Wilber's work, Susan Rhodes offers an "integral approach" to the Enneagram in the pages of "The Enneagram Monthly" and suggests that a teleological perspective is warranted by science (Rhodes 2013, p.19).

Unfortunately, to support his belief in "Eros," Wilber seems to have misunderstood the "facts" of biological evolution, inferring gaps in the theory that don't really exist, and inserting a teleological force to fill those gaps.

I'll take a moment to explore this apparent misunderstanding of the science, focusing on Wilber because he is such a prominent influence on this line of thinking in the Enneagram world (and beyond), but many others make this same mistake regarding the science.

But first, why does it matter?

It matters because, as with Essence, the embrace or rejection of the concept of a teleological force will shape the way we view the Enneagram and the way we

engage in our work on self, so we must proceed cautiously when making our assumptions. It is quite acceptable to say, "I believe *X* and plan to live my life accordingly." If, however, we add that "Science supports my belief in *X* and *this* is how we should view the Enneagram," we have a responsibility to ensure that science *does in fact* support that belief rather than continuing blithely on in our assertions. In particular, Enneagram teachers have a responsibility to ensure that any leaps of inference they make from what is provable to what is speculative are built on a solid factual foundation if they are going to assert that their speculations are anything more than that. The first statement is a faith statement and is acceptable when acknowledged as such; the second statement needs solid evidence to support it.

Even beyond this issue of intellectual integrity, I believe that searching for what is true and letting go of mistaken beliefs are inherently worthy pursuits. I would also suggest that the Enneagram community, which springs from a long line of people who are "seekers after truth," should be willing to embrace the truth even when it undermines their cherished notions. Getting our facts right helps us do so.

The Impact of Darwin

When biologists refer to evolution, they are usually referring to what is typically called, "the modern synthesis." Briefly, the "modern synthesis" is the understanding that the genes of offspring 1) are a mix of the genes of both parents (in the case of sexual reproduction), and 2) contain copying errors (accidental differences) in the genes it inherits from its parents. The mixing and copying errors taken together are called "random mutations." Sometimes the mutations are beneficial and *increase* the likelihood that the offspring will in turn reproduce. Sometimes the mutations are not beneficial and *decrease* the chances that the offspring will in turn reproduce. Over time, those individuals with more-beneficial mutations will out-reproduce those with mutations that are not beneficial. Ultimately, organisms end up looking "designed" for their environment, because it is the environment that determines which mutations are beneficial. This "determination" is called *natural selection*. (It is important to note that the vast majority of mutations are dead ends, and far more species have become extinct than survive today, which certainly undermines the idea of directed "purpose" in evolution.)

Before Darwin, this appearance of design in nature was attributed to a Designer; after Darwin it became clear that the "designer" was blind and unintelligent nature rather than some conscious and deliberate entity.

(In order to make sure that I am not misunderstood, the word "designer" is used as a metaphor here and there is no designing force beyond nature itself. It is almost impossible to talk about evolution without anthropomorphizing the process and, unfortunately, words like "purpose" and "design" are difficult to

avoid. However, it is agreed among the vast consensus of evolutionary biologists that nature has no deliberate or purposeful intention.[1])

Darwin's idea upset a lot of people, and continues to upset people today. Some—primarily creationists of various stripes—reject it outright, but it would be difficult, if not impossible, for any thinking, informed person to do so—it is too solid a theory and too robustly supported by the evidence (see, for example Prothero 2007, Coyle 2010, and Dawkins 2009, for thorough overviews of the evidence for evolution). Other teleologically inclined thinkers, however, more-sophisticated than the creationists, object to Darwin by pointing to perceived flaws or "gaps" in the theory and force a metaphysical plug into those gaps, usually in the form of some type of "intelligent design." These objections are often quixotic and always factually flawed, but all listing the objections and answering them is beyond the scope of this article.[2] Despite the objections, Darwin's theory of evolution is generally considered to be the most important and impactful idea in all of science (*Scientific American*, January 2009).

As far back as 1981, however, Wilber took a position surprisingly at odds with the scientific consensus regarding evolution:

To the average biologist, this sounds shocking, but the conclusion, of those whose specific field is the theory of scientific knowledge is straightforward: "Darwin's theory... is on the verge of collapse...." (Wilber 1981 pp.304-305)

Later, in "A Brief History of Everything," Wilber wrote:

The standard, glib, neo-Darwinian explanation of natural selection*—absolutely nobody believes this anymore. Evolution clearly operates in part by Darwinian natural selection, but this process simply selects those transformations that have* already *occurred by mechanisms that absolutely nobody understands… A half-wing is no good as a leg and no good as a wing — you can't run and you can't fly. It has no adaptive value whatsoever. In other words, with a half-wing you are dinner. The wing will work only if these hundred mutations* ***happen all at once****, in one animal — and also these* ***same*** *mutations must occur* ***simultaneously*** *in another animal of the opposite sex, and then they have to somehow find each other, have dinner, a few drinks, mate, and have offspring with real functional wings. Talk about mind-boggling. This is infinitely, absolutely, utterly mind-*

[1] A common ploy among those opposed to evolution on religious or metaphysical grounds is to make lists of scientists who doubt the consensus position on evolutionary theory vs intelligent design. Rarely are these scientists actual biologists. The National Center for Science Education (NCSE) has started "Project Steve" to demonstrate just how overwhelming the support for evolutionary theory is.

[2] The National Academy of Sciences Institute of Medicine produced a nice primer called "Science, Evolution, and Creationism" that is available for free download at http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=11876

boggling. Random mutations cannot even begin to explain this. (Wilber 1996, pp.22-23)

That no one believes the neo-Darwinian explanation (again, more appropriately known as "the modern synthesis") would come as quite a shock to pretty much every actual working biologist. As Theodosius Dobzhansky (himself a theist) famously wrote, *"nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution."* (Dobzhansky 1973)

Wilber's comments about the half-wing are difficult to fathom since the rationale for the value of "half" a wing is easily explained (Dawkins 1996, p.125). Penguins and ostriches would agree that there is value in "half" a wing. Wilber has backtracked on his half-wing comments, referring to them as "metaphorical" but still insists that the standard theory of evolution has too many gaps to explain our state of nature without the invocation of some evolutionary intelligence or *telos*.

In a comment posted on his blog on December 4, 2007, Wilber wrote:

But even that is not enough, in my opinion, to account for the remarkable emergence of some of the extraordinarily complex forms that nature has produced. After all, from the big bang and dirt to the poems of William Shakespeare is quite a distance, and many philosophers of science agree that mere chance and selection are just not adequate to account for these remarkable emergences. (Wilber 2007)

This is, of course, a mere argument from incredulity rather than a legitimate critique, and one would be challenged to point to a working evolutionary biologist who shares Wilber's concerns.[3]

While there may still be some debates about specific details of evolutionary theory, no serious evolutionary biologist would agree with Wilber that there are gaps that require the insertion of a supernatural intelligent force or believes that random mutation and natural selection working together is insufficient to explain biological evolution.

Why these objections to Darwin despite the overwhelming evidence? The answer was eloquently provided by John Dewey in 1909 in his classic essay, *The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy* (Dewey 1984, pp.20-31). In the same way

[3] It is here that those who embrace a teleological force in nature or intelligent design will mention some specific scientists who are not evolutionary biologists but who voice objections to the modern synthesis, such as Michael Behe (a microbiologist), William Dembski (a mathematician) and Fred Hoyle (an astronomer). Rebuttals to their claims are easy to find on the internet. For example, see a rebuttal of Hoyle at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junkyard_tornado and Allen Orr's rebuttal of Behe and Dembski (Orr 2005). A general critique of intelligent design theory can be found in Foster et al (Foster et al 2008).

that Darwin's theory rendered the idea of Platonic forms inert, it undermines assumptions about the *necessity* of a teleological force.

Dewey understood the arguments of the Platonists and the teleologists:

I refer to the old problem of design versus chance, mind versus matter, as the causal explanation, first or final, of things. As we have already seen, the classic notion of species carried with it the idea of purpose. In all living forms, a specific type is present directing the earlier stages of growth to the realization of its own perfection. Since this purposive regulative principle is not visible to the senses, it follows that it must be an ideal or rational force. (Dewey, p.20)

He understood the impact that "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," to use Daniel Dennett's phrase, had on the arguments for Platonism and teleology:

In laying hands upon the sacred ark of absolute permanency, in treating the forms that had been regarded as types of fixity and perfection as originating and passing away, the "Origin of Species" introduced a mode of thinking that in the end was bound to transform the logic of knowledge, and hence the treatment of morals, politics, and religion. (Dewey, p.20)

And later, Dewey asserts that embracing the idea of inherent goals in evolution (i.e., teleology) is not to be on the cutting edge of knowledge but is actually to revert to old and outdated ideas:

To assert—as is often asserted—that specific values of particular truth, social bonds, and forms of beauty, if they can be shown to be generated by concretely knowable conditions, are meaningless and in vain; to assert that they are justified only when they and their particular causes and effects have all at once been gathered up into some inclusive first cause and some exhaustive final goal, is intellectual atavism. Such argumentation is reversion to the logic that explained the extinction of fire by water through the formal essence of aqueousness and the quenching of thirst by water through the final cause of aqueousness. (Dewey, p. 28)

Finally, Dewey points out why it is not scientifically valid to say that nature *must* have a purpose (telos) or an intelligent guiding hand:

The Darwinian principle of natural selection cut straight under this philosophy. If all organic adaptations are due simply to constant variation and the elimination of those variations which are harmful in the struggle for existence that is brought about by excessive reproduction, there is no call for a prior intelligent causal force to plan and preordain them. (Dewey, p.26)

I want to be clear here—perhaps there *is* an intelligent force shaping the development of nature or co-creating the future with us, but, if so, it remains well-hidden, leaves no trace of its presence, and its existence is not required by the evidence. Asserting that such a force exists is a matter of faith. Darwin, and the work of so many others who have come after him, have made it possible to explain the evolution of life and of human nature without the invocation of supernatural forces or purposes.

Our Evolved Nature

With an understanding of Darwin, the philosophical and scientific justification for Platonic and teleological essentialism fades away. It is difficult to sustain the idea of a *real* self and a *false* self, or of *higher* aspects and *lower* aspects if we choose to define those four italicized words from a metaphysical perspective that points to something we must *remember* or to something we are *destined* to become. The question becomes, "what to insert in their place?"

There *is* profound insight regarding aspects of human nature to be found in the work of (at least some of) the authors and teachers who write about Platonic essence and teleology. It is useful to know, for example, that the issue of "value" is relevant to Point Three of the Enneagram and Ennea-type Threes, because this knowledge gives us grist for the mill of self-development.

However, there is little scientific or philosophical support for the metaphysical underpinnings of their teaching and it is potentially misleading to frame these aspects as Platonically Essential or part of an unfolding *telos*. Perhaps these concepts work well as metaphors to spur growth, but they easily lead to the pre/trans fallacy and undermine the credibility of the Enneagram in scientific and philosophical circles. I prefer to not use metaphors that fly in the face of the developments of science and philosophy since the publication of Darwin's theory in 1859. Alchemy led to insights that formed the basis of modern chemistry and medicine and astrology led to insights that formed the basis modern astronomy, but scientists most people have let go of these earlier ideas. In the same way, the Platonism of early Enneagram teachings have led to profound insights, but perhaps it is time to let go of the old ideas and embrace new ones.

Plato and his followers helped us understand that humans do have a nature with predictable tendencies, capacities, and constraints. In a sense, our naïve intuitions about people having an essence is not far off the mark, there *is* such a thing as human nature. But it is an evolved and evolving "nature" rooted in our biological heritage rather than some Platonic realm or supernatural teleological purpose. It is a loose grouping of qualities, but none of these qualities are "essential" in the sense that if one were missing in someone, that person wouldn't be human. This nature is different from that of our distant forebears, effectively ruling out the possibility that it is rooted in some "unborn" essence unless we think that, say, *ardipithecus*, with his brain that was one-fifth the size of ours, was also trying to regain contact with the essential quality of "Holy Love"

4.4 million years ago. The nature of our distant descendents will be probably be different from ours as well. In the words of evolutionary biologist David Barash,

When the early 20th-century philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset observed that "man has no nature, only history," he neglected to add that this includes an evolutionary history, as a result of which we are constrained as well as impelled in certain ways and directions. (Barash 2013)

Rather than rely on Ideals and *telos* as explanations for our nature, it may be more helpful to view the Enneagram from the perspective of "methodological naturalism". Methodological naturalism is the view that while our understanding of the universe is incomplete, "natural" explanations are the only useful explanations to support statements of fact (as opposed to statements of faith or opinion), and that when natural explanations are not available, an open-minded but explorative state of agnosticism is called for.[4] The naturalist view removes "real" and "false" from the discussion of human nature and replaces them with "adaptive" and "maladaptive." It allows us to stop grasping for something that allegedly exists in another realm and focus on increasing "adaptiveness" and decreasing "maladaptiveness." Finally, it frees us from the pre/trans fallacy if we can remember that like everything else about us, our temperament contains elements that start off in immature forms and, over time and under the right circumstances, become more mature. Naïve intuition grows into mature intuition, undifferentiated subjectivity matures into the ability to appropriately objectivity assess our subjectivity while honoring its value, etc.

Our biology may have endowed us with a legacy, but it also endowed us with the capacity to transcend evolutionarily outdated impulses. We may have the urge to be selfish, but we have the capacity to rise above it. As Barash puts it in the same article cited above:

[W]e have the opportunity to assert ourselves as creative rebels. We may elect intentional childlessness. We may choose to be less selfish and more genuinely altruistic than our genes might like. We may decide to groom our sons to be nurses and our daughters to be corporate executives. I would go farther, and suggest that we must do such things—deny aspects of our own biological heritage—if we want to be fully human. (Barash 2013)

While biology may provide the foundation for our nature, science is not the only tool the methodological naturalist relies on in attempting to understanding

[4] It is important to distinguish between methodological naturalism and philosophical naturalism. Philosophical naturalism is the belief that the natural is all that exists—there are no gods, no miracles, no supernatural. Methodological naturalism, however, does not take a stance about what exists, it is the view that the only way to reliably understand natural phenomena are natural methodologies—science, reason, logic, etc. (Pigliucci 2010 pp. 178-180)

that nature; philosophy, psychology, and even spirituality are critical tools in helping us understand how to be and how to live, and we should embrace the latest insights that each of these fields has to offer while letting go of those that have become outdated. Letting go of the ideas of supernatural purpose and Platonic Essence does not preclude the pursuit of growth, and this is not a call for doing away with spirituality in the Enneagram; each of us would be well-served to pursue wisdom, compassion and efficacy; to seek communion with the numinous and strive for some form of transcendence.

What's the Harm?

In addition to being scientifically and philosophically outdated, embracing the view that particular qualities of our nature are Platonically *essential* can, as we have said, make us more prone to mistake the immature version of the quality for the mature version of that quality. For example, we might make the mistake of believing that our naïve intuitions are some kind of profound "inner knowing" or "Essential Guidance." Realizing that the ongoing development and maturation of the quality is required, understanding that we never reach "essence" because essence doesn't actually exist, can relieve us from the illusion of "real" and "false" and help keep us honest in our assessment of ourselves. After all, how often do we hear people refer to themselves as "unhealthy" or trapped in their ego or, if discussing Spiral Dynamics, refer to themselves as "first tier"? Almost never. However, in my experience working with clients I have found that using terms like "adaptive" and "maladaptive" or "effective" and "ineffective" reduce the defensiveness that reduces people's desire to look at themselves honestly and work to change.

Further, it is simply more accurate to see the various aspects of the human experience as just that, various aspects of experience rather than "real" or "false" selves. The common explanation that our "essence" is who we *truly* are while the false self is what we accumulate later is misleading and inaccurate. Our nature is so intricately intertwined with our environment that we are changing, adapting, and reshaping ourselves each moment from the time of our conception (and even before that, if you factor in our evolutionary heritage). Both external and internal stimuli trigger epigenetic responses that express particular genes that trigger instinctive reactions. Our environment triggers non-conscious cognitive and affective responses that we are unequipped to even perceive (Wilson 2002, pp.6-16). We are far too permeable and interwoven with our environment (Ridley 2003, pp.98-124) for such distinctions as "real" and "false" to have any basis in reality.

What is the danger of embracing a teleological perspective? From one perspective, not much, I guess; although I'll repeat that it is intellectually dishonest to claim that science supports one's view if science does not. Ignoring evidence and the implications of evidence rarely has positive outcomes. Perhaps there is no harm in people wanting to take comfort in the idea of some force pushing evolution forward or some inherent purpose in the universe. But there

certainly can be harm when the assumption of *telos* becomes more ambitious and one assumes that one actually knows what the purpose of the universe is. People who claim to know the intention of the divine always make me a little nervous. Recently, I was filled with anxiety by listening to a teleology-minded guru talking to his audience about how they, as part of the small percentage of humans in the know, should take "divine pride" (whatever that is) in being on the leading edge of evolution, riding on a surfboard full of Spirit.

I much prefer the approach of a Carl Sagan writing about a photograph of the earth from distant space in "The Pale Blue Dot," a passage laced with awe and humility and a plea for consideration of the whole rather than the ego-driven "divine pride" of the few:

Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity – in all this vastness – there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves…

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known. (Sagan 1994, p.6)

In closing, let's return to the naïve essentialism with which we began, the innate and intuitive tendency to assign essential characteristics to the objects around us. One of the biggest dangers in not clearly understanding the many facets of essence—the multiple meanings of the word and the implications thereof—is that it can trap us into seeing the Enneagram as merely a simplistic typology. Despite all of our protestations of how "we are not our type" and the "Enneagram doesn't put you in a box," we often treat others as if they *are* their type and we often put people in boxes. Falling into the trap of non-consciously believing there is an "essence" that makes a person their Ennea-type, we try to explain any behavior as if it were easily understood based on a person's type. When we think we understand a person's essence, we are less willing to question our assumptions about them and we engage in all sorts of Enneagram contortionism to try to justify our assumptions rather than taking a closer look at what we are seeing. The Enneagram doesn't explain everything, despite our best efforts to try to make it do so.

Such naïve essentialism affects our Enneagram theory, as well. We pay lip service to the notion that we must focus on motivation rather than traits, but because we are naïve essentialists we end up focusing on traits anyway. We see a trait in someone of a particular type and we assume that all others of the same Ennea-type share the same exact traits. People who should know better end up saying things like, "He must be a Five because he has low energy," "Eights don't

read," or "Fours could never run a corporation." Such simplistic thinking is an insult to a complex and robust system like the Enneagram.

We intuitively put things into categories and boxes because doing so helps us develop a sense of control over our environment. The Platonic way of understanding the world (and the people in it) before Darwin took deep root because it so accurately matches our naïve intuitions. But Darwin showed us that life cannot be easily classified (and that includes us), that despite the title of his most famous book, "species" don't actually exist but are instead a useful fiction; that what we think is a neat and orderly tree of life is actually a bush, and it's a messy, gnarled bush that sprouts up wherever it can find purchase. We, each one of us, are messy and gnarled as well, and the concept of "type" is a useful fiction. We must take care and not believe the fiction is real.

It is imperative that if we are going to work with the Enneagram, a system of classification as well as a map of the individual psyche, we examine the concept of essence in all it's manifestations and be conscious and deliberate on how we use the word. We must decide what we believe and what we don't, what the implications of our beliefs are, and how those beliefs limit or advance our search for truth and the maturation of our better nature.

Some say there is little romance or majesty in a universe lacking *telos* or Essence; I would disagree and give the last words to Darwin, who ended "On the Origin of Species" with:

There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (Darwin 1859, p.513)

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