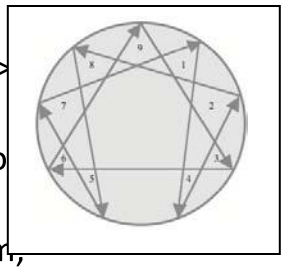
A Quickie on the Enneagram
by
John R. Amos

Would you like to become closer to people, or at least understand them better? If you are interested in improving your relationships—whether with your spouse, other members of your family and friends, or even those you report to or who report to you at work—the Enneagram can help.

The Enneagram is a nine-pointed star consisting of a triangle imposed on a hexagon and surrounded by a circle. The star's points are exactly 40 degrees apart. The Enneagram looks like this--------->



A little scary, isn't it? Some people think so, but if you do it's not what you may be thinking. The Enneagram has nothing to do with divination, sorcery, or devil-worship. The Enneagram, while not a religion, has been influenced by many great religious traditions—Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.—and it can even help you improve your relationship with God. But that's a whole subject in itself. The purpose of this short article is simply to acquaint you with the Enneagram with a view toward improving your relationships with other human beings. My hope is to whet your appetite to learn more.

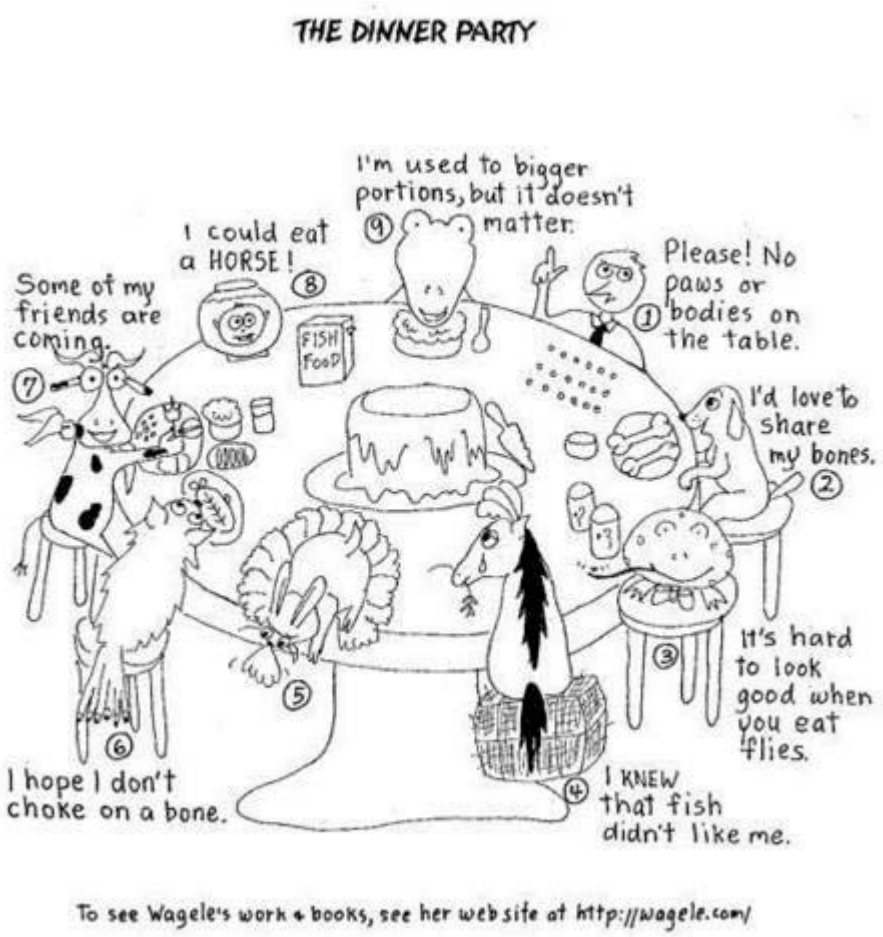
So just how does the Enneagram help people grow closer one another, or at least understand one another better? By helping people identify how they are **not present** to one another. That's right, not present.

We all have some idea of what it's like not to be present, e.g., to be daydreaming or reading our e-mail or opening the US mail while someone else is talking. Despite the hectic pace at which we are encouraged to live today, we really can't multi-task. To be present to another person we have to give them our full attention. We have to be quiet not only by not talking or reading or watching someone or something else; we also have to be quiet inside ourselves. We have to disconnect from the chatter inside our minds.

And the chatter inside our minds is a good clue to how we are not present to other people. This chatter might be called a preoccupation, and the theory on

which the Enneagram rests is that there are nine basic preoccupations. Identifying our own is a first step toward recognizing how we are not present or how we tune out others, and thereby it is a first step toward becoming more present to them. In the course of this discovery it almost invariably happens that we discover not only how we are not present to others but also how others are not present. Thereby the Enneagram helps us understand others better.

Here's an example of the nine types of people, none of whom are really present at



Notice how the One (in the upper right hand part of the table) is focused on whether the others are using good manners. To his left (our right) the Two wants to nurture everyone whether they need or want it or not. The Three is worried about how he or she (hard to tell sex in this drawing) appears to others. The Four is concerned with what another, the Eight, thinks of him or her and interpreting the Eight's words only in light of that concern. The Five is silently observing the rest and not contributing these thoughts to the conversation. The Six is

preoccupied by something that might go wrong, that he or she might choke. The Seven seems happy about his friends who are coming, and given his eye contact or the lack thereof they presumably are not among those already seated. The aforementioned Eight sounds threatening. No wonder the Four is concerned. The Nine has reason to be dissatisfied with what is happening but is refusing to speak on his or her own behalf.

Of course, dinner is not the only place the nine types of people exhibit their characteristic ways of not being present or on the same page. Check out the boardroom:



The Nine at the head of the table wants everyone involved in the project; the Three (near the bottom right) is concerned with how it's going to look; the Six (opposite him on the left at the bottom) foresees difficulties problems. Once again, he Eight is demanding (e.g., to get the project underway), but the Seven next to him wants to explore more options. The Five is focused on thinking the matter over rather than getting it done while the Four wants the group to approach the project more creatively. The Two, meanwhile, just wants to help, and the One is insisting that everyone follow the proper procedures.

Recognize anyone so far? Perhaps. Perhaps not. See whether you do from another table at



As in the boardroom, each type at this dinner table is concerned with its own agenda. Beginning this time with the Eight (in the upper left hand corner), who is demanding service from others at the table, and moving on to the Nine who's so close to everybody it's hard (even for her) to tell where she stands or what she believes, and moving again to the One, who emphatically states what's wrong. Now the Two is impressed with how much she's needed by others; the three is preoccupied with her accomplishments elsewhere; and the Four is thinking about what's missing. The Five, Six, and Seven, all of whom live in their heads, are also not present in characteristic ways. The Five is not sharing his observations; the Six is fearfully interpreting the Three's behavior in a negative way without checking out her thoughts; and the Seven is thinking or talking excitedly about all the other activities he could be or will be doing besides eating dinner with the people around this table.

You may have noticed as you viewed these examples of people not being present a little unpleasantness or negativity. That's what happens when we are not present to others and they are not present to us. We all feel misunderstood.

This is not to say that working with the Enneagram is completely negative experience. However, it can begin that way. That's because the ego in each of us is what stands in the way of our becoming more present to each other. However, the Enneagram also teaches us about the good qualities of all nine types, which, as you may see, are not far from their defects. The Eights, for example, who appeared above so demanding, can make great leaders. Likewise Nines, who focus so much on unity. A number of Nines have served as President of the United States or held other high offices, because they are skilled in bringing people together and in putting other people's needs ahead of their own. Ones make great religious leaders as they are distinguished by ethical behavior. Twos, Three, and Fours are all concerned with other people. The Two wants to help others and often genuinely does so. Threes like to accomplish tasks; working with them helps others become more accomplished and more efficient. Fours seek authentic relationships with others. Fives are observant, and when they share their observations, are often astute. Sixes are natural trouble-shooters and problem solvers. Every group needs one, or maybe several! Lastly, the Sevens just want to have fun and are usually fun to be with.

These descriptions, of course, are only bite-sized. Future articles in this series will provide more detail. Meanwhile, you might want to read more about the Enneagram and its nine types in any of these books: *Understanding the Enneagram* Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, published by Houghton-Mifflin in 2000; *The Nine Ways of Working* by Michael J. Goldberg, published by Da Capo Press in 1999; *The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective* by Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert, published by Crossroad in 2002; *The Everyday Enneagram* by Lynette Sheppard, published by Nine Points Press in 2000; *Higher Therapy* by Anthony Falikowski, published by O Books in 2010; and *The Essential Enneagram* by David Daniels and Virginia Price, published by HarperOne in 2009.

In this list you may have noticed that the Enneagram is useful in wide variety of fields from psychology to therapy and personal growth and from religion to business. Future articles will spell out these applications in greater detail.

Often the Enneagram is compared to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is widely used in businesses here in the United States to give employees some self-awareness and to help them realize how they might work together more effectively in teams. You might wonder why this article did not begin by saying something like, "The Enneagram is a system for describing personality types and determining which classes the people we know belong in." The reason is that the Enneagram, while it does that, is so much more. The real purpose of the Enneagram is to help people become more present to themselves, to others, and to God.

The next article in this series will take up the question of how this is done, but here's just a teaser: The secret is learning to live the present moment. To augment slightly a statement Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, teacher, author, poet, and peace activist, "People sacrifice the present for the future [or the past]. But life is available only in the present. That is why we should walk in such a way that every step can bring us to the here and the now." Or as Saint Paul says in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, "Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." Many others are urging us to live in the present moment. One of the more well-known is Eckhart Tolle, whose book, *The Power of Now*, has sold over three million copies.

Meanwhile, ponder these wise words from Father Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest and Enneagram teacher:

> Many people are afraid that such systems lead people to pigeonhold one another. To be honest this undeniably will happen when one first gets to know the Enneagram. . . . . [However] (t)he Enneagram is first of all a key to self-knowledge. The point is not to nail others down or to have others nail me down, but that I ask myself who I am, what dangers and possibilities are there within me, and how can I find my "true self," which God put inside me. . . . . The Enneagram . . . .is not freedom, but precisely by spelling out our unfreedom it can become a signpost to freedom. We can forget a signpost once we have before our eyes the goal that is described in the Bible in many images and colors: as the city of God, as a sumptuous feast, as the reign of freedom, as life to the full. (*The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective*, pp. 24, 228, and 249.)

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