

The Enneagram of Psychological Birth: Putting Mahler's Model to Work for Spiritual Transformation

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Abstract

The nine types of the Enneagram can be precisely correlated with the successive stages of Margaret Mahler's *separation-individuation* process. The psychological experiences at a given stage do not *cause* our type to form. Rather, our inborn type temperament predisposes us to experience a particularly vivid *imprint* at our type's corresponding stage of the developmental process. Looking closely at the interplay between type and developmental experience can help us understand how our unique personalities form atop the substrate of our inborn Enneagram type. In particular, it offers us specific clues as to *how* and *when* and *why* we all, depending upon our type, begin to lose contact with the *essential qualities* of our true nature. As we learn to reconnect with these essential qualities, we work to complete the "unfinished business" of our early development.

Introduction

Gurdjieff famously described the Enneagram as a "universal symbol" whose inner dynamics could be used to explore and elucidate any question: "A man may be quite alone in the desert and he can trace the Enneagram in the sand and in it read the eternal laws of the universe. And every time he can learn something new, something he did not know before" (Ouspensky, 1949, p. 294). While there may be an element of Gurdjieff's characteristic hyperbole in this statement, the Enneagram symbol has indeed proven, in the hands of its many subsequent students and practitioners, to be a formidable instrument for exploring and elucidating the human condition. Oscar Ichazo's account of his discovery of the modern psychological Enneagram – which he described as an instantaneous crystallization of the entire structure of personality in a flash of intuition – seems to bear out Gurdjieff's promise. Subsequent students of the Enneagram, such as Claudio Naranjo, A. H. Almaas, Don Riso, Russ Hudson, Helen Palmer, David Daniels, and Sandra Maitri – to name just a few – have all discovered further patterns and interconnections through prolonged study of the Enneagram symbol.

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It is in this spirit and tradition that I approach my current topic. This essay is partly in response to Bea Chestnut's *Enneagram Journal* article on object relations theory and the Enneagram (Chestnut, 2008), as well as to the lively debate that ensued in the pages of the *Enneagram Monthly*. In her journal article, Chestnut offered a way to align the models of several object-relations theorists (Margaret Mahler, Melanie Klein, Thomas Ogden, and Heinz Kohut) with the Enneagram, in order to describe more precisely "how early relationships form the basis of personality development" (p. 22-23). In her treatment of Mahler, whose model I will concentrate on in this essay, Chestnut aligns the key developmental sub-phases of *differentiation*, *practicing*, and *rapprochement* with the Body, Head, and Heart Centers of the Enneagram.

Chestnut's article is well-constructed and thought-provoking, but her alignment of Mahler's model with the Enneagram seems a bit murky at times (e.g. Type Eight is located in the *differentiation* group but is also used as an example of *practicing*), and her description of *rapprochement*, with all its emphasis on fear and ambivalence, sounds to me a lot more like Type Six than like the Heart Center types. So I would like to enter into a dialogue with Chestnut's essay, but I would propose that instead of organizing the discussion thematically around the Centers, and tracing Mahler's sequence in the order of Body Center/Head Center/Heart Center, we organize it along the lines of the object-relations triads worked out by Don Riso and Russ Hudson, and map Mahler's progression in the other direction, starting with Type Nine and moving clockwise around the circle back to Nine.¹

I would also like to weigh in on the debate that ensued between Bea Chestnut and Susan Rhodes, as it raises questions about the validity of Mahler's developmental model, as well as about how we construe the nature of Enneagram type. In her piece in the *Enneagram Monthly* (Rhodes, 2008), Susan Rhodes took issue with Chestnut's article on two grounds:

- 1) Rhodes interprets Chestnut's essay as arguing that childhood experiences *cause* our type to form, whereas Rhodes believes that our Enneagram types are inborn; and
- 2) She believes that recent research has discredited Mahler's model, particularly by demonstrating that infants are aware of their differentiation from the mother much earlier than Mahler thought when she did her classic study in the 1970s.

To address both of these concerns:

- 1) I too believe our Enneagram type is inborn.² Therefore, I will not argue that experiences during the universal process of separating and individuating *cause*

our type to form. Rather, I am suggesting that each type will experience a particularly poignant developmental *imprint* at that type's corresponding developmental stage.

- 2) Rhodes's point that researchers have identified differentiation experiences earlier than Mahler suspected in the 1970s is valid. Mahler herself acknowledged as much later in her career (Bergman, 2000, p. xvi). But this research spurred colleagues to subtly revise Mahler's original model rather than to reject it outright. As Fred Pine notes in his preface to the 2000 edition of Mahler's study, all of the phases of infant development are dynamic and contain different strands of the developmental process simultaneously (xii). Yet, crucially, each phase gives rise to "moments" of particularly intense affective experience, as for example the "moments [of] merger" with the mother occurring during the phase Mahler described more monolithically as the "dual unity" of mother and infant (ix). My working hypothesis in this essay is precisely that such intense affective "moments" of experience leave their imprints on our developing consciousness, and that a particularly indelible imprint is left by the experiences that occur in the phase corresponding to our inborn type temperament.

Just as I am not arguing for a cause-and-effect relationship between these developmental stages and our individual Enneagram type, I am not looking to "prove" the correspondences between the Enneagram and Mahler's model in the sense that one system is being called upon to validate the other. Rather, in the spirit of Gurdjieff's words quoted at the beginning of this essay, I hope that bringing the dynamic structure of the Enneagram into contact with Mahler's model will further illuminate an intriguing aspect of human development: how, because of our inborn type, each of us will selectively respond to certain developmental experiences more than others, in the process building our unique personality structures on top of the temperamental substrate provided by our Enneagram type. The real "proof" of the endeavor, it seems to me, is whether or not my readers feel, at the end, that *both* of these systems have been further illumined through bringing them together.

Mahler's Developmental Sequence and the Nine Types

We can chart a clockwise, spiraling journey around the Enneagram in which Type Nine functions as both *alpha* and *omega*, though in this transformative journey the *omega* is also another *alpha*, what Gurdjieff would call the higher "*do*" that begins the next octave of development.

Type Nine: Mahler’s “Dual Unity”

The “alpha version” of the Nine correlates with Mahler’s description of the earliest infant experiences in the *symbiotic phase*, in which “the infant behaves and functions as though he and his mother were . . . a dual unity within one common boundary” (Mahler et al., 1975, p. 44). To repeat Susan Rhodes’ caveat, this phase is not as monolithically undifferentiated as Mahler originally thought, but it should suffice to recognize that it contains the most intense *moments* of merger experience, and to ponder its similarities to the subsequent expression of the Nine’s personality type.

For is it not the ongoing and central struggle of the Nine to discern and learn to assert her own, unique being? To escape the gravitational pull of the surrounding human matrix so as to truly know her own will, her own aliveness, her own desires? Again, I am not arguing that this early experience *causes* the type to develop, for we all go through this phase and we are clearly not all Nines. But if I come into this world as a budding Nine, doesn’t it make sense that this early phase would exert a strong pull on my psyche, would leave an indelible imprint that I would then carry with me throughout the subsequent development and maturation of my personality?

As I noted in the introduction, however, this is not the whole story of how the Enneagram correlates with object-relations theory. Don Riso and Russ Hudson have worked out a triadic model, using the theories of Karen Horney and W. R. D. Fairbairn, that identifies both the *primary object* each type relates to and the *dominant affect* of that object relation. The diagram below shows how the model was worked out:

The Riso-Hudson Object-Relations Groups³

	Attachment (Fairbairn's "Ideal Object")	Frustration (Fairbairn's "Exciting Object")	Rejection (Fairbairn's "Rejecting Object")
Withdrawns (Horney's "moving away") Primary "object" = Both the Nurturing and the Protective Figures	9	4	5
Assertives (Horney's "moving against") Primary "object" = the Nurturing Figure	3	7	8
Dutifuls (Horney's "moving towards") Primary "object" = the Protective Figure	6	1	2

This diagram arrays the "Horneyan" or "Social Styles" triads against the "Dominant Affect" triads, which are based on a re-working of Fairbairn's primary affects. Don Riso's discovery that the Horneviaan groups were united not only by their shared "social style," but also by a common primary object, allows us to identify for each type a *dominant affect toward a specific primary object*. Note that the Attachment affect, which Fairbairn considered to be the primordial affect, aligns with the inner triangle of the Enneagram's primary types (3-6-9). Note also the repeated sequence, as we follow the types around the circumference of the Enneagram, of Attachment-Frustration-Rejection. Fairbairn's formulation of the three primary affects describes an analogous dialectical progression within the individual psyche.

Returning to type Nine, we can see that this type's core object-relation dynamic is rooted in *attachment to both the nurturing and the protective figures*. (The *nurturing figure* is usually associated most strongly with the mother but is more broadly the figure that first holds, nourishes, and comforts the infant. The *protective figure* is usually associated with the father, but it too can be more broadly understood as the figure that protects, provides guidance and structure, and at certain crucial points offers an alternative to the energies of the nurturing figure.) With the Nine, even though we see a crucial developmental imprint occurring in the early part of the symbiotic phase, which is

primarily an experience of the *nurturing figure*, the ongoing interplay of the type with its environment later pulls the *protective figure* into its *attachment* orbit as well. Again, this description accords well with what we know of the Nine personality type and its profound attachment to the entire, enveloping human environment.

In my discussion of the subsequent types I will end with a look at the *essential quality* of each type, an aspect of our true nature which has become obscured by our ego-structures. When recovered, the essential quality heals the type's core object-relations wound, for each type's primary object-relation dynamic represents the ego's attempt to resolve the type's tensions and dilemmas on the plane of internalized images of others. With type Nine, however, this discussion must wait until we encounter the Nine, again, at the end of this first spiraling journey around the circle.

Type One: The Unity is Split

Early on in the symbiotic phase, the infant experiences moments of disruption and dissatisfaction as well as merger and unity. So, for example, the milk-giving breast is not always there as soon as the baby wants it. Nor can the baby always discharge uncomfortable sensations as soon as they arise but may have to wait for outside help, for example by being "burped." Such early rhythms of distress and discharge, notes Mahler, "help the infant in time to differentiate between a 'pleasurable'/'good' quality and a 'painful'/'bad' quality of experience" (p. 43). Such a developmental imprint as this would seem to align itself naturally with the embryonic personality structure of a young Type One.

For is it not core to the One's journey to seek out the good and the right, and to align himself with it? To recognize the bad, the wrong, the defective, and to shun or seek to correct it? When the primordial attachment to the nurturing environment is riven by this early experience of division, *frustration* arises as the natural response. Why can't *everything* be good, *always*? One's can be tormented by such questions in ways the other types can scarcely imagine. As I continue to grow and develop as a One, I will ultimately pin this *frustration affect* primarily on the *protective figure*, on the figure that is supposed to provide structure and guidance in my world.

The essential quality that the One is seeking to reconnect with is called, in the Riso-Hudson teachings, Essential Alignment, which is a direct awareness of the intrinsic rightness or "suchness" of Being.⁴ Although we all have access, in moments of complete openness, to any of the essential qualities, each type comes into the world with a special sensitivity to its own corresponding quality, and thus also to any experience of loss of

contact with that quality. Indeed, the vivid developmental imprints I am arguing for in this essay are precisely such felt moments of contact *with* and alienation *from* the type's essential quality. So, for the One, the soul's inherent affinity for the experience of Essential Alignment is disrupted by the splitting of the infant's experience into categories of "good" and "bad." When I recover my contact with Essential Alignment, I heal this wound of splitting in my experience of Being. Aligned again with the inherent rightness and "suchness" of Being, my soul need no longer judge and criticize and seek to improve its experience.

Type Two: Love-Longing

While still in the symbiotic phase, Mahler tells us, "the infant begins dimly to perceive need satisfaction as coming from some need-satisfying part-object – *albeit still from within the orbit of the...symbiotic dual unity* – and he turns libidinally toward that mothering source or agency. The need gradually becomes a wish and later the specific 'object-bound' affect of longing" (p.46, *emphasis Mahler's*). Even through the thickets of Mahler's highly specialized vocabulary, it is possible to sense the primordial possibility of heartbreak dawning in the infant's consciousness. For to the same degree that the infant can experience sweet merging love with the mother can she also suffer the devastation of its loss or interruption. In the dialectic of these primal affects, the Nine's *attachment* establishes the ground in which the One's *frustration* can take root, and the experience of frustration now begets the specter of *rejection* for the Two.

The rejection affect is a complex, double-edged set of feelings, part fear of being rejected, part rejecting activity, but we can see it clearly at work in the Two's personality structure. We see it in the Two's intense love needs, born out of the fear that there really might be no love in the world, and often expressed as a fervent *rejection* of these very needs. I think of Simone Weil's poignant formulation: "The danger is not that the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but that, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry" (quoted in Kornfield, 2008, p. 28).

As I mature as a Two, I will come to experience *rejection* most vividly from an internalized *protective figure* – perhaps an internalized image of the father competing with me for mother's love, or perhaps the paternal superego punishing me for my own love-needs – and I will come to over-identify with the nurturing figure, the source of love, learning to dispense love to others while pretending I don't need it for myself.

The quality that I am struggling to reconnect with as a Two is called, simply, Essential Love: the direct recognition that love is an essential aspect of Being, that it pervades

Being, that Being is, in fact, *made* of love. When I integrate this quality, I need no longer manipulate the world around me to give me a sense of *being loved* by reflecting back that I am *giving love*.

Type Three: Mutual Cueing

Next comes a kind of transitional phase, straddling the symbiotic phase and the ensuing separation-individuation phase, in which the mother and infant establish a “good enough” holding environment, a concept Mahler borrows from D. W. Winnicott. Mahler’s description of the process immediately brings to mind two central aspects of the Three’s personality structure:

Even the most primitive differentiation...can only take place if a psychophysiological equilibrium can be attained. This depends first on a certain matching of the discharge patterns of the mother and the young infant, and later, on their interactional patterns, *behaviorally discernible in mutual cueing*, as well as in the infant’s earliest *adaptive patterning* and in his receptive capacities with the ‘good enough’ holding behavior of his symbiotic mother (p. 49, *emphasis added*).

We see here the early imprint, which will be felt most vividly by the infant Three, of a subtle and mutually pleasurable dance of mirroring between the baby and the mother. Still largely within the charmed circle of the symbiotic embrace, yet beginning to discern her own role within the symbiotic field, the baby learns to adapt her behavior to elicit the desired response: “When I smile, mother smiles back.”

We need not go far to recognize the Three’s personality structure reflected in this early behavior. As a maturing Three, I will continue to adapt myself to the cues I perceive in the human world around me, giving back what I perceive is wanted so I will feel mirrored and valued. It will be the source of my greatest strength and my greatest weakness that I will learn to do this so skillfully, for I will probably get the validation I seek, but too often at the expense of knowing, fundamentally, *who* is seeking it. This is the burden of the Three’s deep *attachment* to external mirroring, first by the mother, and later by the entire world related to as a field of nurturing validation.

Thus has the dialectic among the primary affects led us back to *attachment*, a reaction to the fear and separation of the *rejection* affect, and so the rhythm will continue around the circle. Structurally, it is worth noting that, like the Three, the Six also functions as a transitional phase, in that case between the separation-individuation phase proper and

the later phase of *consolidation*. Add to this the Nine's function as both beginning and endpoint, and we can see that the inner triangle of "primary types" functions here, as so often proves to be the case when we closely examine the inner dynamics of the Enneagram, as a quasi-autonomous structure-within-a-structure.

Before we leave the Three, however, we should take a moment to contemplate the lost quality, called Essential Value, which resolves the Three's object-relations dilemma. For when I come to rest in the direct knowing of my own, essential value, which is not dependent upon anything that I must *do* or *achieve* but is rather an intrinsic aspect of my Being, I see clearly how I have projected my own inherent value onto an external "source," which I then spend my life courting to come back to me. I can choose to rest, instead, in the validating embrace of my own Being.

Type Four: Forming an Identity

Mahler called the holding environment established between mother and child "the symbiotic organizer – the midwife of individuation [and] psychological birth" (p. 47). We are at the threshold now of the *separation-individuation* phase, which in its various sub-phases will leave its characteristic imprints on types Four through Eight. Mahler describes this complex phase as made up of "two intertwined, but not always commensurate or proportionately progressing, developmental tracks. One is the track of *individuation*, the evolution of intrapsychic autonomy, perception, memory, cognition, reality testing; the other is the intrapsychic developmental track of *separation* that runs along [the lines of] distancing, boundary formation, and disengagement from mother" (p. 63, *emphasis added*). In types Four through Eight, we can see in each type an emphasis on one of these tracks over the other, with the exception of the Six, in which the salient struggle revolves around the attempt to balance the conflicting claims on the ego of separation *vs.* individuation.

The first sub-phase of separation-individuation Mahler calls *differentiation*, and here we see the track of *individuation* being emphasized. A primary signpost of this sub-phase is the infant's "straining his body away from mother," in order to visually examine and touch her face, as he seeks to cognitively individuate both his own and his mother's unique features. Around seven to eight months, the infant begins to exhibit the classic "stranger reaction," in which he actively explores new faces, "checking the unfamiliar against the already familiar" (p. 54). The infant is creating the early building blocks of what will later become a sense of his own unique identity, and he is beginning to break out of the charmed circle of mirroring by the nurturing figuring, exploring a wider world in which he knows himself largely *against* the strangeness and difference of others.

If I am a Four, this search for what it is that distinguishes me and makes me unique will be a central preoccupation of my life, and much of my search will be marked by a pervasive feeling of *frustration*, both with myself in the difficult search for inner identity, and with the world around me for not sufficiently appreciating and validating my uniqueness. In terms of the ongoing dialectic of the object-relations affects, the preceding phase of *attachment* to a mirroring environment has given rise to a deep *frustration* with that environment's limitations and inadequacies. So strong is the *frustration* with *both the nurturing and the protective figures* that a commonly reported belief or fantasy of Fours is that they were somehow "switched" at birth and have grown up in the wrong family!

If, however, I am able to reconnect with my Essential Identity, I recognize that I am not *me* simply or solely because I can make myself appear different from all that is *not-me*. I am who I am by virtue of my inherent and inalienable identity, the subtle and unique flavor that I alone bring to Being. Recognizing and knowing this directly, I need no longer fret over my resumé of unique traits and characteristics. I am the precise and unique vantage point on Being that I am – and that is enough.

Type Five: Practicing Separation

Mahler called the next sub-phase of separation-individuation *practicing*, and here the emphasis is clearly on *separation*. This is the sub-phase in which the child's growing abilities to crawl or walk enable him to go off alone, separating himself from the parental sphere so he can explore a wider world and come to know his caregivers from a distance. Mahler characterizes the development of upright walking as "the greatest step in human individuation . . . [when] from an entirely new vantage point [the child] finds unexpected and changing perspectives, pleasures, and frustrations" (p. 70-71). Mahler further noted that "the maturation of locomotor and other functions during the early practicing period had the most salutary effect on those children who had an intense but uncomfortable symbiotic relationship" (p. 66). Mahler had no model like the Enneagram to help her understand predisposed type differences, but she seems to have clearly registered the *rejection* affect of those children who struggled most ardently to break out of the symbiotic sphere in order to plunge into the practicing phase with all its "pleasure in mastery" (p. 68).

As a maturing Five, I will continue to experience this double-edged affect, anticipating *rejection* by the rest of the world even as I actively reject its claims upon me. Fives famously channel this *practicing*, separation energy into the realms of the mind,

striking out on bold intellectual journeys that take them to wondrous but lonely places. Fives often believe they do not want to be intruded upon and yet may suffer from feelings of loneliness and isolation as a result of their withdrawal. Riso and Hudson note that Fives are often “psychologically stuck in the separation phase” (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 212), and I would interpret this as a reference, more specifically, to the *practicing sub-phase*.

We can see here how the Five has gone beyond the Four’s *frustration* with the parental/family matrix to a more thoroughgoing *rejection* of the field of *nurturing and protective figures*. Deep in the Five’s psyche is a belief that she must withdraw from contact *with* Being in order to gain a mastery, through intellectual or mental understanding, *of* Being.

The essential quality Fives must recover is a kind of *gnosis*, of direct knowing through contact with the thing known: so the resolution of the Five’s object-relations dilemma through the recovery of Essential Understanding involves the recognition that, as a Five, I have learned to withdraw myself from direct contact with the world so as to understand it from a place of refuge. This applies not only to other people but even to the world of ideas I cherish. When I embrace the full contact of direct knowing – of ideas, of the world, of other people, of my own body in the moment of knowing – I recognize that I need no longer separate myself from and *reject* the world in order to know it.

Type Six: Support vs. Engulfment

The *practicing* phase, during which the child explores a wider world, separated from the mother or nurturing figure, is followed by a period of profound ambivalence and emotional re-calibration, called by Mahler the *rapprochement* phase. During this phase, “as the toddler’s *awareness* of separateness grows – stimulated by his maturationally acquired ability to move away physically from his mother and by his cognitive growth – he seems to have an increased need, a wish for mother to share with him every one of his new skills and experiences, as well as a great need for the object’s [i.e. the mother’s] love” (p. 77, *emphasis Mahler’s*). Partially unnerved by his newfound ability to forge out on his own, the child now seeks an “optimal distance” from the mother, played out in a characteristic approach-avoid pattern of behavior: “the ‘shadowing’ of mother *and* the darting away from her, with the expectation of being chased and swept up into her arms [,] indicate both his wish for reunion with the love object and his fear of reengulfment by it” (p. 77).

As the *rapprochement* drama plays out in the further ego-development of the Six, it becomes, in a sense, a struggle to find the optimal balance *between separation and individuation*. In other words, how can I achieve the autonomy and *individuation* I desire without feeling *too separated* from the ground of parental support? As a Six, I will tend to re-enact this ambivalent drama with everyone and every situation I encounter. The strong *attachment* I form to the *protective figure* highlights the importance of this figure as guidance in my bid for independence and autonomy within the nurturing field (Riso and Hudson, 1999). The original protective figure in my life will be the prototype of all the figures and structures I subsequently look to for support as I try to maintain my autonomy without straying too far into the unknown and unsupported.

When I reconnect with my Essential Awakeness, I begin to resolve this persistent dilemma. Awakeness connects me with my own *internal* guidance, an awareness of how to respond to each moment as it arises, rather than forever worrying about what *might* arise in the future and rehearsing scenarios about how I might then deal with it. When I reconnect with my Awakeness, my *attachment* to the protective and guiding figure, in all its myriad manifestations, relaxes into a trust in the moment-by-moment unfolding of Being. I trust that, in each moment, I know how to balance my drive toward individuation with my need for supportive orientation to the world around me.

Type Seven: The World is My Playground

Following the *rapprochement* phase, the child moves into the final sub-phase in Mahler's model: the *consolidation* of the separated and individuated self. Mahler notes that the main developmental task of this sub-phase is twofold: "(1) the achievement of a definite, in certain aspects lifelong, individuality, and (2) the attainment of a certain degree of object constancy" (109). We see here again the twin strands of (1) *individuation* and (2) *separation*, now being consolidated and stabilized.

Mahler first discusses the *separation* strand, noting that "the establishment of affective (emotional) object constancy depends upon the gradual internalization of a constant, positively cathected, inner image of the mother" (109). The key developmental imprint for the Seven, I believe, involves an affect of *frustration* precisely around this internalized image of the *nurturing figure*. As a Seven, my Passion of Gluttony will be a response to my deep sense of frustration as I attempt to obtain constant satisfaction from the nurturing environment. I will struggle to achieve the object constancy Mahler describes, fearing as I do that anything I do not experience or consume in this moment may not be around to experience or consume later.

Mahler highlights the use of “transitional” objects and activities as the child seeks to move beyond the *rapprochement* phase and to consolidate object constancy (p. 100). Typical transitional objects noted by Mahler’s team were a favorite doll, a feeding bottle, or the chair that mother was just sitting in. As a transitional activity, Mahler also noted children consuming large amounts of pretzels and cookies after mother left the room, in effect seeking to “fill” the absence of the nurturing figure. Riso and Hudson note that even adult Sevens “seem to be still in search of transitional objects” (Riso & Hudson, 1999, p. 265). As a Seven, indeed, I will learn to turn my entire world into a vast collection of transitional objects. Every pleasurable experience I can obtain will be a way of managing my separation from the *nurturing* source and keeping the resulting *frustration* and anxiety at bay.

I can resolve this unceasing struggle for satisfaction, however, by re-connecting with my Essential Freedom. Essential Freedom is not a freedom *from* deprivation or constriction or dissatisfaction. It is an inherent dimension of freedom *within* Being. When I reconnect with this quality, I realize I am free to experience everything – even pain and deprivation and disappointment. What’s more, I realize I am still free even *within* these experiences. The experience of Essential Freedom annihilates my ego-agendas around selectively experiencing myself and my world, around my constant striving to obtain satisfaction and to avoid pain.

Type Eight: Standing on my Own Two Feet

We are approaching the final phase of the individual psyche’s “birth” into the world. Mahler describes this sub-phase as presenting especially difficult challenges, and notes that for some children it is much harder than for others. I would suggest that, particularly if one has come into the world with the Type Eight temperament, the imprints of this phase will be experienced as a painful assault on one’s integrity of being.

Mahler describes the inevitable trauma involved in consolidating the separation from the nurturing figure, highlighting the role of aggression in the child’s attempt to fully *individuate* into an autonomous and independent self: “the less predictably reliable or the more intrusive the love object’s [i.e. the nurturing figure’s] emotional attitude has been [or has been experienced as], the greater the extent to which the object *remains* or *becomes* an unassimilated foreign body – a ‘bad’ introject in the intrapsychic economy. In the effort to eject this ‘bad introject,’ derivatives of the aggressive drive come into play” (p.117, *emphasis Mahler’s*). Moreover, for all the children she observed, Mahler notes “active resistance to the demands of adults, [and] a great need and a wish (often

still unrealistic) for autonomy (independence). Recurrent mild or moderate negativism, which seems to be essential for the development of a sense of identity, is also characteristic of this subphase” (p. 116).

In this sub-phase, we can see the building blocks for much of the Type Eight’s ego-structure: a forceful resistance to the impingements of the outside world, an aggression-fueled assertion of independence and autonomy, and feelings of *rejection* (and/or intrusion) *by* the *nurturing figure* that inspire, in turn, a strong affect of *rejection toward* that figure. It seems that we must utter an existential “NO!” – and with especial vehemence if we are Eights – in order to fully achieve and defend our psychological birth from the nurturing matrix.

To achieve my full spiritual birthright as an Eight, however, I need to reconnect with my Essential Strength. This is not a strength that I use to force or overpower or protect myself from my environment. Sometimes also called Aliveness or Immediacy, Essential Strength is the manifestation of the vital life force of Being within me. It is an aspect of Being we all experience, but if I am an Eight it is my life-blood, my home, the aspect of Being that most feels like *me*. When I am in touch with it, I know my autonomous, individuated self in my bones, and I can proclaim instead the essential “YES!” that brings me into full contact with myself in the world.

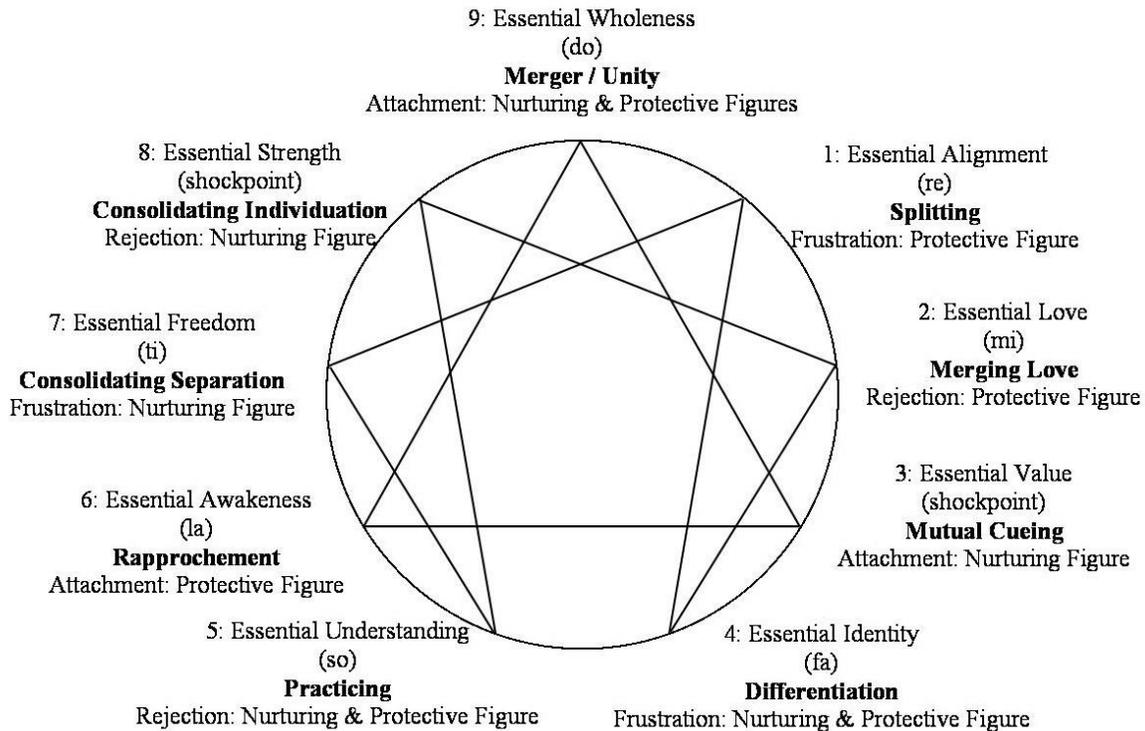
Type Nine (Revisited): Wholeness and Connection

We can now connect with the Essential Wholeness of Type Nine, and we can understand this quality all the better for having journeyed around the circle and arrived here once again. In this “higher octave,” the Type Nine teaches us how we can be fully individuated from the matrix of all our internalized *nurturing and protective figures* and yet be deeply and intimately connected to the world around us. Indeed, one of the most important lessons of this journey around the circle of the Enneagram is that we cannot experience truly meaningful connection *until* we have achieved our full individuation: before that point, all our connections and contacts are strongly colored by various forms of object-relation transference. Put another way, we are primarily relating *to our own internalized images* of others until we achieve true individuation. So the Essential Wholeness of Type Nine is *both* a wholeness and self-sufficiency of the fully individuated self *and* a deep and abiding connection to the whole of Being.

Concluding Remarks

“And every time [a man studies the Enneagram] he can learn something new, something he did not know before.”

(Gurdjieff, quoted in Ouspensky, 1949.)



I suggested earlier that the real “proof” of the value of aligning Mahler’s model with the Enneagram would be a recognition that both systems were further illuminated by the contact. In my view, this exercise has proved worthwhile, for several reasons:

1) For those readers interested in developmental object-relations psychology, I believe that an understanding of Enneagram typology sheds considerable light on the differences Mahler noted in the developmental experiences of the various children she observed. Without any theory of temperamental type differences, Mahler generally attributed these varied experiences to the quality of mothering each child received. While this is undoubtedly one factor, to rely on it exclusively is to miss out on crucial developmental nuances and, potentially, to create confusion and unnecessary feelings of guilt in parents and caregivers.

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2) Bringing Mahler's model into alignment with the Enneagram symbol, I am made aware, once again, of the astonishing complexity and inner coherence of the Enneagram. I find it amazing that the Enneagram can simultaneously hold the linear, progressive model of Mahler, and the dialectical triads of Fairbairn-Riso-Hudson, in a coherent and meaningful balance. The Enneagram is thus able to represent the spiraling course of human development, which is *both* linear-progressive *and* cyclical-recurrent. This was one of the subtler points, I thought, in Chestnut's original essay.

3) More specifically, aligning Mahler's model with the points around the Enneagram provides a concrete working hypothesis as to just when, and how, and why we all experience a loss of contact with the *essential qualities* of our true nature, and how that loss contributes to early personality development. This seems to me a potentially major contribution to our understanding of the Enneagram. Both in my own work of inner inquiry and in early experiments with group work around this model, I have found it "tests" true in terms of inner understanding and insight. If anyone more versed than I in empirical-statistical methods of testing wished to take this model up, I would be very happy and eager to learn more.

4) At the deepest level of transformative work, where we begin to truly engage the energies and qualities and fixations of *all* the nine types within us, I believe this model offers a powerful guiding structure. We are all stuck, for all or much of our lives, on the first level of the spiral outlined in this essay. We are probably *especially* stuck or fixated at the developmental point that corresponds to our type, but in effect we still need to work through all of the developmental imprints that disconnect us from our true nature, and this model can help us to see the rhythms and patterns that would naturally guide this work. Readers familiar with Gurdjieff's teachings may have noted that in the "octave of transformation" outlined in the Enneagram diagram, where Type Nine is the *do* that begins the initial journey *and* the *do* that begins the higher octave, Types Three and Eight function as the logical "shock points" along the way:

- At Three, the deep recognition of *value*, of the *personal* dimension of Being, is needed to emerge from the initial symbiotic circle;
- While at Eight, that type's access to the strength and energy of the vital life force itself is called upon to finally break free of the entire matrix of object relations in which we are enmeshed.

We must deeply understand these energies within us, even if they are not our primary types, in order to harness the psycho-spiritual force needed to genuinely arrive at the

higher octave. At that point, a whole new Enneagram journey possibly awaits us, but one that only fully *separated*, *individuated*, and *whole* human beings can begin to travel.

In my own journey of self-exploration as a Six, it has proved very fruitful to see how my ambivalence in so many arenas of my life is imbedded in a deep-seated and unresolved *rapprochement* crisis. When I am truly present to this still-open wound, when I see in the moment how I am projecting or transferring this crisis from my early childhood onto my adult experience, I am able to tap into a deeply compassionate understanding of my own suffering and, by so doing, I am learning to heal it.

We all carry imprints, of course, from every stage of our early ego-development, but I suspect that each of us carries one especially deep, core imprint from this all-but-forgotten formative period of our lives. To learn to perceive the deep and largely hidden roots of our present suffering in this momentous past is to help ourselves immeasurably on the path to freedom and our true nature.

¹ I want to thank Russ Hudson for the original suggestion to examine the Enneagram in light of Mahler's model. The basic organizing premise of this essay I owe to a personal conversation with Russ at an Enneagram Institute Training in 2006. Any missteps in the detailed working out of this premise are, of course, mine alone.

² In a recent letter responding to Susan Rhodes, Bea Chestnut (2009) argues that this is also her interpretation of type, and that Rhodes misunderstood her original article by failing to distinguish clearly between "personality" and "type." I would add that at least three major Enneagram writers have already explored the idea of inborn types and how our ego-structured personalities develop in relation to them in some depth. (See especially Almaas, 1998; and Riso & Hudson, 1999 and 2003.)

³ For an earlier version of this chart, with slightly different terminology, see Riso & Hudson, 1996, p. 448. For Fairbairn's object relations affects, see Greenberg & Mitchell, 1983, p. 164 ff.

⁴ The *essential qualities* are part of an evolving teaching provided in the writings and trainings of The Enneagram Institute. Each type's *essential quality* can be seen as a distinctive expression of how that type manifests in the realm of Essence and Being. It is important to remember that

we can reconnect with these qualities any time we truly come to rest in Presence, though the full *integration* of these qualities in our souls is only the fruit of sustained spiritual practice – of a sufficient multitude of such moments of reconnection. I believe I am using the currently preferred Riso-Hudson terminology, though again any errors or idiosyncrasies in interpretation are mine alone. (See also Riso & Hudson, 1999.)