

Moving Toward Wisdom

Chapter 16 (Postscript) of Don Riso's book *Personality Types*

To face the world and the terrifying insecurity of human existence naked and defenceless seems like an overwhelming situation for anyone to be in. Each person's ego attempts to buffer itself from the full realisation of the insecurity of its existence in different ways. Each type adopts different strategies for inflating the ego as a defence against being insecure and alone.

The paradox is that our ego cannot exist without defending itself from the full awareness of existence. Our personality is threatened by the mystery of our existence, whether we affirm it in hope or recoil in despair. And yet, if each of the personality types pushes its defences to an extreme, it brings destruction on itself. Indeed, the life of the personality seems tenuous at best and always seems to be in danger of being destroyed by something. Too much openness to life and it runs the risk of being overwhelmed; too little, and it destroys itself from within. Too much freedom is as threatening to it as no freedom at all. When all is said and done, existential anxiety may be the proper response for beings who are aware of their own mortality. Like Moses before the burning bush, we quake with terror in the realisation that we ultimately stand before the vastness of being.

There seems to be only one way out of this conundrum: to hope to find meaning for our lives, a meaning that connects with something real beyond the concerns of our personality.

However, we are in the insoluble position of trying to find a meaning for our lives without being able to step outside our lives to find their ultimate context. Being able to step outside of our existence may happen at the moment of death, when this life has come to an end. If we still exist in some form beyond that moment, we will know whether our life has had meaning - and what that meaning is. So much of the mystery and tragedy of existence comes about because we cannot know with certainty what our life means before that decisive moment.

Although the ultimate meaning of life is mysterious, it affects every moment that we live. What we believe about the meaning of life influences what we value and every choice we make. In considering these realities, we move from the psychological to the metaphysical, where the human context ultimately will or will not have meaning. It may be that human existence is absurd and meaningless because there is only the endless recycling of matter and energy in an indifferent universe. Or it may be that the ultimate context of human life is personal and that there is a God whose existence is the reason for

our own. Or it may be that there is a divine intelligence that is not personal in any form that we could recognise. **For most of us, the ultimate nature of the universe is beyond our personality's ability to know. This is why the meaning of life always involves "faith," whether we call it that or not.**

In the absence of a direct experience of our own nature and of divinity, we must rely on beliefs. Mystics of various spiritual traditions insist that such direct experience is possible but that it requires that we transcend our personalities. If we do not have direct experiences of our true nature which form the foundation of faith, then we must have "faith" in something else. Because we cannot live without meaning, without reference to something outside ourselves, we inevitably create idols as substitutes for faith in the transcendent and the meaning which it supplies.

Of course, the supreme and universal idol is pride, the ego inflating itself, attempting to be the cause of its own being, attempting to find its own meaning within its own resources. Pride sees no reason to look beyond itself for help or guidance. It is satisfied with itself. **Each of the personality types is tempted toward a particular form of pride as a way of defending itself from the anxieties involved with it's existence.** The **Nine's** temptation is to believe that it's tranquility is an ultimate value, the **Eight's** is to believe in its own strength and will, the **Seven's** is to believe that it will find fulfilment in exciting experiences, the **Six's** is to believe that it can create ultimate security for itself, the **Five's** is to believe in knowledge as a source of power, the **Fours's** is to believe that all of its feelings and subjective states are significant, the **Three's** is to believe in its own excellence, the **Two's** is to believe in it's own indispensability, and the **One's** temptation is to believe in its own righteousness. While these temptations are characteristic of each of the personality types, they are all our own temptations, too.

If there is a theme in this book, or a lesson to be learned by studying the personality types, it is that while we legitimately look for happiness by seeking our personal fulfilment, we often seek it wrongly. **Every personality type creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, bringing about the very thing it most fears while losing what it most desires as it looks for happiness.** If, when we search for happiness, we inflate our ego at the expense of recognising and properly valuing our Essential Self, we may be sure of failing in our search. The pursuit of identity, security, and happiness without reference to our essential spiritual nature leads us into a maze of apparent goods and seductive idols. It is not so much that we do not see who we are as much as that we see only a small part of who we are. We are blinded to the fullness and magnificence of our ultimate nature by the trance of our personality. Our true nature exists only now, in this very moment. It includes all of the concerns and motivations of our personality while also transcending all of them.

Each personality type contains within it a source of self-deception which, if played into, invariably leads us away from the direction of our real fulfilment and deepest happiness. This is an irrevocable law of the psyche, something of which we must become convinced if we are to have the courage to look for happiness where it truly resides. This requires courage, because to fully reside in that place, we must be willing to experience our deepest fears, the full extent of the falseness of our personality, and the multidimensional mystery of the human heart.

Looking at each of the personality types as a whole teaches us that **the agendas of our egos are ultimately self-defeating.** Each type's fears do not go away by attempting to resolve them through the mechanisms of the personality. By depending on our personalities instead of realising that our essential nature already contains all that we seek, we fail to achieve our heart's desire. Thus, **Twos** spend their whole lives searching for love from others and still feel that they are unloved. **Threes** endlessly pursue achievement and recognition but still feel worthy and empty. **Fours** spend their entire lives trying to discover the meaning of their personal identity and still do not know who they are. **Fives** endlessly accumulate knowledge and skills to build up their confidence but still feel helpless and incapable. **Sixes** toil endlessly to create security for themselves and still feel anxious and fearful about the world. **Sevens** look high and low for happiness but still feel unhappy and frustrated. **Eights** do everything in their power to protect themselves and their interests but still feel vulnerable and threatened. **Nines** sacrifice a great deal to achieve inner peace and stability but still feel ungrounded and insecure. And finally, **Ones** strive to maintain personal integrity but still feel divided and at war with themselves. The way out of these self-defeating patterns is to see that they cannot bring us the happiness that we seek because **our personality does not have the power to create happiness.** As wisdom has always recognised, **it is only by dying to ourselves—that is, to our ego and its strategies—that we find life.**

Thus, a related lesson can be drawn from these pages, one which we call the law of psychic economics. It is in the nature of the psyche that we inevitably pay a price for every choice we make. In each moment a certain amount of mental, emotional, and physical energy is available. When we spend the energy in an activity, it cannot be spent on something else. In addition, different choices that we make can produce widely different results. An hour spent meditating produces a very different result from an hour spent drinking beer and watching television. This is not to say one is necessarily better than the other, but that they lead to vastly different results—which may affect the whole of our lives. Moreover, the price we pay may well not be immediately apparent, which is why we so easily fool ourselves into thinking that there will be no consequences for our actions. But the cost to ourselves is always paid in the kind of person we become. By our choices

we create our ourselves and shape our future, whether that future is ultimately one of happiness or unhappiness.

How, then, can we go about transcending our ego? What would motivate us to do so? How can we know what will really make us happy?

People always seek what they think will be good for them, even if they turn out to have been mistaken in their choice. Some seek wealth, others fame, others security, as each desires to possess that which he or she thinks will bring happiness. But unless we find what is truly good by learning to orientate ourselves to our essential nature, we will be sidetracked into the pursuit of empty substitutes. If we fall into the trance of our personality, we turn the objects of our desires into idols which cannot satisfy us. Then we suffer and wonder why.

The strange thing is that, as with our quest for the meaning of life, we are in the difficult position of searching for what is truly good for us without having a clear understanding of what that might be. **Each of the personality types seeks what it thinks will be good for it in the wrong places, or in the wrong ways, or both.** **Twos** think that they will be happy if they are loved sufficiently by others, **Threes** if they are admired by others and outstanding enough, **Fours** if they are totally free to be themselves, **Fives** if they can have all the knowledge and skills they want, **Sixes** if they have enough security, **Sevens** if they can experience all they want, **Eights** if they can completely protect themselves, **Nines** if they can have total peace of mind, **Ones** if they can only be perfect enough. We can see that these desires will never be fully satisfied. External conditions will never fulfil them in the way that each type wants. Without realising it, each type is postponing happiness (and the realisation of its true nature) until its demands are met. Thus, each type is doomed to frustration by searching for happiness where it cannot be found. All these strategies fail because they are only partial goods which have been raised to the status of the prime good in life.

How, then, can the Enneagram help us know what is really good for us? The answer lies in its Direction of Integration¹.

The difficulty is that in order to move in the Direction of Integration, **we must be willing to transcend the habits of our personality. We must be willing and able to go beyond ego, to reach out to something more, to experience the parts of ourselves that have nothing to do with the agendas of our personalities. At the same time, we must also be willing to fully experience the limitation and pain that our ego's habits are causing us.**

¹ *visit www.enneagraminstitute.com or read 'Personality Types' by Don Riso for more on this

Self-transcendence is difficult and frightening because it entails going into unknown territory, feeling, thinking, and acting in ways foreign to our personality, contrary to our past habits, at odds with our old attitudes and identity, and free of the old wounds and defences of our childhood. In a sense, self-transcendence is a rebirth, a true transformation, the coming into being of a new person who is learning to leave the old ways behind and strike out into a new world.

Yet this is precisely what each personality type must do if it is ever to find real happiness:

- **Twos** need to overcome their tendency to deceive themselves about their needs, feelings and motives by moving towards the self-understanding and emotional honesty of the healthy **Four**.
- **Threes** need to overcome their desire to surpass others and draw attention to themselves by moving toward the commitment and humility of a healthy **Six**.
- **Fours** need to overcome their moodiness and self-indulgence by moving toward the integrity and self-discipline of a healthy **One**.
- **Fives** need to overcome their detachment and cynicism by moving toward the practicality and courage of the healthy **Eight**.
- **Sixes** need to overcome their pessimism and suspicion of others by moving toward the hopefulness and receptivity of the healthy **Nine**.
- **Sevens** need to overcome their superficiality and impulsiveness by moving toward the depth and focus of the healthy **Five**.
- **Eights** need to overcome their emotional armouring and egocentricity by moving toward the compassion and concern for others of the healthy **Two**.
- **Nines** need to overcome their complacency and self-forgetting by moving toward the energy and self-investment of a healthy **Three**.
- And **Ones** need to overcome their criticalness and rigidity by moving toward the joy and enthusiasm of the healthy **Seven**.

In the last analysis, **learning how to transcend the ego involves nothing less than learning how to be open to love**. Only love has the power to save us from ourselves. Until we learn to truly love ourselves and others—and to accept the love of others—there can be no hope of lasting happiness or peace or redemption. It is because we do not know how to love ourselves properly that we lose ourselves so easily in the many illusions ego sets before us.

This is what much of present-day psychology must take into account if it is to be less sterile. After all, Freud's own goal of therapy was to help a person "to work and to love." Modern psychology seems to have lost sight of how to accomplish this because it

has abjured the transcendent, ignored the heart's deepest yearnings, and has not recognised the existence of Being, the very ground of our humanity. Unless acquiring the ability to work (and hence to re-create the world) and to love (and hence to re-create the self) becomes one of the main goals of psychology, then it will ultimately be a vain and empty enterprise. Therapeutic techniques can do little lasting good unless they help us toward a recognition of where human fulfilment really lies. About that, the testimony of the greatest human beings who have ever lived bears witness that fulfilment lies in reconnecting with the ground of our being and by living in a way that gives testimony to our spiritual nature.

This is as easy to say as it is difficult to practice. It seems to be part of the human condition for us to learn the most valuable lessons in life the hard way. However, only by suffering from our mistakes does knowledge become our own. Who would believe that happiness lies in the direction of self-transcendence unless he found this out for himself? We seem to need to forget what we require for happiness until we discover the truth for ourselves.

According to the proverb, the longest way round is the shortest way home. It seems to be necessary to try to discover the secret by going somewhere in order to learn that [you already possess it]. The path always take you round in a circle, back to the place where you stand. (Alan Watts, *The Meaning of Happiness*, 119-120.)

To put this in terms of the Enneagram, the movement we make in the Direction of Integration brings us full circle back to ourselves—"the longest way round is the shortest way home." **Our truest fulfilment does not lie in the direction of a jealously guarded self but in the direction of self-transcendence as we learn to open to others and reality.** Alan Watts expands on this. He says that even after we have applied all the psychological techniques at our disposal, we are still left unsatisfied, because we have been looking in the wrong places for happiness.

There is always something it [psychological technique] leaves unsolved, for there remains a subtle, indefinable and elusive inner discontent...

This is truly a "divine discontent" for I believe it to be what the mystics describe as the yearning of the soul of God; as St. Augustine says, "Thou has made us for Thyself, therefore we may not rest anywhere save in Thee." By a hundred different techniques we can adjust the details of our lives and make ourselves happy in the superficial sense of having nothing specific to be unhappy

about. But techniques can only deal with details, with separate parts; something different is required to transform one's attitude to life as a whole, and to transform the whole of one's life. Without this transformation the real unhappiness remains, expressing itself in all manner of disguises, finding innumerable substitutes for God which do not work because they are always *partial* things. They are, as it were, the parts of God, but not the whole of Him. Techniques can find these parts; it can find acceptance, wealth, pleasure, experience, knowledge, and all the . . . unknown realms of the soul. But even where all these many parts are brought together, there is still something which no technical trick or device can discover, and this is the whole which is greater than the sum of its parts. (Ibid., 120-121)

Psychology, self-help books, and the Enneagram cannot save us. They cannot make us genuinely happy or, at any rate, happy for very long, because they present partial views on human nature, each groping towards the truth in its own limited way. Of course, **psychological insights can help us be more perceptive about what we are afraid of and the recurrent sources of our unhappiness.** Psychology can help us sort out how we behave, what we typically desire, and how much of what we desire leads us into wasteful conflicts and illusions.

Although they are complicated and subtle, **the personality types delineated by the Enneagram remain but crude reflections of human nature.** Whilst it is valuable to reflect on them to understand ourselves more objectively, using the Enneagram cannot provide us with any ultimate answers, since that belongs to another realm. It cannot work magic, nor can it transform us into perfectly realised beings.

But by helping us to understand ourselves as we *really are*, at our best and at our worst, the Enneagram reaffirms some age-old insights about human nature. In the end, however, the Enneagram is merely a tool, something useful up to a certain point, whereupon we arrive at the threshold of the spirit—both the wellspring and the fulfilment of the mystery of human nature.

Don't know your Enneagram type?

I suggest trying one or more of the following:

1. Read the type descriptions on the Enneagram Institute [website](#) and see what resonates (although beware of self-deception; people often misidentify their type because of how they'd like to be perceived)
2. Find a free Enneagram test online somewhere (although don't take the result as gospel - do more research)
3. Take the brilliant test on the 16personalities [website](#) and then use the MBTI-Enneagram conversion chart below (again, it's just a rough guide)

