

The Exquisite Symmetry Human Biology & the Enneagram Physiologic & Psychologic Homeostasis

The Enneagram is remarkable in the elegance of its overall symmetry and internal unity.¹ In this essay I wish to examine both this internal unity as well as this symmetry, *both* in light of the unifying themes of human biology. The Enneagram describes the psychologic state of the human condition while human biology describes the physiologic state of the human organism. Without both functioning optimally, the organism's survival is in jeopardy.

Diversity and Unity are dominant themes within both the Enneagram and Biology. Both are ways, or processes, of understanding the world. Biologists estimate up to 30 million different species existing on Earth, each uniquely different and differentiable, yet each displaying characteristics common to all. Just as there exists an abundance of tested predictions, and accepted explanations for Human Biology, so also does the remarkable abundance of information contained within the wisdom of the Enneagram predict human emotional, psychological, and spiritual behavior. Evolution has unfolded over millions of years offering both of these exquisite supportive processes as flexible, dynamic, and essential human capacities. The dynamism of the Enneagram is directly parallel to the dynamism of Biology.

The basic human physiologic principle of *homeostasis* is defined as the maintenance of a stable internal environment in spite of what may be a very different external environment.² I intend to show that as a description of the human psychologic condition (addressing instinctive, mental, and emotional drives) the Enneagram mirrors and supports the basic survival of the human organism. From a physiologic, biologic perspective the survival of the individual is dependent upon maintaining homeostasis. This is accomplished in human physiology by means of negative feedback loops, regulatory mechanisms that slow down or shut down output systems when they reach certain levels, thereby threatening the stability of the organism's internal environment.

An everyday example of an unconscious stabilizing feedback loop in humans is the physiologic mechanism to lower body temperature, a mechanism triggered when the internal body temperature rises above certain critical levels. Likewise, when psychological functioning is stressed, the Enneagram illuminates how we unconsciously shunt over to behaviors along our Lines of Flow to stabilize our psychological self.

It is important to keep in mind that these responses to an upset of homeostasis are carried out unconsciously- both physiologically and psychologically. One does not need to 'tell' the body to initiate thermoregulatory responses in the event of high fever

¹ The Enneagram Institute *Full Certification Guidelines: Essay Topics #4*, p. 10/14

² *Biology Today*, Sandra S. Gottfried, Mosby, 1993 p. 162

just as an individual dominant in Type Two does not 'tell' herself to 'go to Eight' in order to avoid decompensating *down the levels* and risk behaving progressively more unhealthily .

When thermoregulatory mechanisms are triggered, the internal body temperature falls, thus protecting cells from thermal damage. The existing state which initiated the fever to begin with may well still persist, for instance an infection, but this lowering of dangerously high temperature assists the body in preserving key physiologic functioning in order to better cope with the threat.

The Enneagram Lines of Flow do exactly the same thing, even if this effect cannot be easily quantified in a test tube or via a thermometer measurement. A clear example is that of a Type Nine individual who is deteriorating down to the stubborn and stonewalling behaviors of the lower 'Average Levels' behaviors. If, with the ongoing stress to the system, the Type Nine man did not shunt over to the average behaviors of the Type Six along the Inner Triangle of Flow, he might cross the shock point, 'build a moat to keep others out,'³ and deteriorate down into the Unhealthy Levels where he would stand in violation to himself as well as others. This behavior could look suspicious, authoritarian, and short-tempered⁴ which in itself isn't particularly attractive, but he avoids falling into ineffectual, neglectful, and willfully blind behaviors.⁵ Here in the Type Six, still Average Level, he retains the capacity for insight into his behavior and the opportunity to right himself, gain a foothold, and move back up to healthier behaviors.

If you have ever experienced the *lysis of fever* consisting of shaking chills and profuse sweating, you would physically be experiencing the internal unconscious shunting to thermoregulatory mechanisms to right your physiology, i.e. maintain homeostasis. While it isn't pleasant to experience or to witness, it serves the purpose of preventing an individual from slipping into fever induced seizures (convulsions) or even coma. It also prevents permanent cell death in the brain as well as other organs. We, both psychologically and physiologically, *shunt* to preserve our core dynamics and from there we have the chance of recovery.

There is a beautiful symmetry here: a symmetry within the biologic and the psychologic processes themselves- temperature righting itself, behavior stabilizing itself- as well as a stunning symmetry paralleling these two essential functions of the human being. One could give examples of any and all organ systems within the human body, from the concentration of urine when we thirst, to the concentration of outward production of energy when we, as a Type Six, move into action oriented Type Three behaviors in order to prevent our paralysis and fall into panic. The elegance is breathtaking in all its symmetrical detail, its underlying support of the survival and growth of the human potential.

³ Part I training, The Enneagram Institute, Type Nine lecture, August, 2012

⁴ The Enneagram Institute: Core Dynamics, 2009, Type Six, p. 23

⁵ Ibid., Type Nine, p.6

I propose that if the Enneagram wisdom could be viewed by *Science* as just as deserving of exploration, study, and analysis as human biology, man as a species would have far better tools in service of ultimate survival.