The Enneagram Hexad Introduction

The Mystery of the Hexad

The Enneagram contains three geometries within a single symbol. The circle immediately suggests wholeness, continuity, and return. The triangle has been interpreted through the Law of Three as the interaction of forces through which experience and manifestation unfold. The six-pointed figure traced by the sequence **1 → 4 → 2 → 8 → 5 → 7 → 1** remains more elusive. Its mathematical basis is easy to demonstrate, but the mathematics leaves the central mystery untouched: What is moving through this sequence?

G. I. Gurdjieff presented the Enneagram as a symbol of process, and P. D. Ouspensky preserved much of that teaching. J. G. Bennett focused on the universality of process, applying the Enneagram to activities as different as preparing a meal, conducting a scientific experiment, manufacturing a product, and pursuing aesthetic development. In these applications, the observable stages of a process unfold around the circumference, while the inner six-line figure connects stages separated within that temporal sequence. The circumference shows the process's successive course; the inner figure reveals relationships through which its stages anticipate, condition, correct, and reinforce one another.

I first encountered Bennett's work more than thirty years ago and understood very little. Their applications of the symbol did not hold my attention, but one recognition remained: process is universal. Everything that lives, develops, learns, adapts, or transforms does so through movement. What appears stable is already participating in change, even when the movement occurs too slowly, quickly, or subtly to be recognized.

Years later, Bennett's work became relevant in a different way. My interest had shifted toward phenomenology and the organization of consciousness. I was no longer asking about the Enneagram of personality types and character traits; I wanted to understand process more intimately: how individual consciousness becomes organized into the psychological self we ordinarily experience as *me*. The hexad offered a way into that question.

The Process Under Study

Human beings enter life with extraordinary sensitivity and morphability. Before anything we would ordinarily call psychology has differentiated, the organism is already responding to touch, hunger, pleasure, absence, frustration, contact, movement, and changes in the surrounding field. Temperament, nervous-system sensitivity, biological needs, environment, and whatever tendencies may already be present in individual consciousness all participate in these earliest encounters. Experience carries charge, and the organism begins learning what it can sustain, what overwhelms it, and what helps restore regulation.

Personality begins forming at this organismic level. Psychology does not appear separately from biology; it develops as an extension and increasing differentiation of an organization already underway. Repeated experience alters expectation, attention, affect, bodily readiness, and relationship. Sensation acquires meaning, responses become increasingly available or difficult to sustain, and broad sensitivity gradually develops territory.

This organization is necessary because the child must develop enough continuity to recognize people, anticipate events, regulate experience, act within the environment, and gradually discover a relatively stable sense of self. Memory connects events across time, relationships take recognizable forms, and bodily and emotional responses coordinate with perception. As capacities for movement, agency, separation, relationship, and exploration develop, the psychological organization becomes increasingly differentiated, and the tensions we will later examine through the hexad become more consequential.

My earlier book, *Nurturing Essence: A Compass for Modern Parenting*, explores this relationship and the unfolding of Essence in greater detail.

Reflective consciousness arrives within an organization already underway. By the time the child can ask, *Who am I?*, the structure through which the question appears has become the apparent questioner. The organization feels given because no earlier reflective position watched it form. It's experienced as the subject of consciousness rather than as a process occurring within consciousness.

Throughout this book, *psychological self*, or *the self*, refers to this developed organization of perception, bodily readiness, affect, memory, object relations, self-image, expectation, defense, and response. Its contents change continually. Beliefs are revised, relationships change, emotional capacities develop, and an entire way of life can be replaced while a deeper continuity remains recognizable. The person changes, but the changes tend to occur within an organization that has learned how to sustain itself.

The medium in which this occurs is individual consciousness, which I will also call the soul or the field of experience when the context requires it. The soul can assume innumerable forms without being reducible to any one of them. Sensation, thought, feeling, memory, contraction, openness, image, impulse, and qualities of Being all arise within it. Psychological organization gives this fluidity enough continuity for a human life to develop and function.

The central question of this book concerns how an established psychological organization maintains itself. A pattern developed through experience begins shaping the conditions under which new experience is received. Expectations influence attention, bodily readiness develops before conscious interpretation, and familiar meanings arrive with the force of present reality. When an encounter carries the person beyond what they can readily sustain, changes in thought, feeling, attention, muscular holding, breathing, and action help regulate the resulting charge and restore a familiar equilibrium. The past continues through the activity of the organization it has helped create.

This equilibrium is often asymmetrical. Some experiences can be received and sustained relatively easily, while others quickly evoke charge and an impulse to alter what is happening. A person may welcome the inward complexity of feeling yet become uncomfortable when pleasure interrupts

discipline. Another may act independently with ease while finding it difficult to express a preference that disappoints someone important. Even the two tension fields meeting at the same hexad point can have markedly different ranges of tolerance. These differences become useful entrances into inquiry because they reveal where the organization begins working to preserve familiarity.

Asymmetry alone does not establish fixation. Temperament, preference, skill, bodily conditions, and circumstances affect what we can sustain. Someone may favor solitude, connection, structure, or exploration without needing that inclination to establish who they are. Fixation becomes apparent when a familiar arrangement must prevail because another response threatens or questions identity.

The tension arcs give us a way to investigate this activity directly. We can notice where charge gathers, what changes in the body and mind, and which response begins preparing itself. With growing sensitivity, the impulse to explain, withdraw, accommodate, judge, control, or distract can become palpable before it completes. Inquiry includes developing the capacity to remain with that movement and its charge long enough to discover what would ordinarily be avoided or quickly reorganized. We become interested in how the functions are being lived together, without imposing an ideal balance upon them.

Personality is a living continuity whose stability depends partly upon continual adjustment. The psychological self responds to changing circumstances while tending to preserve a recognizable organization, much as a whirlpool retains its form while the water composing it changes. *Dynamic inertia* names this persistence through movement. As the activity becomes more transparent, Presence can participate more explicitly, allowing the soul to meet experience without every response having to serve the restoration of its familiar identity.

From Points to Movement

The familiar language of the Enneagram of Personality Types directs attention toward the points as descriptions of different character types of people. This book begins from a different scale of observation. In the interpretation developed here, all six points of the hexad represent functions participating in every human life, and the ordered path of the inner figure shows a directional movement through them.

The order matters. The sequence moves from Determination through Individuation, Relationship, Autonomy, Containment, and Expansion, then returns to Determination. Each function receives conditions created by the movement before it, modulates what arrives, and contributes something to what follows.

These six functions are movements within experience rather than traits belonging to six kinds of people. Their expression changes with development, circumstance, bodily state, relationship, personality organization, and the rest of the system. Determination can appear as clarity, decision, definition, judgment, or control. Relationship can appear as mutuality, dependence, care, accommodation, attraction, or conflict. Containment can provide boundary, focus, privacy, knowledge, or protection from overwhelm. The quality of each function changes with the conditions

in which it operates and its relationship to the rest of the system. The lines also place the functions into six enduring relationships:

Determination–Individuation
Individuation–Relationship
Relationship–Autonomy
Autonomy–Containment
Containment–Expansion
Expansion–Determination

Each relationship creates a tension field in which the functions affect one another. These fields carry personal history. Some movements are easy to sustain; others evoke charge and a rapid effort to regain control, contact, distance, or certainty. We can begin recognizing equilibrium through the responses that restore it.

Adult personality presents this organization as a coherent whole. Different people, situations, bodily states, and relational conditions recruit different configurations, yet the variations remain characteristic enough to belong to one recognizable person.

The Scope of This Inquiry

The hexad tells us where to look by revealing relationships through which psychological organization maintains itself. Phenomenology tells us how to look through immediate experience. The body and nervous system make the regulation of charge palpable. Presence allows a different influence to participate when familiar restoration no longer determines the whole response. The inquiry develops these relationships through explanation, examples, and direct observation.

I propose reading the path 1 → 4 → 2 → 8 → 5 → 7 → 1 through six functions involved in maintaining the psychological self. The test is phenomenological: can we recognize these relationships in experience? This is an interpretation of the symbol, with a specific focus on self-maintenance; questions about the historical origin of the symbol or the formation of personality type lie outside that focus.

> The purpose is practical. By becoming sensitive to tension, charge, and asymmetry, readers can begin to feel dynamic inertia in the body and mind and develop the capacity to stay with it. Such participation makes the organization more transparent and allows Presence and the soul's essential capacities to engage what the personality cannot transform merely by managing itself more effectively.