

## **Nine Types and the Emotional Habits**

by Peter O'Hanrahan

It's time to revise the nine passions or vices. Our enneagram shorthand has been to use the seven deadly sins of the Christian tradition (plus two). After all, these have a long history with the enneagram and they do fit with the nine types. But what we are really talking about is the pervasive emotional habit of each personality type, and "sin" does not do this justice. What I find in teaching the enneagram is that there is much more to say, and that even starting with Christian sins is not always useful. For one thing, most people are learning the enneagram not in a religious context but rather a psychological one. For another, there are many places where Christianity is not a big part of the culture (India, China, etc.)

But the main thing is that the one-word labels are not sufficient to describe such an important part of the type structures. Is gluttony (type 7) really an emotion, or more a behavior that arises from an underlying emotional habit? How about sloth and lust? There are better ways to talk about this.

We begin our enneagram work in our intellectual center, learning about the system and increasing our self awareness. But deep work on ourselves and our type structure means working with our heart center. It's our emotional habit which provides the fuel and motivation for our type, our point of view, our patterns of idealization and avoidance. And it's the emotional habit which is expressed through the activity of our instinctual subtype, thereby distorting the life affirming energy of our subtype. So if we are to get unstuck from the fixation of our head center, if we are to find the authentic expression of our subtype and bring our best self to our important projects and relationships in this world, and if we want to develop the capacity of our hearts for love and transcendence, we must face the "passion" or emotional habit of our type.

When our emotions are strong they do get our attention. I know when I'm really angry, or sad, or scared, or when I have a big reaction to somebody or something. But I'm not often aware that I'm walking around with a more subtle and chronic contraction of my heart center. It's automatic and habitual. I can notice the times when my heart is more open, when I have empathy, connection and fullness. What am I doing the rest of the time? I'd like to be able to track this opening and closing of my heart, perhaps even be able to shift my emotional state. Not easy to do, but the enneagram helps by naming each of our habits. We can remember to ask ourselves: How can we notice this contraction? What are the signals from our bodies? What does our emotional habit feel like? How can we apply our awareness, acceptance, and breathing practices and other methods? Who supports us in this?

The emotional habits around the enneagram are different aspects or derivations of the three major “negative emotions” – anger, fear and grief (distress). Each of these emotions has important survival value and they are part of our evolution, both as mammals and human beings. In other words, they are inherent to our biology, not simply a reflection of our personality. Our goal is not to eliminate them but to manage them so as to become more self-aware and caring human beings.

### **Body Based Types – Nine, One, Eight**

At the top of the enneagram the body-based types - Eight, Nine and One – have a key relationship with anger. Everyone gets angry, but with the body types anger is the leading emotional state, at least in terms of how it reinforces the type structure. Body types “stand against reality.” Things are not the way they should be and we’re here to tell you how they should be put right (in three different personality styles).

### **Type Nine**

It’s complicated with Nines. Some Nines recognize their anger, they have feelings of resentment, they blow up on occasion, they might experience road rage. But many Nines do not “get angry” and are confused to hear that this is their leading emotional issue. But we can say that Nines have the issue of avoiding their anger, and that it’s precisely this avoidance that pushes them out of contact with themselves. This leads to the emotional habit of self-forgetting.

The traditional word “sloth” has been used to describe a habit of laziness or inertia towards oneself or one’s priorities. But sloths are tree-dwelling animals in the Amazon Basin so let’s do better. And Nines are not necessarily “lazy” in the way we normally use this word. Many Nines are very active and productive. In fact, it’s hard to pin down what is really going on with them. What we can observe, and what they can sometimes describe, is that their (subtle) anger takes the form of a “stubborn unwillingness,” an emotional habit that says “I won’t do what I don’t want to do and you can’t make me.” Sure Nines can look agreeable on the outside but their partners and close friends can feel this unwillingness. With self-awareness practice, Nines can learn to feel this resistance and go directly toward their anger to find what it’s saying, to express it when necessary, and to relax it. It seems clear that until and unless Nines connect with their anger, however big or small, they will not be able to become fully present to themselves.

It’s not the amount of anger that characterizes Nines. Many Nines are inherently gentle and peaceful people (while some are easily enraged or even violent). But it’s the placement of anger in the type structure – a layer of disowned emotion that creates a barrier to knowing oneself.

It’s important that Nines step up to conflict with other people (sometimes you just have to say “no” or “I don’t like this”) otherwise they will withdraw

from others even if they are still in the room. It's also important to face the internal conflict between different feelings and impulses, between the yes and no, so as not to space out on priorities. Now this will bring up discomfort and feelings!

The higher emotional capacity for Nines is called "right action." This doesn't sound like a feeling, but we can understand this as the open hearted willingness to do what needs to be done, to face priorities, and to value oneself in the process.

### **Type One**

The passion for type One is simply called "anger." This is accurate, although Ones often have trouble acknowledging that they are indeed angry. We may know they are angry even if they don't! But if we talk about irritation or resentment, now they get it. Things are not being done in the right way, people aren't following the rules, etc. Of course anger is also turned inward and fuels the inner critic and the pressure to be good. Ones are working hard to avoid condemnation or punishment. All of this makes it difficult to keep the heart open.

Better that Ones discover their anger inside their tension and irritation and work with it directly. Sometimes it helps to feel the anger without attaching too much meaning. After all, there are always mistakes and imperfections in this world to justify one's reaction. Perhaps anger can be experienced as simply an expression of the life force and at times does not need to be explained or justified. It's when you have to justify it with righteousness that the type structure is reinforced (and you or others get hurt). By accepting their anger Ones can become more graceful with it. It's possible to moderate anger even while being direct, getting angry at behavior without condemning the person or the entire situation. To be able to say "I am angry about this at the same I value you, care for you, as a person."

On the inside Ones need to treat themselves with kindness (as do we all). A critical mind is a great asset to have, but it becomes a liability when it's fueled by anger. Or to turn this around, the habit of mind, which is always seeing what is wrong or incorrect, can continuously reinforce the habit of anger. Noticing your anger or resentment will help you to avoid your tendency to use intentional goodness in everything you do or say, which easily leads to splitting off from how you really feel. With awareness and practice you can become less angry while accepting the imperfections of this world (and yourself).

Serenity is the higher emotional state for Ones. This is well described by the Serenity Prayer: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference." (Or "don't sweat the small stuff.")

## **Type Eight**

For Eights, lust was the deadly sin assigned to our type. The Greek or Latin version of this word may work better to infer the contraction in the heart, the lack of care for oneself or others while seeking the full pleasures of life. But in English I would say that lust is more of an expression of the body and instincts – mostly about sex. In the Christian tradition sex itself was labeled a sinful activity (although necessary for making babies). We are for the most part moving beyond this characterization. An updated version might be that sex in the context of love or human warmth is a valid expression of the life force, while the use of other people for sexual gratification without care or empathy is the negative aspect of lust. Our culture is confused. Are all those images of sexy people meant to celebrate the human form or just promoting sexual objectification? Maybe it's some of both.

But what is the “real” emotional habit of type Eight? It's a form of anger. When I wake up in the morning with a familiar negative attitude in my chest, when I am thinking dark thoughts about my fellow human beings, it's not lust that I'm feeling. Rather I feel a certain hard-heartedness or cynicism that reflects my style of anger – I have been let down, disappointed or poorly treated and now I am revengeful – justified in not caring. This is the chronic contraction of the Eight which is hard to spot because it's so habitual. “I'm not angry, I'm realistic!”

It's also true that Eights, perhaps more so with men than women, can use big anger as an easy defense against vulnerability. Why not be angry? It seems like the right thing to do at the time. But there is a big cost to relationships and to one's own health. Better to practice going in and down, breathing deeply, getting underneath the anger to the more challenging feelings.

Sure there is an appropriate time for anger. The work for us Eights is to not be controlled by it. Can we stay flexible? Do we have choice about when and how much? Can we acknowledge feelings of vulnerability or hurt and actually tell people? Eights, like Ones, need to practice non-attachment, even when things are not fair. Accepting things, and people, as they are will make us less angry.

The virtue for Eight is called innocence, which is coming to life and relationship without cynicism or blame - the Eight version of open heartedness - willing to be receptive to whatever comes and therefore vulnerable. Hard work, but good work, for Eights.

## **Feeling-based types – Three, Four, Two**

These enneagram types share a key emotional issue of grief. Their sense of security, and their sense of value, lies in finding the acceptance and approval of others. True for all of us to a degree, but feeling types are biologically more sensitive to the connection or disconnection in relationships. The withdrawal of love or approval leads to feelings of distress or panic. So grief, and the avoidance of grief, is central to their emotional habit. I would add that grief also comes up when they feel the loss of contact with their authentic selves due to an over-reliance on image.

### **Type Two**

The classic “sin” of pride does accurately describe the emotional habit of type Two as long we understand that pride has different versions. It sounds like self-inflation, and we do, at times, get the message from Twos that they are very special and deserving of our admiration. This pumped up attitude is expressed through the voice and body language which tells us that we should praise them. Alas, we may be insufficient in our response and then pride may be quickly punctured and deflated. Pride is not usually a steady state. Self esteem rises and falls depending on the approval of others.

The other side of pride is excessive humility. Some Twos are self-effacing as though constantly saying “you are important but I am not.” We all know Twos who seem unable to stand up for themselves and become overshadowed by stronger or more controlling personalities. Or more commonly, Twos seem unable to bring attention inside to their own needs and feelings. If they do so, they feel guilty. Other people’s needs always take precedence. This is more the dilemma for women than men due to family and cultural roles and maybe basic gender differences. What we do see is that both male and female Twos will be either inflated, or deflated, or going back and forth depending on their approval rating.

Twos describe their emotional habit as a pervasive feeling of pressure to win recognition from the people who matter (this could be everyone or targeted to a particular person or persons). Why is this so important? Their inherent responsiveness to others (more mirror neurons!) creates a vulnerability to other people’s opinion. Of course they can learn to stay grounded in their own self worth. But their sensitivity in relationship, and perhaps their very success in connecting with others, can lead to a big imbalance. Pride says “I have value in the eyes of others” and over time, this over-reliance on approval can create, or reinforce, a feeling of inner emptiness.

When Twos turn inside themselves they may feel a deep sadness. At first, being inside means feeling disconnected from others. Some Twos will extend this: “I need to be alone in order to be true to myself.” Over time, centering practice (staying grounded in the body and one’s own feelings) supports authentic connection, what Buber called the presence of “I and Thou”.

The traditional word for the virtue of type Two is humility. This does not mean devaluing oneself, but the realization of one's true measure and self worth without the need for inflation or deflation. It comes with loving oneself and finding balance between giving and receiving.

### **Type Three**

For the "passion" of Threes we often use the word deceit, but I don't really think this qualifies as an emotion. It refers more to how Threes avoid their feelings in the effort to keep up a successful image. This image is often about achievement and productivity, but not always. Sometimes it's being the most impressive or attractive person in the room. (e.g. The most masculine or feminine). Whatever their style Threes separate from their inner selves and become dependent on recognition in the eyes of others. A lot like the Twos, but probably more confident and assertive about winning the admiration of others. And if we don't admire them, they will quickly find someone else who will.

The word "vanity" works better to describe the emotional habit; this is more of a feeling word than deceit. Threes are good at looking good. But why is this so important? And why is it so hard for Threes to know how they are feeling when they are actually "feeling types." In part, this is due to how their attention naturally goes to outside activity. And they are so good at "feeling" other people's expectations and performing to meet those expectations, that the performance itself becomes their identity.

Threes report that at a deeper level, not always conscious, there is a tremendous pressure to earn their value. They do not feel worthy of being loved just for being who they are. Or at least this is the danger of being such a good performer. You identify with the role, and the emotional habit is perpetuated. There's lots of reinforcement for this. It's often the case that what Threes are selling, the rest of us are buying. The work for Threes is to make the inward turn, to step back from doing and performing to tune into what's happening inside. This is scary and will bring up sadness. "Will people love this inner me?" But being honest about how you feel and who you really are will create an opening for being truly known and loved, at least by those who care about you as a person and not just a performer.

The virtue or higher emotional capacity of type Three is called "veracity" or truthfulness. This is the willingness to drop the image and just show up as a regular person - to be honest not only with others but in relation with oneself.

## **Type Four**

The classic “sin” of envy is certainly an emotional state and it may well be more familiar for Fours than the rest of us. “Other people have something that I don’t” brings up either a feeling of deficiency or an aggressive counter-reaction: “I’m more creative, more authentic!” But envy is only a part of something much larger.

The feeling of being disconnected from source (or Holy Origin) is part of the human condition. Fours experience this more deeply than most people, it’s part of their nature, and this leads them on a quest in life. But what happens when the longing for wholeness and deep connection turns into loss and melancholy? They are vulnerable to feeling “There must be something wrong with me.”

I hear Fours describe their emotional habit as chronic disappointment, or dissatisfaction, and the devaluing of oneself or others. On the one hand this can lead to withdrawal and a tendency towards depression. On the other hand the emotional habit sets up recurring idealizations: “If I only had this wonderful connection or this deep experience my heart would feel whole.” But when the striving is driven by the need to overcome deficiency, it’s not stable. You get there, but temporarily, and then you lose it again. Or you fail to get there and feel worse. Or you are pushed out of yourself by the frantic need to get there.

Even though Fours have a big capacity in the heart, the non-acceptance of life as it is, and myself as I am, creates a contraction. They still have lots of feelings but lack kindness towards themselves when the emotional habit is strong. So the longing of the heart and the quest for wholeness need to come from place of self-acceptance rather than deficiency. Fours say that shifting to gratitude is a wonderful practice which balances the feeling of something missing. And when Fours like something, are attracted to a quality in another person, their work is to stay with the feeling of appreciation rather than have this turn into envy.

The virtue of equanimity means the capacity to keep the heart open, welcoming all feelings but being grounded in the goodness of life and spirit. This is a tall order! But Fours can find the ability to feel not only great sadness and joy, but also the calm acceptance of ordinary life.

## **Head-based types – Six, Five, Seven**

These types have the central issue of fear. It's one of the big three "negative emotions" that have important survival value, the other two being anger and grief/distress. Fear helps us be aware of danger and helps keep us safe. From an existential point of view, fear, if faced directly, keeps us honest about our vulnerability and mortality as human beings. But when head types avoid feeling their fear by going up into the mind they also avoid their feelings altogether. It's clear that fear can shut down the heart even when these friends are not aware of their fear.

### **Type Five**

The traditional term "avarice" sounds like greed. Are Fives greedy? Well sure, in some ways. There are certainly Fives who fit the profile of the miser or the scrooge, hoarding their money (like the billionaire JP Getty who installed a pay phone in his mansion for his guests to make calls). But this is a stereotype, which means an archetype taking form in popular culture. And most Fives do not exhibit avarice in this way although they may be "greedy" for knowledge!

So let's drop greed and avarice and focus more on how fear shows up. For Fives the emotional habit is better described as a pressing need to withdraw in order to create safety and protect oneself – to hold back and hold on. Unlike the Sevens, Fives see life as providing limited resources. This means they can be good at prioritizing and conserving their energy and resources. But when fear shows up, there is a contraction in the heart. They will hold back from engaging fully with people due to a fear of being depleted or overwhelmed. People often seem intrusive or demanding; they want "too much" time and attention. We might say that Fives lack trust in the give and take of relationships.

For the most part Fives have a very sensitive nervous system, which makes them vulnerable to states of overwhelm. Too much stimulation or too much expectation from others can set this off. Usually it takes them time and safety to respond emotionally. But it's also the contraction of fear that causes depletion by creating physical tension and restricted breath.

What works for Fives is to acknowledge their limits and state their boundaries directly. This supports a good rhythm of contact and withdrawal. The problem is that when Fives are avoiding their fear they tend to become overly detached, living up in their heads. Now their emotional energy is greatly reduced; they don't seem to have much feeling. But it's precisely this lack of feeling that is a clue to their emotional habit. (Speaking of the problem side, not the whole person!)

Seeking knowledge is a way to stabilize one's relationship with the world. Yet an over reliance on knowing can become a way to avoid feelings of emptiness. When Fives face their fear the empty space can transform into



something numinous and rich with potential – open to spirit, heart and presence.

Traditionally the virtue for Fives has been called non-attachment, meaning an open hearted state which supports both giving and receiving, the antithesis of closing down or holding back from life. (Not to be confused with detachment). I would rather propose “generosity” as the higher emotional capacity, a wonderful quality found in Fives who develop their capacity to share themselves with those they love.

### **Type Six**

For type Six there was no assigned “sin” in the Christian tradition, although we do hear about the apostle “doubting Thomas” and the importance of faith. It was Evagrius of Pontus, 390 CE, who originally described the eight great temptations, or sins, which correspond to the other enneagram types. He seems to have had a blind spot about fear. Maybe he was a type Six!

Many of the Sixes I have spoken with in many years of enneagram work did not want to identify with this type. Partly due to their doubting mind, but also having to do with not recognizing fear in themselves. After all, who wants to be known as a fearful person? Well everyone has fear. But it plays a particular role in the structure of Sixes, probably due to their neurobiology. They seem to have a more acutely sensitive alarm system, more easily triggered into fight/flight/freeze reactions than most of us.

What happens when this alarm system is overly active, when you aren’t able to re-set to a more relaxed state? Not only is this physically exhausting, but fear closes down the heart. Sixes may try to avoid fear by avoiding their feelings altogether, by staying “up in their heads.” This works to a degree. But fear also shows up in chronic worry and anxiety or in aggressive behavior. Some Sixes hesitate, withdraw, or avoid taking action, while others brace themselves and push forward. Or they can go either way depending on the situation. This illustrates the continuum between what we call phobic and counter-phobic. We can describe this as “fear with worry” or “counter-fear with aggression.”

Sixes do their best to handle fear by controlling their external environment in an attempt to create safety. They project that the solution lies outside themselves. If we would all just follow the rules, be reliable, join them in problem solving, etc. then they would not have to be afraid. But this doesn’t work in the long run. People make mistakes; life brings unexpected dilemmas. It’s not that Sixes should abandon their efforts to make things safer. We all benefit from their hard work to plan ahead, anticipate problems, and be prepared. But the path of growth must take them inside themselves to face their fear directly, to apply methods of mindfulness, emotional healing, and physical relaxation.

As Sixes do their inner work, fear will return to its natural place as a biological response to danger and not get stuck in the emotional center as a habit. And the heart center opens up with all its capacity for love, empathy, and the full range of human emotions.

The higher emotional state for Sixes is courage. This is not counter-phobic behavior but the willingness to feel afraid, at times, and to accept the vulnerability of being human. Courage means acting with heart – avec coeur. Although fear may be present, you move forward anyway to do what needs to be done.

### **Type Seven**

It seems obvious that the “sin of gluttony” is not really an emotion but rather a behavior. Sounds like eating too much! Surely for Sevens there is some kind of biological pre-disposition to seek greater stimulation and consumption of experience (not just food and drink). But there is an underlying emotional habit that drives this to excess. Sevens experience a craving for more of everything paired with a deep fear of limitation. Why is this so scary? Sevens who have worked on themselves (a courageous bunch) tell us that if they stay with the experience of limitation they find an underlying feeling of deprivation or even possible annihilation. This brings up big anxiety leading to panic. Feeling limited is just the tip of the iceberg.

As head types, Sevens rely on a very active and fast-thinking mind to keep things up and positive. Life is fun. At the same time they seek to avoid suffering in any form, and why not stay happy if you can? The problem is that this blocks the full range of feelings and “limits” their emotional capacity. Sevens can easily live in their heads with quick visits to pleasurable sensation in the body. Just don’t go near those sad or painful feelings. Sevens report that it’s actually the fear of suffering that is more the issue than suffering itself. This results when there is little self-reflection and lack of a good enough internal “holding environment.” Without this, suffering can become really scary and overwhelming.

Each type has its own dichotomy, a kind of all or nothing belief. For Sevens it’s the split between positive experience and negative experience that makes it hard to accept pain or limitation. But ultimately, everyone has to face the limitation of the body and personal mortality.

What is the difference between the gluttony of type Seven and the lust/excess of type Eight? The meaning of the words is very close. What we can see is that for Eights the “too much” has an angry quality and a style of increased forcefulness. Whereas for Sevens the “too much” arises from fear of lack or fear of emptiness and takes the form of more scattered attention. (Although Sevens will get angry if we try to impose limits!)

Sobriety is the higher emotional capacity of Sevens. It's the antidote, the higher capacity that overcomes gluttony. It means refraining from over-consuming - not just food or alcohol, but intoxication of all kinds. It means having the courage to stay in the present moment and feel one's feelings instead of running away.

Here is a revised description of the emotional habits with the original passions and virtues in parentheses. It takes more than one word to do them justice. Keep in mind that they are all versions of the big three "negative" emotions: anger, fear, and grief. Body types are angry, they are against the way things are. Feeling types avoid grief by striving to find approval and connection outside themselves. Mental types try to resolve fear by staying up in their heads and detaching from their emotions.

It would be more accurate to say that this chart represents the "negative emotional habits." Each of us is capable of a range of positive emotions or virtues which arise as we work on our type structure and open our heart.

