

More Thoughts on Ethics and the Enneagram

By Ginger Lapid-Bogda, Ph.D.

In this final article on ethics and the Enneagram, three compelling quotations are presented, followed by a discussion about how we might use each perspective in our work and three questions to ask ourselves. The first two quotes come from famous scientists, the third from someone in law enforcement. Although none is a theologian or ethicist, their words serve to help us to think of ethics in very practical terms.

“Ethics is the activity of humans directed to secure the inner perfection of their own personality.”

– Albert Schweitzer

When we do our self-work with the Enneagram, using it as a clear and deep pathway for our own development, we are actually making serious inroads into creating a more ethical society. This is a remarkable thought. As we teach the Enneagram with integrity – modeling the effects of real self-development by our own examples –we contribute to the deepest levels of ethical development in others.

Questions for us to ask ourselves...

Are we truly modeling the way, being humble and authentic, sharing our own challenges with those we teach, constantly seeking our next growth edge?

Have we dealt with our own deepest needs and our internal demons so we are not susceptible to being entranced by falsity -- in teachers, relationships, ideas, and communities – allowing us to tell the difference between truth and deception?

Is our intention to truly help our clients reach for their deepest levels of inner perfection or do we collude with them to only feel more comfortable, using the Enneagram only to help them understand why they do things rather than for real change and transformation?

“Relativity applies to physics, not ethics.”

– Albert Einstein

This suggests that there *is* some standard of ethics that we can or should all share as an Enneagram community – for example, being honest with each other and our clients about important areas of information about us: our academic degrees, professional experience, sources of our Enneagram and related knowledge, what we can offer our clients and what we cannot, and more. Perhaps this starts with being honest with ourselves about who we are. We can’t use the Enneagram to enhance honesty and integrity in others if we are not that way ourselves.

Questions for us to ask ourselves...

Are we completely candid about our backgrounds or do we simply think we’re being honest, yet acting in ways that are not fully forthcoming—for example, deleting pertinent information about ourselves or our work, implying something about ourselves that is untrue, or allowing someone to think something false about us without correcting them?

Are we transparent about what we’re doing and why we’re doing it, both in terms our own actions as well as what and how we teach?

Do we constantly challenge ourselves by asking ourselves the hard questions – for example, What we are not being totally honest about? -- instead of focusing solely on the ways in which we are being forthcoming, then applauding ourselves for our honesty?

“You’re born with intelligence, but not with ethics.”

– Massad Ayoob

We must reflect, on an ongoing basis, about the ethics involved in everything we touch related to the Enneagram -- for example, what we teach, how we teach it, what we charge our clients and what we deliver for this charge, how we relate to other Enneagram professionals, what we take credit for that is not our own and whether we take enough credit for that which we have created,

and why we are teaching the Enneagram. Without asking these questions on a daily and weekly basis, we're challenge to become both wiser and more ethical.

Questions for us to ask ourselves...

Do we make the time to regularly ask ourselves difficult ethical questions, then reflect on the answers to continue working from an even higher position of ethical integrity?

Do we have others in our lives with whom we can discuss ethical dilemmas and paradoxes and who are also willing to tell us the truth?

Do we challenge colleagues who engage in unethical behavior,, and are we willing to accept the consequences?

As we consider the ethical challenges facing us individually and collectively, we run into interesting obstacles: limited time; our own needs for security, money, or stature; a history to the Enneagram that is unclear, likely clouded with myth, and filled with a century of personal and professional relationships that have disintegrated into mutual animosity; a environment that is so dispersed globally that no one can possibly know everything that is occurring in our field; a theory base that is both solid and full of contradictions.

These contradictions arise from many factors. On the positive side, Enneagram theory is still emerging; it is an evolving theory, and we are only accessing the Enneagram at this moment in time. Some theory thought to be true appears not to be, and new ways of understanding the system emerge. As a result, we need to encourage the Enneagram's evolution and be conscious of our role and responsibility with it.

On the negative side, some Enneagram teachers – and some who are not but call themselves teachers – take the bait of temptation and develop “pseudo-theory.” This is theory, untested and untried, is based on speculation that is ungrounded in a deep understanding of the Enneagram's essence. Sometimes teachers do this because they think it true and assume it must be so. Some create “pseudo-theory” to differentiate themselves from other teachers in an effort to appear at

the cutting edge of the Enneagram for reasons of ego, fame, stature, or potential financial gain. Some are not aware they are doing this; in a sense, they are not conscious that what may sound interesting or possibly true to them is not yet ready for mass distribution.

We are clearly just beyond the precipice of mass distribution of the Enneagram. Enneagram books are available in every major language. Enneagram teachers exist all over the globe, and we are directly or indirectly in contact with one another. Many of us travel with our work more than we work locally. Groups of Enneagram professionals and Enneagram Enthusiasts meet in person through organizations or congregate electronically through chat rooms, blogs, and more.

What we each do affects all of us, and what we all do affects each of us. An attention to ethics allows us all to move forward, both individually and collectively. If we don't pay attention to the ethical issues inherent in using the Enneagram, we are more likely to move forward, then backward, then forward, then backward, in a way that depletes our energy, reduces our impact, and does not serve the Enneagram as well as it serves us.

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