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## Book Review: The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery

Elizabeth Simmons

*George Fox University*, [esimmons@georgefox.edu](mailto:esimmons@georgefox.edu)

David M. Johnstone

*George Fox University*, [djohnsto@georgefox.edu](mailto:djohnsto@georgefox.edu)

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## BOOK REVIEW

**The Road Back to You: An Enneagram Journey to Self-Discovery**, by Ian Morgan Cron and Suzanne Stabile, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016, 240 pp. (Hardback), ISBN: 978-0830846191

Over the last few years, the self-assessment tool known as the Enneagram has blossomed among the college student leaders at our Christian college. One of its values has been to encourage greater self-understanding and awareness as well as a growing sense of empathy for others. The Enneagram has been particularly valuable in helping students discern how they work and play with others.

One of us has delved deeply into the intricacies of this tool, while the other has resisted the instrument until his son, a student leader, found it exceedingly beneficial. When InterVarsity Press decided to publish a book focused on the Enneagram written by the hosts of “the Road Back to You” podcast (a podcast on the Enneagram), it was a subtle affirmation that this might be worth a look. Cron and Stabile, the authors, note that their podcast seeks to provide “a deeper knowledge of ourselves, compassion for other, and love for God” ([www.theroadbacktoyou.com](http://www.theroadbacktoyou.com)). Our assessment is that this statement is also true for their small book.

While other instruments or tools allow an individual to discern particular strengths, personality, or aptitudes, the Enneagram helps an individual understand his or her motivations. This book explains how the Enneagram can be used as another opportunity to understand oneself. The authors note that, rather than labeling or moving individuals into larger categories, the tool gives students a language to help describe their own inclinations. In our practice, we have found that it differs from other personality type assessments in that when a student truly engages with this tool, it has a way of encouraging them on a journey rather than just providing them with a finite list of strengths or characteristics.

This volume is full of illustrations from the authors’ pastoral and counseling vocations. Cron and Stabile move into a comfortable conversation with readers, drawing them into the book’s contents. They dedicate an entire chapter to each Enneagram type, moving from the theoretical application to the pragmatic and back again. The authors explain that the Enneagram is made up of several spectrums—from integration of self to disintegration, from virtue to vice, from security to stress—each end of which is correlated to health or unhealth. Its scope includes individuals as well as the way that individuals relate to others. It is beneficial both in one-on-one conversations with students as well as in staff teams (i.e., “This is what it’s like to work with me”). It gets to the core of inner motivations by naming the basic desire and basic fear of each type. In my work with students, I (David) have found that students know definitively which type is theirs when they read through the material. The authors acknowledge that the Enneagram is not exactly a feel-good tool; its impact and its growth often come by pruning. In their engagement with the reader, the authors warn that some of their analysis and reflections may be challenging for the reader to read.

As the authors explain, the Enneagram describes the nine types. Each type is given a descriptor or name: for instance, type One is the *perfectionist*, Type 2 is the *helper*, and Type 3 is described as the *performer*. They further note that these types fall into triads—centers out of which each functions—students resonate with being more *feeling* oriented (Types 2, 3, or 4), *fear* oriented (Types 5, 6, or 7), or *anger* oriented (Types 8, 9, or 1).

This helps students begin to name why they may be feeling a certain way, or which of the core emotions are more difficult for them to engage with than others. Using another example—in our work with students, we have found that student-leaders who are Type 6 (the *loyalist*) struggle more profoundly with the question of home and belonging. As the book explains, the Type 6 ultimately deals with the need to feel secure. Because college is often a time of wrestling and insecurity with definitions of home and identity, it is significant for Sixes to know why they feel what they feel or think the way they think. They may be wrestling to a greater degree with these issues than others, and as a supervisor and guide for the journey during their college experience, it is helpful for us to know the linchpin questions in order to challenge and encourage them in their processing. The authors provide similar prompts for discerning how other Enneagram types are motivated.

Cron and Stabile note the challenges of autonomy, independence, interdependence, relationships, and community. They observe the nuances, pitfalls, and joys that each type brings to a relationship. Within our work with student leaders, understanding the distinctive aspects and motivations of each type allows us to probe into the student's personal story with greater discernment and intentionality. These details inform how or why a student responds or initiates in a certain way. This allows an advisor, instructor, or supervisor to strategically shape their lessons, training, and challenges.

In personal experience, using the Enneagram with students helps in their transformation as leaders. We desire self-understanding and growing competency in relationship development to be ongoing, to take root, and to touch the inner life so as to result in authentic change. The authors of this book view the Enneagram as a significant tool and provide a solid introduction to each type. The authors explain how the Enneagram increases personal self-awareness and emotional intelligence in students. They also note that the Enneagram increases an individual's ability to work with others.

We believe that the university campus community is one of the best places for students to further understand themselves and grow in self-awareness. *The Road Back to You* provides an accessible primer and introduction to the Enneagram as a tool for accomplishing this task. This is a volume for those who are unfamiliar with or just starting to explore the implications of the Enneagram. At the beginning of each chapter discussing individual types, the authors provide personal descriptors that clarify the type for the reader. At the end of each chapter, they provide counsel for each type that can prompt deeper growth and reflection. This book provides intentional prompts for individuals and groups to engage with the tool individually and as a group. We are convinced this may be another significant tool in the attempt to increase an understanding of self and grow in the ability to engage in shaping relationships and community.

*The Road Back to You* to you is an understandable and strong introduction to the Enneagram. As a result, this book can be a significant tool in the growing self-understanding of students. While that self-awareness is not always acknowledged as a goal, it is one of the cornerstones of western higher education. We have particularly found that the Enneagram has been an intriguing and engaging tool in our development of student leaders. This book has helped provide a broader but more accessible explanation of the tool. The authors note that beyond introducing the Enneagram, their hope is linked to increasing compassion in the reader for herself and her community. It accomplished this goal, yet it does not develop fully how the Enneagram types works in conjunction with other types. It touches on this area, but we would have welcomed further and deeper conversation.

The authors' second hope is that the reader would recognize aspects of God's character in each of the Enneagram types. They further note the dangers of exaggerating "these characteristics, when we grab hold of a single trait and turn it into an ultimate value or an idol" (p. 228).

In the same way, delving into this self-assessment tool before a student is ready to receive it could result in confusion and frustration. The authors provide a solid introduction to the Enneagram, providing suggestions and guides that can lead a student to profound, transformative, and even humorous conversations. It is a simple and accessible volume, a glimpse into another resource in our development of students.

Elizabeth Simmons and David M. Johnstone

*George Fox University*

✉ [esimmons@georgefox.edu](mailto:esimmons@georgefox.edu);  
[djohnsto@georgefox.edu](mailto:djohnsto@georgefox.edu)