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The Alexander Romantic

Understanding the Psyche of Alexander the Great Through Enneagram Theory

“Ever to be the best, my boy, the bravest, and stand far above all others”

—Homer, *Iliad*. VI. 247¹

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Abstract

The trend in modern scholarship to avoid any emphasis on personality when discussing historical figures has meant that while historians have extensively theorized and analyzed the events which occurred during the age of Alexander (336-323 BCE), there is little research regarding the Macedonian king's intrapersonal identity or psychological motivation, without which we cannot hope to identify patterns of his behavior or actions. My intent is to offer a comprehensive analysis of Alexander's personality based on the Enneagram Institute's system of 9 basic types and 18 additional "wings" as a guideline for accurate and insightful examination of Alexander's actions (and reactions) to experiential stimuli.

¹ Kets de Vries, Manfred F. R., and Engellau, Elisabet. *Are Leaders Born Or Are They Made? The Case of Alexander the Great*. Taylor & Francis, 2018. p.6 (This is said to be Alexander's favorite line from Homer, spoken by the Lycian hero and warrior-king, Glaucus, son of Hippolochus, paraphrasing his father's words. An interesting choice for Alexander, whose strained relationship with his own father caused him to seek signs of godly lineage.)

Introduction

For the contemporary researchers and archivists pursuing theoretical inquiry into historical figures and events, the term “personality” has been exiled from scholarly discourse, along with all of the concepts that come with it: emotion, motivation, morality, etc. The consensus has been that attempting to delve into the minds of influential statesmen and generals is inherently a subjective process, and therefore results in a biased analysis of history and the potential for wildly inaccurate assumptions about the subconscious or emotional foundations driving individuals who are not alive to tell us whether we have hit the mark or are attributing to them completely unfounded introspections.

I would make no assertion that this is not a completely valid concern, and I believe the trend towards objective historical analysis has allowed for far more precision in dividing true primary records from exaggerated or false accounts; However, I have observed in reading the works of modern historical scholars a tendency to, in an effort to remain completely objective, ascribe that objectivity to the figures of antiquity, in place of any emotional motivation. What I will label the “*detachment fallacy*” causes the impulsive and emotive aspects of an individual’s psyche to be completely overshadowed by emphasis on the logical element of decision making, rendering the historical figure robotic and singularly goal-oriented, in pursuit of a goal that may only exist in our anachronistic hindsight.

By evaluating Alexander’s psyche in terms of the Enneagram Institute’s system of personality typing, I make no claim that the results offer a definitive method of retrospectively predicting Alexander’s thought process, nor do I think that can be achieved through any level of psychoanalysis. I do hope, though, that this examination provides a clearer understanding of the

king's personal motivation for conquering enough territory to build a multicultural empire. The knowledge of Alexander's Enneagram type can be used as a tool to more accurately delineate the truth in cases when contradictory information is provided by primary sources. The legend of Alexander has surpassed the point at which the accuracy of accounts can no longer be assumed to be entirely truthful. Every biographer and historian of Alexander contemporary or adjacent to his reign—Plutarch, Arrian, Callisthenes, etc.—has been, fairly, accused in modern scholarship of offering a picture of Alexander reflective of their own preferences. A.B. Bosworth writes, correctly, that “the history of his reign has all too often been a thinly disguised biography, distorted by the personality and values of its author”.² Reaching the same conclusion as Bosworth, I have subsequently made the complete opposite decision as he. I do not provide, as Bosworth does, “an attempt to analyse Alexander's impact on his world without any preconceived model of his personality or motives,” but rather an attempt to develop a model of the king's personality and motives, without any preconceived model of his impact on the world.³ I hope that my analysis can be used in combination with pre existing research to create a more cohesive picture of the life and conquests of Alexander the Great.

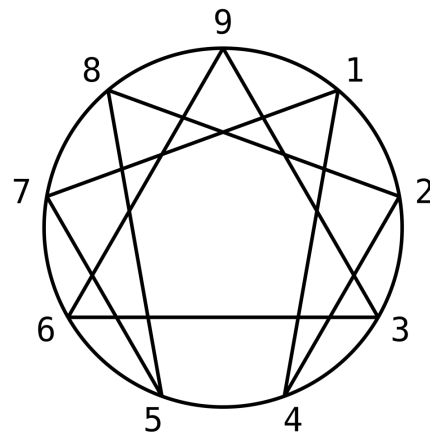
Contextualizing the Enneagram

To assuage any immediate concerns that analyzing the personality of a figure who existed in antiquity through a modern psychological theory is bound to result in anachronisms and false associations, I will briefly refer to the historical origins of the Enneagram concept. The word “*ennea*” is Greek, meaning nine, referring to both the nine personality types and nine points on the Enneagram symbol. This symbol, as well as the concept of spiritual self-discovery that it

² Bosworth, A. B.. *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*. Cambridge University Press, 1993. p.5

³ *ibid.*

represents, is of unknown—but conclusively ancient—origin, likely based in pre-Socratic mathematical discoveries and early Greek philosophy. It has been conjectured that the Enneagram symbol, “with its fascinating geometry and its basis in the mathematics of ratio and proportion” was the first explicitly mentioned in the works of Pythagoras in the 5th century BCE.⁴ The Enneagram was unknown in the West until much later, but appears throughout history in sources as diverse as the Hebrew Kabbalah, the *Enneads* of Plotinus (204-270 CE), the Babylonian Sarmān Brotherhood (~500 BCE), and Russian Rosicrucianism (~1800 CE). The modern revitalization of Enneagram theory may have begun with Athanasius Kircher’s book, *Arithmologia*, in 1665, published in Rome and including both the symbol and name⁵. The cumulative Enneagram theory to which I will be referring is based on the research of Bolivian philosopher Oscar Ichazo (1931-2020)⁶, and the Enneagram Institute, founded in 1997⁷. The Enneagram is timeless, and though it is considered a “living symbol,” constantly in motion, the laws governing its theoretical foundation are as relevant to the discovery of ancient truths as they are to modern identity psychology⁸.



⁴ Riso, Don Richard, and Hudson, Russ. *Personality Types: Using the Enneagram for Self Discovery*, Revised Edition. Houghton Mifflin, 1996. p.12.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16

⁶ Riso, Don Richard, and Hudson, Russ. *The Essential Introduction to the Enneagram: Discovering Your Personality Type*, Revised & Expanded Edition. Houghton Mifflin, 2003. p.6.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Riso & Hudson. *Personality Types*, p.17

The Enneagram Theory of Personality Typology

Before I engage with any psychoanalysis of Alexander the Great, I will lay out the basis for the Enneagram’s system of dividing personality types, the connective factors between the types, and a basic description of the nine types. I also think it necessary to explain, after clarifying the Enneagram theory, why I find this system better suited to historical inquiry than the more widely known personality typing system, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. The Enneagram symbol (shown above) provides the basis for type identification and connections. Each of the nine types is equidistant and of equal value, and the lines within the circle represent specific subdivisions beyond the nine types. Each *type* encompasses both the *personality* and *essence* of an individual: respectively, the aspect of identity and behavior that is learned and acquired through experience, and the aspect of identity and behaviour that is innate and biological.⁹ A person will only ever have one basic type, any of the nine, which does not change but also does not necessarily mean that the individual can not exhibit traits of other types (more details in the following sections). The basic personality types can be understood as follows, though simplified¹⁰:

Type One is principled, purposeful, self-controlled, and perfectionistic.	Type Two is generous, demonstrative, people-pleasing, and possessive.	Type Three is adaptable, excelling, driven, and image-conscious.
Type Four is expressive, dramatic, self-absorbed, and temperamental.	Type Five is perceptive, innovative, secretive, and isolated.	Type Six is engaging, responsible, anxious, and suspicious.
Type Seven is spontaneous, versatile, acquisitive, and scattered.	Type Eight is self-confident, decisive, willful, and confrontational.	Type Nine is receptive, reassuring, complacent, and resigned.

With these descriptions as the basis for understanding the nine types, the centers and wings can be added to the explanation. The Enneagram centers serve to place all nine types in

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ “[How The System Works](#).” *The Enneagram Institute*.

relation to each other, based on the assets and liabilities of how each type interacts with the environment. The *Feeling Center* includes types 2, 3, and 4, the *Thinking Center* includes types 5, 6, and 7, and the *Instinctive Center* includes types 8, 9, and 1. The types in each center share a dominant unconscious emotional response that occurs when the type loses touch with the self: Types in the *Feeling Center* gravitate towards feelings of shame, types in the *Thinking Center* gravitate towards fear, and those in the *Instinctive Center* gravitate towards anger or rage.

The Enneagram “wings” are composed of the two types numerically to the left and right any basic type (for a type 9, the wings consist of type 8 and type 1), and in addition to having a basic type, every individual also has a complementary wing, exemplifying secondary traits of one of the two adjacent types. For example, type 3s by themselves are achievement-oriented and status-conscious, striving to feel valued and be admired. For a type 3 with a type 2 wing (which can be expressed in shorthand as 3wing2 or simply 3w2), the type 3’s ambition might manifest as a desire for a large group of supporters or fans, as a result of the type 2’s desire to feel loved and be needed. A 3wing4, on the other hand, would experience the type 3’s ambition but with an emphasis on originality, integrating the type 4’s desire to feel personal significance.

In regards to why I choose to engage with the Enneagram over Myers-Briggs, the latter is entirely focused on the personality while the Enneagram includes what it calls the *essence*. The unique quality of essence allows the Enneagram system to identify underlying motivations rather than purely actions. For example, the Myers-Briggs system classifies each individual as either Introverted or Extroverted. Not only does the Enneagram allow for more nuanced spectrums of traits, it moves deeper than identifying, in this example, if an individual gains or loses energy when in the presence of large amounts of people, instead identifying what basic fears and desires motivate that preference. A Type 5 personality, which indicates a fear of being useless or helpless

and a desire to be independent and able to solve problems, may apply to an introvert or extrovert; if a Type 5 shows introvertive tendencies, it may imply that they are independent and dedicated to work, and that when stressed, they may become detached, preoccupied with their thoughts, and help-avoidant. An extroverted Type 5 may feel motivated to be helpful and express their independence and capability through leadership and management. Stress may cause them to become high-strung, bossy, and perfectionistic. It would likely be easier to type Alexander via the Myers-Briggs identification system, considering that system is more oriented towards external expression of personality, however I believe the Enneagram will provide more insight as to Alexander's motivations and the driving force behind his actions. Where the Myers-Briggs would be able to tell us if Alexander the Great would feel comfortable or anxious at a rowdy Macedonian salon, the Enneagram can determine how much of Alexander's strategy was influenced by the wishes of his mother versus collaboration with his generals versus his own individual beliefs.

Existing Scholarship

In spite of his uncontested influence and massive impact on both his own surroundings and the modern world, Alexander the Great has been subjected to only a miniscule level of psychoanalysis. One of, if not *the* only modern book offering a psychological evaluation of Alexander the Great is the work of Manfred F. R. Kets de Vries and Elisabet Engellau, titled *Are Leaders Born or Are They Made? The Case of Alexander the Great*. The authors, both experts in the fields of psychoanalysis, organizational leadership, and management, examine specifically the events formative of Alexander's identity and leadership ability. Their research provides an important perspective on leadership skills of Alexander, but falls short in its historical

comprehension of the era, attributing to the Macedonian king, as a singular actor, the entirety of the skills and traits that were necessary in creating his empire, traits which were more likely a collection of the diverse tactical minds that made up Alexander's inner circle and entourage. The book also falls victim to the detachment fallacy, implying that many of the emperor's decisions were purely strategic in nature, products of intentional, calculated policy. In explaining Alexander's leadership image manipulation, the authors write that "Alexander used his choice of dress as a propaganda tool, adopting native costumes wherever appropriate..."¹¹ This gives plenty of credit to Alexander for his marketing strategy, but ignores the influence of Alexander's taste for luxury, of which Arrian writes that "Alexander was induced to indulge his desire of emulating the Median and Persian wealth...according to the custom of the foreign kings".¹²

Unfortunately, the limited scholarship on Alexander the Great's sense of self means that the majority of discourse on this topic has been collected in various internet forums, Reddit threads, and blogs. Hobbyists and amateur theorists have offered plenty of opinions regarding Alexander's personality type, and, as the internet's citizens tend to do, have thrown a dozen counter-arguments and refutations at every post containing the slightest of opinions. Notably absent from these internet discussions are even amateur historians, the majority of participants, mirroring Kets de Vries and Engellau, are amateur or professional psychologists, behaviourists, or developmental researchers. As a result, these discussions offer evidenced claims and scholarly insights about typology, but are often rendered inaccurate by limited or false historical information pertaining to Alexander's reign. A user on Typology Central's forum posted that "the most important fact about this man is that he adored his horse, Bucephalus, and honored him with the naming of a city instead of yet another Alexandria," which might be foundationally true

¹¹ Kets de Vries & Engellau, *Are Leaders Born or Are They Made?* p.59.

¹² Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*. IV, VII.

but I doubt the majority of historians would fall in line with the claim that this is “the most important fact” about Alexander.¹³ Another user added: “Alexander the Great was an ego obsessed [narcissist] obsessed with his legacy and self image” (and was then immediately accused of “broadcasting [his] stupidity”).¹⁴ Along with historians, the Enneagram is consistently absent from these internet discussions, which more often focus on Myers-Briggs identification and insulting each other’s mothers. The consensus, though, based on my scouring of message boards and the polls on typology forums, is that Alexander most closely represents Type 7w8¹⁵, which is called “The Realist” or, in a distant second place, type 8w7¹⁶, “The Maverick”. Beyond these two assertions, there are equal (though low) numbers of users divided between identifying Alexander as a 2w3, 3w2, 3w4, and 4w3, with a couple of 1w2’s and 2w1’s scattered between them¹⁷.

Beyond the internet forums, there is currently no scholarship occupied with the Enneagram type of Alexander, or any personality identification of him at all. This is somewhat surprising, considering that Enneagram types have been ascribed to Augustus Caesar (Type 3), Plato (Type 1), Galileo (Type 7), and the Buddha (Type 5), also Frodo Baggins (Type 6), though perhaps that is not as surprising¹⁸. Alexander the Great has been proven time and time again to be one of the, if not *the*, most recognizable historical figures in the modern world, and yet he has shifted so far into legend that understanding him as a man is not an undertaking yet completed. This may be due as well to the lack of sources for which Alexander himself was the author.

Though he is subject of a plethora of biographies throughout history, documentation that would

¹³ User: Anew Leaf, [Thread: Alexander the Great is the only ENTP 8 that existed in history](#). Typology Central Web Forum, Oct. 2, 2012.

¹⁴ User: Elfboy, [Thread: Alexander the Great is the only ENTP 8 that existed in history](#). Typology Central Web Forum, Oct. 2, 2012.

¹⁵ User: Kicking Lettuce, [Alexander the Great, Personality Vote Breakdown](#). Personality Database, June 13, 2015.

¹⁶ [Alexander the Great MBTI Personality Profile, Enneavotes Breakdown](#). MBTI Database, Aug. 8, 2017.

¹⁷ [Thread: Guess the Type: Alexander the Great](#). Personality Cafe, May 26, 2013.

¹⁸ [“The Enneagram Nine Type Descriptions.”](#) Enneagram Institute

indicate his own feelings is limited by the extent to which he shared those feelings with his friends and supporters.

Typing Alexander

With the disclaimer that I do not necessarily agree in full with the internet's ruling on Alexander the Great's Enneagram classification, I will begin with an explanation of the type most commonly attributed to him, which certainly has evidence to support it: a Type 7 with an 8 Wing. The Type 7, known as "The Enthusiast" desires satisfaction and fulfillment of needs above all else. Fearing pain and deprivation, Type 7s pursue adventure as a means to collect positive experiences, and move quickly from one idea to the next, often juggling multiple different projects or plans. As a part of the *Thinking Center*, 7s are more specifically anticipatory thinkers, often drawn to imagining possibilities in advance, and making decisions on-the-fly. They are bold and determined, and likely to be charismatic, fast learners, and have wide ranging interests. As a result, Type 7s often find it difficult to maintain focus on one task and pursue it to completion. The *Thinking Center's* propensity for feelings of fear manifests in the 7 as anxiety that they will not know enough to make the best decision for themselves and others. This anxiety causes Type 7s to cope by keeping their minds busy as often as possible with stimulating activities, or by trial-and-error: trying to experience every possibility in order to gather knowledge about what works and what doesn't.

There is undoubtedly some merit in the argument that Alexander is a Type 7. The king shares the Type 7's description as visionary, impulsive, flexible, and determined. Adaptability was a necessary characteristic for conquering territory and Alexander had it in spades. Of his battle against the army of Porus, Arrian writes: "As soon as Alexander observed that the Indians

were drawn up in order of battle, he stopped his cavalry from advancing farther...” noting that Alexander was quick to survey the surroundings, identify a new strategy in response, and execute that strategy to attain victory.¹⁹ In addition to battle strategy, Alexander’s adaptability was a necessary component of his quick thinking in improvising his speech at Opis, tailoring his words to the occasion to best achieve his goal of unifying and placating his troops.²⁰

The type 7 tends to internally justify the actions of others, often subconsciously avoiding any recognition of ill will others may hold towards them, the knowledge of which would limit their happiness. There is an event that I find to be both the strongest example of this trait in Alexander as well as its biggest counterargument, as a result of conflicting motives that complicate the situation. When he is told by Craterus that Philotas, son of Parmenion, had been confiding to his mistress his lack of respect for the king, Alexander’s initial response is to plot to have her report to him any conversations she has with Philotas. Though this implies some suspicion on Alexander’s part, Plutarch notes that this was far from the first time Philotas’ treasonous statements had been brought to Alexander’s attention, but the king did not pay them any mind, either because he wanted to give Philotas the benefit of the doubt, as would denote a Type 7, or because Philotas was the son of one of Alexander’s most prominent generals and trusted advisor. According to Plutarch, after engaging in his plot to reveal Philotas, “Alexander, although he now had overwhelming evidence against Philotas, endured these insults in silence and restrained himself, either because he had confidence in Parmenion’s loyalty, or because he feared the power and prestige of father and son.”²¹ Once again Alexander shows a hesitance to assume the worst of Philotas, but his motive is unclear. The conflict is even further exacerbated, and ultimately comes to a head when Philotas neglects to warn Alexander of a plot against him, a

¹⁹ Arrian, *Anabasis*. V, XVI.

²⁰ Arrian, *Anabasis*. VII, VII.

²¹ Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*. 49.

plot which, though unevidenced, he was accused of designing. Alexander only decrees that Philotas should be tortured and executed after the urging of his closest advisors, before which the king had been prepared to pardon his friend. When he first becomes aware of the plot, Alexander “held his hands up to the sky and, bursting into tears, bemoaned the fact that he had been so repaid by one who had formerly been the dearest of his friends.”²² After hearing Philotas’ denial of his guilt, Curtius writes: “it would be difficult to say whether the king believed him or kept his anger concealed in his heart”.²³

In the sequence of Philotas’ friendship and betrayal of the king, I raise the possibility that this is, rather than evidence of Alexander’s Type 7 nature, a reason to believe Alexander exhibits traits of another type more than 7. The issue that prevents this series of events from offering evidence of the Type 7 is the fact that Alexander never became completely unsuspecting of Philotas, or seemed to gain a sense of freedom from believing Philotas to be a trustworthy friend. This is also the only case of Alexander showing such reluctance in punishing those plotting against him, acting far more decisively in his responses to treason by Parmenion, Cleitus, and Callisthenes. Also, the belief that Alexander was lenient towards Philotas as a measure to keep himself content is implausible at best. In contrast to the Type 7’s desire for happiness and freedom, Alexander’s desire was clearly not to live in blissful ignorance, or to maintain optimism, or he would not have made so many decisions that caused him stress and responsibility. On the other hand, perhaps it was the influence of a Type 7 personality that drove Alexander to continue his conquests rather than devoting his time to stabilizing the empire and managing the administrative portion of his leadership responsibilities.

²² Curtius Rufus, Quintus, *The History of Alexander*. VI, VII, 28.

²³ *ibid.* VI, VII, 35.

An issue with identifying Alexander's personality type is that in all of the material written about him, it is hard to delineate his own motivation for wanting to expand his empire. In other words, he had the choice of just maintaining the lands attained by Philip, living out his life in luxury as a Macedonian king, or going on an extremely risky endeavor to conquer every single bit of land that he could. Surely the allure of conquest wasn't simply that he wanted to travel around the world for new experiences as would denote a Type 7, or even that he believed conquering land would lead him to more happiness (he can't have been ignorant to the fact that leading an army to battle after battle would result in deaths, pain, injuries, and losses).

This is the shortcoming of identifying Alexander as a Type 7; while he definitely exhibits some of the traits of this type, he is not necessarily motivated by those traits. Though none can deny that in Alexander's conquests he pursued adventure, however he was not driven by a desire for adventure, unless one can believe that the king would have been satisfied with simply traveling the world, instead of conquering it. It is equally understood that Alexander showed himself to be impulsive at times and flexible in his plans, for a Type 7 to remain so dedicated to a singular path of conquest would be rare, and Alexander rarely wavered in his strategy of facing challenges head on, though his technique was innovative and dynamic. The most glaring difference between Alexander and the typical Type 7 is that the latter's basic fear is of loss, pain, and having their basic needs unmet. If this were the case for Alexander, he would not have been so inclined to make decisions leading to injuries, casualties, and starvation, as he did at Issus by refusing Parmenion's advice to accept Darius' terms of alliance²⁴, or in the Gedrosian desert by pouring the water offered to him onto the sand.²⁵

²⁴ Plut. *Life of Alexander*. 29.

²⁵ Arrian, *Anab.* VI, XXVI.

It is also important to note that the Enneagram provides a basis for understanding how each type acts when at their healthiest and unhealthiest level of self-consciousness. The type 7 at its best is satisfied and appreciative, awed by the simple joys of life. To believe that Alexander exhibited these traits, or that he lived at a healthy level of self-integration, I would argue is difficult, and it is near-impossible to claim that he was both healthily self-aware and expressed that in the way of the Type 7. On the opposite end, at their unhealthiest, the Type 7 becomes claustrophobic and erratic, easily falling victim to addictions or material obsessions.²⁶ The unhealthy Type 7 would perhaps provide an explanation for Alexander's impulsive killing of Cleitus, but would then fail to explain the subsequent grieving, as well as Alexander's maintained calm state during battle.²⁷

I will endeavor now to offer my reasoning for believing that Alexander falls into the category of the Enneagram Type 4 at *least* as much as he does Type 7. This is not to say that there is indicative proof enough to claim one way or the other, and I hope I have given evidence enough to show that the Type 7 does in many ways match what we know of Alexander. This being the case, I think that the concentration of internet users who believe without any doubt that Alexander was a Type 7 is reflective of a larger oversight that affects all scholarship on the king's life. The Type 7, in opposition to the Type 4, is an extremely visible identity. It manifests in ways that are easy to notice from afar: charisma, determination, leadership, etc. Especially in regards to Alexander, the fact that the Type 7 resides in the *Thinking Center* is a reason for its prevalence in the discourse of the king's personality; one can clearly see the results of Alexander's logical thought and reasoning in his battle arrays, strategies, and innovations. The Type 4, on the other hand, resides within the *Feeling Center*, and since leadership requires a

²⁶ *Type Seven: Levels of Development*. Enneagram Institute.

²⁷ Plut. *Life of Alexander*. 13.

large amount of modulation of one's image and reputation, we have very little insight into Alexander's emotions. Despite the traits of the Type 7 being more visible in Alexander's actions, to conclude that this also defines his motives is inaccurate. Again, I see very little evidence that Alexander's conquest was driven by a hedonistic excitement to chase opportunity, experiences, and freedom. In fact, I see equally minimal evidence implying that Alexander's mindset was future-oriented, and that he was consistently generating new ideas and anticipatory plans for his future.

I present the Type 4: fitting in even just its name, "*The Romantic*". The Type 4 denotes individuals who fear more than anything that they are insignificant, and desire to create for themselves a unique identity. I use the word *create* intentionally, because the Type 4 often manifests the desire for individuality and significance by developing within themselves a fantasy self, embodying all of the traits that they consider ideal, and then attempting to reflect that character in their actions and relationships. Type 4s do not pluck this fantasy desire from thin air, it derives from the Type 4's characteristic belief that they are uniquely talented and gifted, destined to reach some higher potential. The fantasy-self that Type 4s create is often a combination of traits they see in role models, historical figures, or fictional characters. For Alexander the Great, who slept with a copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow and deemed himself a son of Zeus along with his heroic ancestors Heracles and Achilles, it is not difficult to believe that Alexander imagined himself to be a uniquely gifted figure destined to follow a dramatic path of heroism and influence.

Seeking to emulate and surpass the feats of his predecessors may well have been Alexander's driving force throughout his life, and it definitely was in some more visible situations. From the days of his childhood, Alexander is recorded to have felt restricted in his

potential by the feats and reputation of his father. When Philip was celebrated, Alexander became temperamental and dramatic, both qualities of the Type 4. Quoted by Plutarch, Alexander often lamented to his friends after Philip won a decisive battle or captured a city: “Boys, my father will forestall me in everything. There will be nothing great or spectacular for me with your help to show the world”.²⁸ Were Alexander a Type 4, it would make sense for him to have been sensitive to the successes of those around him and feel a sense of envy or melancholy, desiring to be the one celebrated and influential instead (despite the fact that Alexander, even in his early years, had his fair share of successes and celebration).

Plutarch goes on to write that Alexander “cared nothing for pleasure or wealth but only for deeds of valour and glory,” which, if the biography is to be believed, makes exceedingly evident Alexander’s tendency towards the desires of the Type 4 over the Type 7.²⁹ The Enneagram Institute explains that the primary, and often only, reason for a Type 4 and a Type 7 to be mistaken for one another is that at their unhealthy extremes, both become excessive and self-indulgent; However, while a Type 7 tends to hoard material wealth and pleasurable experiences, a Type 4 becomes hyper-focused on indulging their own fantasies, daydreaming about their ideal self and life. A Type 4 who amasses material goods does so out of an appreciation of their beauty or significance, essentially collecting “trophy” of their experiences, while a Type 7 amasses material goods because possession offers them a sense of security and acquiring new things brings them a thrill, though they are likely to lose interest in a possession as soon as they find another one.³⁰ Alexander’s lack of interest in wealth and pleasure shows a leaning towards the Type 4 that is exhibited in other regards throughout his life.

²⁸ Plut. *Life of Alexander*. 5.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ [Misidentifying Fours and Sevens](#). Enneagram Institute.

In Alexander's life and conquests he made a vast number of decisions that seem to have been influenced by a desire to assimilate to the demigods in his Pantheon of ancestral heroes. The most striking example of this is in his Siege of Aornus, of which Arrian writes: "For stupendous is this rock in this land, about which the current report is, that it was found impregnable even by Heracles, the son of Zeus".³¹ Alexander, says Plutarch, "was anxious to prove that boldness can triumph over fortune and courage over superior force; he was convinced that while there are no defences so impregnable that they will keep out the brave man, there are likewise none so strong that they will keep the coward safe".³² Here Alexander proves to not only be fascinated with the thought of measuring up to his fantasy-self consisting of heroic figures, he also exhibits the Type 4's sense of individual destiny or talent. Like the Type 4, Alexander has a dramatic sense of self-image and idealism, and becomes insistent that everything he does must be by his command, and done his way.

In addition to their idealistic and dramatic sense of self, the Type 4 feels in tune with their deficiencies and pain, often feeling as though they alone suffer more than anyone else, and holding on to that feeling to support their sense of individualism and destiny. This trait Alexander expresses in his grieving after the death of Hephaestion, which by all accounts was intense and lengthy.³³ Some records say that he "spent most of that day prostrate over the body of his friend and would not leave it until he was dragged away by his Companions: others have him prostrate on the body for that whole day and night" according to Arrian.³⁴ It is also notable that this grieving, as Alexander was no doubt aware, mirrored that of Achilles after the death of Patroclus. In his grief for Hephaestion, as well as his parallel response to Cleitus' death by his

³¹ Arrian, *Anab.* IV, XXVIII.

³² Plut. *Life of Alexander.* 58.

³³ Arrian, *Anab.* VII, XIV.

³⁴ *ibid.*

own hands (and the death of Bucephalus), Alexander exemplifies the Type 4 tendency to respond to pain dramatically and emotionally. In other situations Alexander also shows the aforementioned tendency to indulge in painful emotions as a way to feel uniquely destined to endure suffering, such as when he, though dehydrated, spills his water on the Gedrosian desert. It is also possible, in keeping with this analysis, that Alexander's refusal to punish Philotas for his treasonous words was, rather than being from ignorance or political necessity, an attempt to meet his emotional need to feel cognisant of his flaws and vulnerabilities. This would also explain why he sat behind a curtain to hear his Companions torture Philotas, and perhaps gained some emotional satisfaction in knowing that his own strengths, which Philotas was accused of questioning, had been proven by his ability to withstand the insults.³⁵

Type 4s are known to treat personal traits like clothing, trying on many different characteristics and identities throughout their lives, in an effort to find some certainty about themselves. They pick traits based on qualities they see in others and the traits of role models or what society considers noble (either pursuing that nobility or its opposite, in an effort to feel unique and unlike the majority of people). The Type 4s treatment of personalities as clothing would explain Alexander's tendency to adopt characteristics of the cultures he conquered, from their stylistic choices to their women and their treatment of royalty as divine.

Much of the discourse surrounding Alexander emphasizes the question of whether the Macedonian king, as he advanced in his conquests, became tyrannical. To be a charismatic and widely supported king, only to fall victim to a series of sudden decisions based on greed, narcissism, and self-interest, seems unlikely, even for a powerful figure like Alexander, which leads me to believe this is another example of his Type 4 tendencies. The personality of Alexander seems in records to be dynamic and unpredictable, which is another factor making it

³⁵ Plut. *Life of Alexander*. 49.

difficult to characterize him. In some cases he is ruthless in attacking those who oppose him, in others he is sympathetic and forgiving. He is analytical at times but impulsive at others, and his charismatic way of addressing his people or spurring them into action seems inconsistent with his bouts of anger and grief and the moments of harshness he has towards his army and enemies. He shows no anger towards Philotas after learning that his friend speaks badly of him behind his back, and yet murders Cleitus within one night of hearing the other's words. I think it plausible that while Alexander's more tyrannical actions occurred near the end of his life and conquest, they were not due to a complete shift in personality or a malevolent nature that he had hidden during his early campaigns, but instead were evidence of Alexander becoming a more unhealthy Type 4. Alexander's shifts in mood and self-consciousness were not only present in his later campaigns, but previously had been managed by a healthy Alexander in a way that supported his strengths, rather than competing with them. Alexander was an impulsive but effective "berserker" in battles, and his adoption of the customs of territories he conquered was diplomatically strategic. A Type 4, when healthy, tends to be a creative problem-solver and empathetic friend, Alexander showed these traits in his innovative battle strategies and rousing speeches to boost his troops' morale. As he endured more and more losses and suffering throughout his conquests, however, Alexander began to drift towards the unhealthy Type 4 qualities, becoming moody, disdainful, and emotionally distant. The Type 4 in any state of health maintains a focus on the past, contrasting the Type 7's future-oriented, anticipatory mindset. Likely Alexander incurred more and more regrets as he continued his conquests, unable to emotionally move on from focusing on his hollow victories, treasonous attempts by friends, and the changes he could have made to have been a more effective leader, to have better echoed his imagined hero-self and become deserving of a place with the gods and his ancestors.

Conclusion and Potential Oversights

The nature of Kets de Vries and Engellau's book is evidence of the fact that in the scholarship of Alexander, far more attention has been paid to his *force* of personality than to his actual personality. Nearly every source agrees that Alexander's impassioned speeches and diplomatic charisma when dealing with his own troops and his conquered territories were integral to his acquisition of support and sustained power. Despite offering lengthy descriptions of how Alexander's speeches roused his army to excitement, very little is said of how those speeches affected Alexander. Was he invigorated by his troops' loyalty, or excited for the chance to show his leadership prowess? Or did he have to put on a facade each time he addressed his troops, to hide his own lack of confidence or perhaps anger at his troops' disorder? There is not a clear answer, and in fact there are so many answers as to overrule any credibility of one account over another. That there is such a wide breadth of contradicting and hyperbolized information regarding Alexander's conquest means that it is difficult to pin down what were actually traits of the man himself, and what his contemporaries inserted into their accounts based on preconceptions, biases, and dramatization. What we do know, is that undoubtedly Alexander was able to use his strengths to his benefit, and keep his weaknesses from interfering with his campaigns. Whatever Alexander's personality type may have been, it was a personality to be written in capital letters, emboldened, and italicized.

I offer a warning for dangers of which I am cognisant in writing this analysis, and can not be avoided. As a figure now more of legend than history, I analyze Alexander's type with the same hesitation that I would Heracles or Achilles. It is more accurate to identify Frodo Baggins as a Type 6 than it can be to define Alexander. For a fictional character, there are no consequences to falsely typing and there are no texts to which we do not have access. Every

moment of Frodo Baggins' existence can be read and analyzed, but to complete an analysis of Alexander based on that same expectation would be ludicrous. The Alexander that exists in historical records is not comprehensive of the Alexander who ruled Macedon, his biographies are no more than highlight reels. The likes of Plutarch and Arrian sing praises of Alexander's successes and write of his defeats with the lightest touch of the pen on paper.

Perhaps another time, should I become inclined, I will work towards identifying the Enneagram types of those biographers, since their accounts are irrevocably swayed by their own tastes for drama or suspense, thrilling battles or emotional reunions. I will not, though, ignore the possibility that there is no Alexander left in those records except that which was created by the authors, in which case this analysis is useless. Assuming, though, that the histories of his era are not founded in lies, there is still reason to be wary of giving too much weight to a flawed analysis of a flawed psychological theory based on flawed accounts of a flawed historical figure.

I will also note—and I think this is a shortcoming of many texts about Alexander, modern or otherwise, and not just my own—that the figure of Alexander the Great has encompassed and swallowed the characters of those around him. What we believe to be the feats and strategies and weaknesses of Alexander may well have been a combination of the feats and strategies and weaknesses of Hephaestion and Parmenion and Eumenes and Craterus and Olympias and any number of other friends, confidantes, relatives, and advisors with whom Alexander shared the responsibilities of his campaigns. “Alexander” no longer refers only to the man astride Bucephalus with two plumes on his helmet, but to the entirety of his army. If “Alexander” marched to Issus, no reader of history is to infer that he did so on a leisurely solo stroll, leaving his army at the last rest stop. Consequently, if “Alexander” appoints a satrap or plans festivities or writes a letter or asks obeisance, are we to assume that these actions are not just as much in

reference to some broader group of individuals who embody “Alexander”? The Enneagram theory asserts that no type has any greater value over any other, despite using numbers to categorize. No type is ideally suited to rule, though some are more likely to attain, or enjoy, leadership positions, but every type has weaknesses that would create barriers to perfect leadership. It is therefore certain that Alexander was greatly benefitted, whatever his personality, by the different and diverse personalities of those around him, and there is no question that those collective personalities provided more unique strengths and picked up the slack of each other’s weaknesses in a way that made possible the reign over a vast empire, as one cohesive unit.

As much as personality typing can seem limiting or like a simplification, I think it’s especially important for understanding Alexander to have the context of his personality and inclinations, specifically his motivating desire and fear. That has been a major point of contention in understanding Alexander the Great: It is difficult to identify why he made the decision to build an empire. It wasn’t any royal obligation to continue where his father left off, nor out of a sense of moral justice or a wish to spread Macedonian culture. Unless he was more of a pushover than any biographer describes him to be, it wasn’t a decision made due to external factors like his mother’s encouragement or the urging of his subjects. Instead, I think Alexander feared that he would be forgotten as just another figure with a brief stint ruling over the Macedonian *backwoods* of the intellectual and cultural center that was Greece, and he wanted to simultaneously prove to himself that he had what it took to conquer the world, and create a lasting legacy so that he would feel satisfied with having reached his ideal, joining the ranks of his ancestral heroes. In that regard, I think Alexander the Great’s achievements and impact on the future rendered him as significant and unique as any Type 4 could hope to be.

