

Psychological Types and Social Change

A NECESSARY APPLICATION ?

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My life outside of power

I see myself in the faces

Classes, groups and races

Locked out of power.....

And I hear myself in their music.....

Jack Bruce and Kip Hanrahan 2001

I don't believe that knowing about type necessarily helps people to individuate.

I think it helps most people to find the social niche best suited to their temperamental inclinations, so they can carve out an identity that feels right to them and develop it in a productive and satisfying way.

Lenore Thomson 2003

In the past two or three decades, the growing interest in and popularity of the MBTI® has seen a steadily expanding number of products available for application in various settings.

Well-written booklets on coaching, change, communication; teamwork; leadership and the like, as well as information on the more complex aspects of type, perform a useful role in helping both MBTI practitioners and their clients understand more about type and how to use it. Dozens of books, of excellent, sometimes variable, quality complement these publications. This is a situation which would doubtless please Isabel Briggs Myers, who emphasised the applicability of type; C.G.Jung, I suspect, might have mixed feelings.

A feature of these publications, and indeed much of what is presented at gatherings of type practitioners throughout the world, is that groups, organisations, society are approached with a general acceptance of the *status quo* in terms of the societal frameworks we live in, notably in the business world. Type is presented here as a means of adding value to what is, by change processes, or whatever method. Self-help applications naturally focus on the subjective aspects of how one might be a better person and so forth, rather than broader social issues.

While all this is admirable in intent, I'm concerned that a lot of material in the type world accepts the status quo as a given, particularly in the business area. For me, an understanding that there are normal differences between people such as type provides, leads directly to issues of social change.

For example, if it is true that people are different, then why is government policy mostly driven by averages and/ or statistical norms? That might be efficient at a surface level in terms of money allocation, but it can't be all that effective.

In talking about social change in this way, I'm not advocating that the world be more like me, an INTP. To be quite candid, NT oriented visions of the future usually appal me. I'm not a utopian. I'm much more interested in people being themselves, whatever type, even whether they have one or not in terms of consciousness or self-awareness.

Type and social change is about change in society overall and how an understanding of the differences in people pointed out by type theory and practice could lead to a better society. I see type as a stimulus to social change because it's about different types of people, not an average or norm, together with the realisation that the types can and do have mutually exclusive aims. A better society also involves understanding that it's hard to keep a society together because there are so many differences between people. Social stability depends on understanding and respecting the differences while keeping the things that join us together in mind.

Type ideas can help forge social change because they present positives of desirable opposites. The reality of course is that people don't present the positive side of themselves all day everyday, notwithstanding the positiveness. In that sense, we don't need to get into a welter of politically correct type language, trying to satisfy everyone, and satisfying no-one.

So I don't mean that we should push for type concepts to be used in general discourse. For one thing, there'd have to be some agreement on what type preferences actually are for, and that isn't clear. Statements that infer that Fs are overall gentle and peaceful are hard to justify once one realises that the recent Iraq war was quite probably prosecuted by two men preferring some form of Feeling. The fact that might have happened is no problem for my understanding of type preferences, but I suspect that won't be general. You don't need or want type jargon to push for social change in that case because definitional disputes can muddy the waters..

At any rate, it would be counter-productive because the MBTI is a saleable product and so part of the world of business. In that respect, the instrument itself is a liability in terms of social change, because it involves a commercial transaction with organisations who want to make money. Nothing intrinsically wrong with that, but it's hardly independent and objective. Giving everybody the MBTI isn't a good idea anyway. Even if types aren't falsified, you're then living in a totalitarian state, and I'm presuming that social change is about people being more democratic and equal.

Type demonstrates valuable differences in people, particularly in terms of how people prefer to live their lives, as Lenore Thomson's comment illustrates. If we wish to be living in a democracy, this has a few logical consequences, and yet prevailing definitions of democracy seem to concentrate on a free economy, free market and so on with opinions perhaps expressed through the stock exchange and similar outlets.

While there's obvious importance in economic issues, this approach doesn't strike me as particularly democratic, particularly if individual economic power and influence is taken into account. Furthermore, these institutions and their activities are based on the idea of *homo economicus*, economic man, a person who makes rational decisions concerning money and life issues. Type language identifies this as a variant of extraverted thinking, but it's clear that not even all extraverted thinkers operate in this way, let alone the rest of us. So it's a false model, it's not true. Yet it governs our lives. Surely that can be changed. You don't need to know type to know it's wrong either.

Living one's life has to do with more intrinsic satisfactions; happiness, more or less. I'm presuming that people should, by and large be able to enjoy themselves in various ways, without too much fanfare or pharmaceuticals, within the mixed pleasures and stresses of life. Depression (as defined) seems to be a major disease of our time, whatever it is. It seems to be

an unruly category like stress, or emotion. Drugs and depression together or separately, can mean people unable to access their type, or their core self.

While some people seem to need medication to get them to survive the day, it's not clear to me that prescription drugs are the way to go, and I speak as a sometime sufferer of a form of depression. But if more and more people are being prescribed one pill or another to get them through each day, or even life itself, then the expression of their type, seen as healthy in the Jungian framework is really not going to happen. So if I'm not able to be me for a lot of the time and the same is true of you and others, then it's not exactly a free society, or a healthy one.

It gets pointed out regularly that it's inadequate or inhuman social structures that are often the key in people becoming depressed. The much-touted cognitive behavioural therapy, another variant of extraverted thinking, has its uses like any method, but it can't be enough if a job is oppressive and threatening, a neighbourhood breathes poisonous air, and transport and communication isn't adequate.

All too often, however stress issues are pushed back on the person's inadequacies: genetic, social etc., rather than asking whether something ought to be changed in the external world because it's an unacceptable way to treat people.

Education is another matter. Data seems to suggest that specific types of people aren't catered for in schools: people who don't want to learn in groups, and those who do; those who find it hard to sit down to learn and those who prefer it that way. It seems fairly pointless to continue a system that doesn't work well.

In some respects, all the things I've suggested go back to money issues: there's not enough money for this, that and the other. In Australia, governments continually promise to lessen the tax burden, thus limiting income and so expenditure. This is notwithstanding that the people continually express their wish for more services administered by the government, even if they're taxed more.

I don't know what it's like other countries, but I suspect that there are many areas where speaking the language of the philosophy of type can help point out a better direction for all people: race, colour, sex, creed, type.

Notes:

Some of the views in this paper were first presented in my *C.G.Jung's Theory of Psychological Types as a Grand Theory* (1998/9) and *Depression and Type* (2000). Aspects of *Leading with Type* (2000) are also relevant.

Quoted lyrics are from 52nd Street (warner-chappell) from Jack Bruce *Shadows in the Air* Sanctuary CD 06076084511-2 2002. Jack Bruce is a Scottish musician, singer and composer of some renown in jazz and rock circles; Kip Hanrahan is a New York jazz/latin band leader, arranger and songwriter

Lenore Thomson is a Jungian analyst. Her comment is used with permission

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