


Evolving Revolving Devolving



Type, humans, development

Shouldn't we be flying by now?
Half way between our lives and the stars.
Shouldn't we be soaring now?
Science and explanations left below

—Jack Bruce and Kip Hanrahan (2001)

Long-time readers of my work will be familiar with the names attached to the quotation above, if not with the music: a curious, physical, steamy style favoured by these two men when working together; a New York-themed amalgam of Latin American and African rhythms with jazz and blues overtones, and a Scot whose playing and singing has evoked critical admiration for 35 years.

There's a lot of passion, exhilaration and technical expertise (yes, they do go together) in the music, and the words above are part of what is a love song: the expectation/anxiety of being as one in love, physical and spiritual—if we are in love (and we are), shouldn't all these things be happening (and they're not)?

The words also remind me of one of the conundrums of interpreting and understanding type that come up from time to time—in the language, or in the air at conferences—and that's the notion of 'evolved' or 'developed' people.

Although these words seem to be used more in American settings (particularly with a 'spiritual' overtone), they have a general currency, and you can encounter them here; some AusAPT members use the terms quite regularly.

One comment that comes up from time to time is the opportunity at type gatherings to meet these 'evolved' or 'developed' people, often of specific types. For example, a recent article in the *Bulletin of Psychological Type* described the writer's pursuit (I'm not exaggerating) of others of his INFJ type at the APT Minneapolis conference.

To be fair, in meeting other INFJs, the writer was seeking *himself*, and I can certainly relate to that. But it's the language and approach that's different: the notion of beings that are 'other', 'superior'. The road to sitting at the feet of gurus and perfect masters follows—not for all who use these terms, but the gates are open, and the road beckons.

You might sense some ambivalence, even concern, in my approach to this topic, and you'd be right. I go to conferences to learn, and to meet people (for a while, anyway, then I have to hide). Some of the people I meet and talk to might be seen as evolved beings, certainly developed. I must admit I haven't seen any distinguishing characteristics.

I was talking to Mary McCaulley at the Minneapolis conference when a person interrupted us to ask for a photo of Mary. Her gushing, reverential tone and language was very much in the realm of seeing Mary as a superior being.

By the way, if you're thinking this is primarily an American issue, some readers may recall the local identity who, at the 1994 Melbourne conference, equated the Myers and Briggs families with the Catholic metaphor of the Holy Family, partly gneflecting in the process. That person is an NT, which made it fairly incongruous if you're into spiritual stereotypes, but culture has its influences.

While I am not a fan as such, Bob Dylan's advice 'don't follow leaders' has always resonated with me (although the more prosaic line 'watch your parking meters' that follows hasn't been of much influence at all). But that's what you get from an ISTP, as I believe Dylan to be.

So I'm wary of gurus, and of claims to being an evolved being or some such. That doesn't mean that I don't admire people, listen to what they say, pursue their ideas and work, listen to their music, or anything like that. But I don't see them as a special class of person, 'evolved' or whatever.

If you read broadly about C G Jung, you'll find a complex man with many gifts, but with faults and failings like the rest of us. If he were an 'evolved' being, what practical use would his insights be to ordinary human beings? And the same applies to Isabel Myers. Her remarkable work doesn't mean an 'evolved' or superior status, as a perusal of her biography will show.

But what does 'developed' or 'evolved' mean?

'Developed' is in some ways fairly straightforward in type terms, as it can imply the effective use of preferences, and the acknowledgment and use where appropriate of non-preferences. It can also mean a level of consciousness, in Jung's terms—not a 'higher consciousness', but simply having more control over preferences; a direction of will. It's not clear to me that this was what the INFJ in the *Bulletin* was about.

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The term 'evolved', as I see it being used, may include that sort of meaning, but generally it implies something more. This has to do with its origins, which are not from Charles Darwin, but from Herbert Spencer—a contemporary now almost forgotten, but one of the founders of sociology, the progenitor of Social Darwinism, and an influence (unspecified) on Katharine Briggs.

Spencer's little tome *Education* may have been the Briggs influence. Spencer interestingly suggests that education start with the simple and then to the complex. Perhaps this is the unwitting origin of Otto Kroeger's 'Intuitive Conspiracy', although there's more to it than that.

More importantly, though, Spencer's views were also invoked liberally in 19th and 20th century debates about 'improving the race.' In this country, around the time of Federation, they were useful fodder for debates on immigration under the general heading of eugenics, and also significant in our treatment of Aboriginal people—although we can't blame Spencer for that, as we Australians did it all ourselves.

Spencer's notion of progress and development has had many consequences or parallels, such as sociological and anthropological models that start from hunter-gatherers and go to communities/cities, industrial revolution, space, etc, with the implicit presumption of progress.

You can see how Aboriginal people miss out in this framework, which seems overly attached to Western notions of 'progress', and to some fairly ordinary history. But it still has great influence, particularly if you listen to the current refugee debate, an event that (in my view) has confirmed some unpalatable but true aspects of the history of Australia and immigrants as recently presented by David Day.

We're not as nice as we think, but again I think that's a failing of a number of nations. Just look at a good news report or read a good newspaper and you'll get my point fairly quickly. As a fifth-generation Australian, I'd prefer honesty; guilt doesn't flow from that, as lawyers and moralists might have it. But let's not lie to ourselves.

In suggesting that people in medieval and classical times were less conscious (as he defined it), Jung presumed some developmental psychological aspects. He used the term 'unconscious', though, to describe the majority of humans contemporary with him.

But, as far as I can see, Jung never constructed a theory of a new and future race. That is a theme of Spencer's which was taken up by others, and is surprisingly influential in many areas of the personal growth movement. Hence the 'evolved' tag, and the occasional sect waiting for God or space beings to take them away, rapture them, whatever.

You can see this developmental theme in science fiction, fantasy, even straight science and some psychology. There are two versions: temperament gives a clue as to how each is going to turn out.

In both versions, the hunter-gatherer era (SP) is followed by cities and codified laws (SJ). The Renaissance / Age of Enlightenment / Industrial Development then leads to today, and on to the future person.

If you prefer *NF*, then the current person is NT and the future one NF—communities of harmony loving together until the end of time.

If, however, you prefer *NT*, then it's the Mr Spock future, with the current era being NF.

Nearly all of the economic and social futurists present the future human being as a paragon of rational virtue—actually, as an exponent of extraverted thinking, which isn't much different from those who hold power now.

Is there any evidence for this idea? Christopher Badcock is one of many who point out that the current model of human beings isn't structured very well at all. It's not necessarily the refining and development of millions of years.

Clearly, some things would operate better if they had been designed differently; some things have developed over time, and others not. But it's not necessarily progress in the Spencerian sense, or the 'evolved' sense.

It strikes me that, in the type community, 'evolved' seems to be applied to those who have an intuition or vision of how life should be led—an intuition or vision that might be described as spiritual, with connotations of growth, development, and where mankind is going. Generally, there aren't too many facts supporting their point of view because, after all, it is a *vision*. They gain influence and attract followers or imitators.

Often these people can be seen as other-worldly. But is that being 'evolved'? Or is it simply being a particular sort of intuitive, perhaps with an underpinning belief system that's not as explicit as it might be to the person concerned, or to those listening or following?

In America, for instance, I suspect that the 'Great Awakenings' of centuries past still influence the philosophical and spiritual outlook of that country. There are really no local or European equivalents, unless you want to count the post-modern fixation with Paris in May 1968.

I wonder whether describing people in this way is all that helpful. Type suggests to me something about the different sorts of people there are—that's how I came to be interested in it. Some might say I need all the help I can get in trying to understand others, and there's an element of truth to that.

There are people who want to be themselves, and others who don't have that interest, just wanting to live and let live. Notions of development and being 'evolved' sometimes lead to discrimination against people who don't see that as what they want to be, but who just want to be respected for who they are. One outcome can be that relationship feeling that the current you isn't good enough, and there are obviously some difficulties with that.

For me, anyway. ❖

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Gotta make way for the Homo superior.

— David Bowie, 'Oh! You Pretty Things'

Frank told me once, or several times, that someone had described him as 'fully self-actualised', and he's quite proud of that. Sometimes he even tells girls. Sometimes he explains it to them as meaning that he's 'pretty much 100 per cent horn, baby.'

— Nick Earls, 'Sausage Sizzle'
