

Type as dissent

Some pointers



The freewheelin'
Peter Geyer

The 'constructive use of differences' doesn't mean there was no argument in Isabel Myers' philosophy

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*True personality is always a vocation ...
an irrational factor that destines one to emancipate
themselves from the herd and its well-worn paths*

C G Jung

*Babs and Babs lay dreaming in a four-poster bed
Arm in arm, head to head, Babs and Babs
Babs said, 'Watcha thinking?' ...
She said, 'Nothing ...
But I never do, 'cause I leave it up to you ...'*

Daryl Hall

It isn't me that's what's wrong with you.

John Cale

*You don't know what you're going to do tomorrow;
nor do I.*

Richie Benaud

The road to darkness is a journey, not a light switch.

Lex Luthor

What happens when something you believe to be true is found to be false; or if you had a core belief, and find it isn't quite right? Does it affect your logic, or values, or both? And what did you do, or think you should do, about it?

How do people in general find out about things—or do they really want to?

New knowledge or information can be dangerous, because it can make present existence uncomfortable—to say nothing of the future. It's also potentially the start of a personal journey.

C G Jung took the view that becoming a personality means, in part, the necessity to set out on your own path, even if you are a conventional type. In this way an ISTJ, for instance, can dissent from given norms or conventions, in their own way.

For Isabel Briggs Myers, her work was about the 'constructive use of differences' (McCaulley 1980). This doesn't mean there was no argument or discussion involved in her philosophy, nor disagreement, for that matter. A robust exchange of views was necessarily part of her world, and is one of the reasons why her work has survived and prospered.

Developing preferences, and using them well, implies an increase in understanding and acceptance of others. It also means recognising that there are real differences between people that can't be erased through good intentions or standardising procedures, so we are not simply spending our lives contained within a type description.

People of the same type may be on different sides of an argument, or in academia, politics, etc. The basic *principles* are the same, but different *values* are attached to the data or the discussion. This depends on life experience, and also on what appeals to the person. Type means interpretation, not literal attachment to specific things.

One of the interesting things about type is that, properly understood, it limits personal opportunities. This is an outsider's perspective, at least, as the opportunities were never there to begin with. Contemporary thinking tends to orient to all things being possible or desirable; sometimes there's a rigid denial or rejection of information that challenges this perspective. Phrases like 'sending a message', 'raising awareness' and 'giving hope', can proliferate.

The latter phrase in particular would concern the liberal American writer Barbara Ehrenreich, who considers 'hope' inferior to actually *doing* something (2007). Preferring to be 'hope-free', she reports that paradoxically, an emphasis on 'positive

psychology' can make people take a less positive approach to those in trouble, or who don't possess a naturally sunny disposition. The Australian phrases 'get over it' and 'move on' come to mind.

In this respect, 'potential' can be people's decisions about the lives of others, and 'failure' simply the lack of inclination to follow through with those decisions and pursue a more relevant life. Having 'choices' can at times seem like being told 'there's no such word as *can't*'—a familiar and annoying refrain in my youth.

Should you want people to be someone else? It's not an easy question to answer.

We can delude ourselves about human adaptability, from the general to the particular. The standardisation of education through outcomes, assessments and goal-setting takes a judging hue, with a high likelihood of demotivating perceiving students, and thus being counterproductive. It might be better to have someone like Richie Benaud (a success in his own right) explain his alternative approach to goals.

If you're a judging type yourself, you may consider these things desirable for learning. But it's a little more complex than that, and the successful presenting of the world and its inhabitants as complex has its challenges—as the current debates on climate change and the nature of other cultures and places amply demonstrate.

There's the notion that people are democratic in the western mode, or that 'the West' and democracy are the same thing. Democracy is about the people, yet you can be popular and undemocratic—even here. The people don't naturally go for democracy, otherwise we'd have different public discussions. Clive Hamilton and Sandra Maddison argue that in Australia the current system operates to stifle dissent (2007). The method they describe in some ways presents a view that citizens are, or should be, of one mind.

A similar problem exists in the current approach of presenting almost anything as entertainment: school, sport, even politics. The problem here is that we don't have to take any of it seriously, even learning, because it's OK as entertainment. And yet

entertainment is a variable interest; for quite a few it has nothing to do with learning.

In any case it's really hard to keep up with everything you have to (i.e., what you're compelled to do) and what interests you—so, most things, really. If you focus on crime shows and reality TV, or sport and music, or politics, business, there's really not much room for anything else. And if I'm unfamiliar with actors or TV shows in general, what does that say of me—or of others who eschew sport or politics instead?

The generalisation of skills and abilities as being available across the populace, without any supporting data, has its problems as well. Usually this has to do with a poor use of extraverted thinking. For example, Federal Minister Joe Hockey recently said:

If people have the capacity to buy a house, have children, then why don't they have the capacity to negotiate a job?

I found this comment startlingly naïve, in what was otherwise an impressive presentation. Unfortunately this sort of logic is all too general on all sides of politics. Those skills and attributes are quite different, and each is difficult in its own way. It's questionable whether 'the people' as a whole have any of those capacities at a high level. In any case, the only evidence would be outcome, not process, and it's the *process* where negotiation resides.

I have bought a house, but I wouldn't say there were skills involved, as I'm not good at negotiating. Consequently, I wouldn't have the ability to genuinely negotiate my wages and conditions, even without taking into account inequities and power relationships in the process. So I have no idea how other people can go about it, other than just signing what's put in front of them.

The same logic applies in going from the idea that education and health care are highly important to people—values that are well documented—to a presumption that more than a small proportion of the same people will actually get involved in relevant activities.

In this case values are not necessarily what people *do*, but what they *think* should be done; sometimes, what they *say* should be



Richie Benaud: 'You don't know what you're going to do tomorrow; nor do I'

done—it doesn't necessarily mean they do it themselves.

It's also not clear that people in decision-making positions are capable of making consistently astute decisions. For instance, they may be known for not wanting to hear about specific kinds of information, particularly outside a particular field. It may also be that the level or sophistication of decision-making is beyond them as human beings. Isabel Myers used to say that the hardest thing to develop is good judgment.

Gideon Haigh, in reviewing Fred Hilmer's book on his experiences as Fairfax CEO, notes that Hilmer could not get past his management model to look at what actually goes on in newspapers: the human side of product and the random nature of news escaped him (2007).

Saying that something 'can't be afforded', sometimes off the cuff, can be simply saying 'no', rather than investigating broader ramifications. And reforming, like change, doesn't necessarily mean improvement or going forward—'progress'. This doesn't mean that people in such positions are bad people, even though they may harm others' lives, deliberately or otherwise. But it's an indication they may not be up to the task: no-one might be, for that matter.

And how should we consider evidence, or information?

These days 'balance' is called for, when the focus should be simply on sources of good information. That view presumes all opinions are equal, well thought out or not, and that ultimately one side is the best way, when there may not be a clear answer at all. Reality is a little different, and in a good discussion it would be rare for a 50:50 situation to arise in the real world. Looking for balance can unwittingly give legitimacy to cranks, or vapidity.

Ex-schoolteacher and sometime Victorian Liberals leader Robert Doyle thinks that students should be able to back up their opinions with reasoning or facts, rather than by claiming their view as valid by definition, because they had expressed it (2007). This idea could be usefully applied in many areas of adult activity: politics and the type world come to mind.

Shelley Gare considers the standard of public debate or discussion on anything to be in steep decline (2006). Her 'airheads' are a combination of people who routinely speak to display their ignorance, and those who are employed to skilfully sculpt well-sounding phrases that actually say nothing, thus defusing or drowning a controversy—sometimes in the interest of 'balance'.

Should sources of knowledge be morally impeachable, or ostensibly perfect, like the Dalai Lama?

The personal lives of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud have been profiled recently. It's an all too regular occurrence, as if it's easier to look for flaws than to address the work of such men. Freud and his peccadilloes, or Jung and his mistresses, don't tell you much at all about their work and their contributions to contemporary thought—although they do say something about the interests of those who focus on those sorts of things. Perhaps it's all entertainment.

Type, too, is written about and presented by flawed people. There are no 'perfect masters' in type. Nor should there be—although some regularly seek them out, or invent them. Regrettably, development doesn't fix flaws: you can be knowledgeable but unconventional; clumsy; at times confronting, perhaps. Reality can sometimes be daunting.

We should be concerned if the approach to life in a society is strongly influenced by a particular group, no matter how large or small, or from whatever perspective. People don't have to meet and collude; they can simply agree separately on the shape of the world. They may avoid certain information, or misinterpret it, or deny it, even though they have varying levels of skill and knowledge.

They may also be people who do not experience type difference in their lives, and perhaps other differences as well. So it's important to present a dissenting view.

Otherwise we'll still keep having the same arguments—and nobody learns anything at all. ❖

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... we possess today a highly developed collective culture which in organization far exceeds anything that has gone before, but which for that very reason has become increasingly injurious to individual culture.

C G Jung

Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority.

Oscar Wilde
