

Dialogue With My Daughter: Part II

Personality Types

Institutional v. Personal Interests

Theocracy v. Democracy

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<http://mccue.cc/bob/spirituality.htm>

A few people have contacted me and indicated that while what I write is interesting and useful, it is far too long and uses language that is too technical. They have accordingly encouraged me to try to follow the KISS (keep it simple stupid) principle. Accordingly, I am experimenting with recording some of the conversations I have with my kids and am as a result finding a more accessible presentation style. Some of the same people who asked for easier to read versions of my material have indicated this approach works for them. So, here is another conversation summary. As is the case with all of my pieces of this sort, most of the content of this summary is drawn from actual conversations with my older daughters (ages 17 to 22). However, lots of extraneous material has been excluded and I have taken some creative license to "smooth" things out. The conversation setting is in my car on the way to drop a daughter off at work. The content summarized here represents a small fraction of what we talk about.

A final background note: It was snowing heavily on the morning most of this particular conversation occurred, and so the roads were very icy. About a month ago this daughter hit some ice on a country road, then hit the ditch and rolled one of our vehicles three times (twice sideways plus an endo just for good measure). She was, amazingly, only badly shaken up, but was kept in the hospital overnight for observation since the accident had been so bad that the doctors suspected internal damage. We are very grateful for her good fortune.

Bob: Would you mind seeing if you can turn my Blackberry on?

Daughter: You can't turn on your Blackberry? Where is your Palm?

B: They gave me a new Blackberry at work yesterday. I turned it off last night and can't figure out how to get it back on. Here are the instructions.

D: Hmmm. (a minute passes). There you go. On.

B: Great! Which button do I use?

D: This one. And you have to hold it down for a few seconds.

B: OK. Thanks. Would you mind flipping through my email for me?

D: OK. Let's see, the email icon is ...

B: On the far left. I figured that much out.

D: Here we go. (She flips through several) And now one from XXXXX.

B: Open that one.

D: "... Thanks for the data. It will take me some time to clean it up. Did anyone give numeric values for the individual personality letters? We should include that question in the next survey ..." What is that about?

B: Oh, it is a project I am working on with a post Mormon friend respecting the personality types of people who seem to be most inclined to question their religious culture. It ties into that cog dis stuff we were talking about yesterday. The hypothesis is that certain personality types are more likely to fight their way through the fear a person has to confront when leaving his social group – his herd – than others.

D: Interesting.

B: It is. X is a scientist. He recently received his Ph.D. and has access to the kind of statistical processing software that is required to analyse the data I collected. But, a few interesting things were obvious to me when I summarized the data in a spread sheet so he can analyze it. Want to hear?

D: Sure. (no eye roll).

B: How much do you know about personality testing?

D: Not much.

B: It works more or less like this. We are using the Meyers Briggs survey, which is likely the most popular. It is based on the research of the psychologist Carl Jung. You've heard of him, right?

D: Yes.

B: The idea is that we have certain personality traits that are not carved in stone, but are pretty hard to change more than a little. The most recent research indicates that these traits are based roughly 50% on genetics, and 50% on the conditioning we received during our formative years. So you and I, like it or not, will bear Mormonism's stamp for the rest of our lives. And I don't think that is necessarily a bad thing. Many of Mormonism's values are, in my view, good. Honesty, family is important, relationships are important, etc.

D: Right.

B: The MB testing system uses four categories to assess personality. Each is set up like a spectrum. For example, the first is Introverted to Extroverted. You are scored, basically, on a scale from 1 to 100 on that scale. I can't remember them all now, and in fact only carefully thought about the first two letters as I summarized the data so that X could analyze it, because that is where the most obvious pattern emerged.

(At this point we are driving down a freeway. I am going slower than usual because of the ice and snow on the road. The car starts to fish tail a bit. I stop talking, take my foot off the accelerator, and within 100 yards have the car back under control. I then open my mouth to begin speaking again, and look over at my daughter to find that she is silently weeping – tears streaming down a beet red face. I remember her accident, and begin to reassure her that everything is fine, nothing to worry about, I understand her feelings, let it out, etc. We don't talk about personality tests for a while as she calms down.)

B: OK now?

D: Yes. Thanks.

B: Back to the personality stuff?

D: OK.

B: Hmmmm. Where were we?

D: Introverts v. extroverts?

B: Right. That was the first category. Which do you think would be more likely to leave the Church?

D: Extroverts?

B: That is not what the survey indicated. About 90% of those who no longer believe are introverts. Why do you think that would be the case, based on the cog dis stuff we were talking about a yesterday?

D: I have no idea.

B: How about this. Extroverts are more connected to their dominant social group. Social activities are more important for them than for introverts. Right?

D: I see where this is going. So, Extroverts are more fearful of being expelled from the group and so cog dis is more of a problem for them?

B: Right. However, this is still just a theory, and our little survey, while interesting, falls far short of proving it. For example, all of the survey participants are on-line community types. My guess is that these people tend to be more introverted than the average person anyway. I plan to eventually redo the survey in a more scientific way, and see if I can persuade people who are not on-line types to participate. That would make the results more reliable.

D: That makes sense.

B: In any event, the second letter in the four letter set is either N or S. The N stands for Intuition, and the S for Sensing. Sensors are more present oriented. Intuiters tend to think in broader terms. They are more interested in why things came to be as they are, and what the long term consequences of different actions will be. Which of those two do you think are more likely to question their religious beliefs?

D: Intuiters - they care about things a lot of people don't care about.

B: Right. And the person most likely to question is an introverted intuiter, if our survey data is correct. That is, the kind of person who does a lot of thinking about why things are they way they are, what caused them to become this way, and what the long term implications of our current way of doing things is.

D: That makes a lot of sense.

B: That is the kind of person who would, eventually, gather enough information to allow his cerebral cortex to overcome the fear generated by his reptilian core at the thought of being separated from his "herd". I can't

tell you how good it felt when I read the things, in various places, that allowed me to put this little puzzle together. For a while there, I thought I was going crazy. As you might guess, I am an Introverted Intuiter. I am close to 50-50 on the Introversion – Extroversion scale, but am 90%+ Intuiter. The third letter has Thinker at one end of the spectrum and Senser at the other. The people who leave the Church tend also to be Thinkers. Thinkers pay more attention to what is really going on, and less attention to what they feel or what they wish was going on.

D: No surprises there.

B: This cog dis stuff, and how different people in different positions are affected about it, explains all kinds of things for me. I use it every day to make sense out of what I see at work, in the newspaper, in our family, etc.

Here is a good one for you. The story you told me about your friend whose Dad was so anti-gay, and then the boy had to admit to himself that he was gay, had a big impact on me. That is tragic.

D: Yes.

B: You have read enough about the gay thing to understand what current biological research has to say about it, haven't you?

D: (Nods "yes", unenthusiastically.)

B: And you know that the suicide rate among LDS gay people is far higher than in the gay population on average, and that certain makes sense in light of the kind of thing we know about your friend, right?

D: (Nods again.)

B: So, why don't Mormon leaders just admit they were wrong on that one? The fact that they won't admit they were wrong is responsible, at least to an extent, for many people each year killing themselves.

D: (Says nothing for several moments. Is clearly suffering. Sighs.)

B: Think about what it would do to the Church as an institution if the leaders admitted they had been wrong on this issue. How many LDS leaders have spoken out against homosexuality?

D: Lots.

B: Right. Up to and including several at Conference last week. And if so many of them were so confident about this, and were wrong, what might that say about other things they have said?

D: Maybe they are wrong too.

B: And, what would members of the Church likely do, if they understood this?

D: Maybe stop obeying.

B: That is it in a nutshell. And here is the most important part, from my point of view. This is where cog dis comes back in to explain something that puzzled me for a long time. I think Gordon Hinckley is a well intentioned man. Do you think he is the kind of person who would kill people?

D: Of course not.

B: Then how can we explain that he and the other LDS leaders are responsible, in part, for killing those gay people? They could save many lives each year if they simply admitted they were wrong, or even might be wrong, respecting the Church's position on the gay issue.

D: (No response.)

B: How about this. He and the other LDS leaders have identified with the Mormon Church. That is, their lives are so tied to it that they have come to believe that what is good for it is good for them, and vice versa. They have given their lives to the Church. They derive much of their self esteem from their roles as LDS leaders. They have encouraged their families to become as devoted as they are. In some cases, they also receive large incomes from the work they do for the Church, and for the many businesses the Church owns. A psychologist would say that their egos are tied up in the Church.

If the Church is really important to someone; if their whole life is tied to it in many ways; what are they likely to feel if they are confronted with information that suggests that the Church is not what they thought it was?

D: Fear.

B: So, cog dis would kick in. Right?

D: Yes.

B: So, that entire process would talked about yesterday would take over. An LDS leader like Gordon Hinckley could look at the information respecting homosexuality and say to himself, "This can't be right. All of the prophets can't be wrong. And despite how convincing this looks, I know that scientists have often changed their theories. So, I will trust the prophets instead of the scientists." On this basis, he could feel justified to ignore the probabilities suggested by what the biologists, and geneticists, and neurologists are now telling us about homosexuality. And the refusal of LDS leaders to accept this at the same time as most of the rest of society is starting to accept it, and the gay community and much of the liberal aspect of society has accepted it, is what produces the social pressure within Mormonism that results in gay people committing suicide.

The real issue for the Church's leaders is not what is most likely to be right or good for individual members, it is what will happen to the Church as an institution and their role as its leaders. That is, they put the interest of the Church before the interest of any group of individual members. Sometimes that leads to horrible things like gay kids committing suicide. And, this is precisely the same thing that happens with the JWs and their blood transfusions. The threat to JW leadership authority that would result from acknowledging that they were wrong on that point is so severe that they maintain that belief even though it costs many lives.

D: (Silence)

B: The thing that most fascinates me in all of this is how well intentioned, sincere men and women – and I believe that almost all LDS leaders are in this category – can end up doing the horrific things they do. Cog dis theory explains this for me as nothing else has. The Church has become so important in the minds of its leaders that they protect it even when the costs they impose on the members becomes very high. Cog dis blinds them both to the real nature of those costs, and to any information that would suggest to them that they might be doing the wrong thing. They are just like your friend Lori, except her decision affects few people other than her. The decisions of LDS leaders affect many people.

Remember how we talked yesterday about how to "get out of our heads"? How could religious leaders "get out of their heads" and so reduce the effect of cog dis on their decision making process?

D: I have no idea.

B: How about this. As I just noted, when one of us makes a bad decision because of cog dis or otherwise, it is sad but not a big deal for a lot of other people. But, when a societal leader (religious or otherwise) makes a bad decision, it affects many people in a negative way. So, how again do we "get outside our own heads" for our personal decisions?

D: We talk to friends, or professional counsellors.

B: Right. What would be the equivalent for our leaders?

D: They should talk to other people as well.

B: Right. Would it work if the people in the leadership group just talked to each other?

D: Probably not, because they all have the same problem. Kind of like two doctors in the same family each trying to diagnose their child.

B: Brilliant! They need to talk to outsiders – people who have a different point of view. Think about how our democratic governments work in this regard. We have opposition parties who scrutinize everything the government does. We have all kinds of checks and balances. And, we have freedom of the press and free speech, which are designed to encourage the expression of as many different points of view as possible. And, the government must tell us how they are spending our money, what they are planning to do, etc. George Bush was on TV last night telling the people down in the US how he plans to send more troops to Iraq, if necessary. I have not read the papers today, but I can only imagine how the people with a point of view that differs from his are going after him over that one. The more important the decision and the more people it may affect, the more different points of view it should be subjected to. That is a big problem with many religious groups. Their decision making processes are not open to the kind of scrutiny I just described.

Well, here we are. That didn't take as long as I thought it would, snow and all. Have a good day sweetie!

D: Love ya.

Postscript: I friend shared the following personality type joke with me that is so good I have decided to include it here. I did not discuss this with my daughter, however.

After presenting a seminar on Jungian personality type analysis and causing the seminar participants to self assess, the instructor asks the class, "How many people of your personality type does it take to change a light bulb?" Here are the answers, by personality type:

ISTJ – One worked in the past, so one will work now!

ISFJ – Only one, me, as long as that is OK with everyone else.

INFJ – Does the light bulb really want to be changed?

INTJ – Could you please define change? And what, exactly, do you mean by light bulb?

ISTP – 1

ISFP – 0, the ISFP is happy just sitting there and experiencing the dark.

INFP – 2, one to change it and one for support.

INTP – Hmm...light...illuminance... $I=10.76LT(1/4f)(F/V)2H\cos40+If$

ESTP – None, til I check the breaker

ESFP – Who cares – the important thing is that it would be fun!

ENFP – Well, let's see, there's one to notice the bulb is out, and one to make a new lampshade, and one to read a magazine article on alternative lighting means, and one to draw a picture of a candle, and...

ENTP – One, but only after tightening, wiggling, shaking, testing, etc. to make sure it's not something else.

ESTJ – The cost/benefit ratio would dictate only one.

ESFJ – At least 2 – let me get on the phone and call someone to come over...

ENFJ – But that was my favorite light bulb!

ENTJ – YOU!!! CHANGE THAT DAMNED BULB!!!