

*Morten Tolboll*

## **Constructivism, the postmodern intellectualism behind New Age and the self-help industry**

The Self-help industry is characterized by two specific methods: psychotherapy and coaching. Psychotherapy and coaching are by no means methods, which only exist within a defined theory, as for example NLP (see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large group awareness training (LGAT)**).

NLP (as an example) is a very open therapeutic method, which draws on a number of other therapeutic methods and psychologies, and at the same time the people, who for example start a NLP education, are people, who carry the psychologizing world-view of their age. The two methods therefore don't origin from NLP – they rather become reinforced and ritualized through NLP as just one of a number of therapeutic methods, which today are being spread on the market for personal development and therapy.

So the interest in the authentic human life is not a NLP invention but a trait of the age of authenticity, and the two methods refer after all also to the most spread psychological world-images of our age: the humanistic psychological world-image, and the constructivistic world-image.

In a secularized culture of growth, where religion and ideologies play a constant lesser role in everyday life, psychologizing theories about the fall of the self, its regeneration and realization, apparently get a constant larger spread. Yes, my claim is that we in fact have to do with a new ideology, which danger can be seen in that secularization here has been removed. The pseudoscientific psycho-religiousness, which characterizes the self-help industry and its promises about personal development, is directly written in EU's project on education and lifelong learning, and therefore it becomes systematically introduced in schools, further and higher educations, companies and management theory. I call this ideology **The Matrix Conspiracy** (see my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**).

Today we do not need to open many weekly magazines, bestseller books about personal development, or newspapers, in order to discover, that the two methods are

recurring everywhere, where modern people are concerned with telling and interpreting their life into a superior connection. The psychotherapeutic method especially appears through a long line of self-help books and books about spirituality, which are selling extremely well these years, and it also exists in countless versions of women's magazines, and their many articles about women who have found their own true self again, and thereafter have taken the leadership in their own lives (see my articles **Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**, and **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**).

The constructivistic method is on the other hand more outspread in books about personal development (self-improvement or self-guided improvement) self-improvement based management and coaching.

A bit caricatured you could say, that the prototype on the psychotherapy-oriented method is a spiritual seeking woman, who often is going in psychotherapy, while the prototype on a constructivist is a ranger, who is interested in personal development and works with coaching.

But as mentioned, they can't altogether be separated; often they are mixed together, and under one you can say that they both are a part of the self-help industry.

In my article on humanistic psychology, I have already investigated the psychotherapeutic method. Hereunder also belongs the more popular movement of New Age psychotherapies (see my article **The devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy**).

In this article I will concentrate about the constructivistic method, which more belongs in management theory and the postmodern intellectualism (see my article **Management theory and the self-help industry**).

There both exist a social and an individual version of constructivism. The social constructivism is outspread on universities and therefore in much degree on all educations. The individual constructivism is more outspread in the coaching environment on for instance work places. However they are both included in modelling the concept about what constructivism is. I will start the article with an examination of the social constructivism, and end it with an examination of the individual constructivism.

## **Social constructivism**

The first time I was introduced to the strange world of social constructivism, was by my professor David Favrholt, and I could hardly believe my own ears. The following account is inspired by Favrholt's celebration lecture November 2, 2001, in the occasion of the end-of-master celebration on Center for Philosophy, University of Southern Denmark.

The latest craze in reductionism is social constructivism (read more about reductionism in my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**). Actually we ought to speak about a sociology, but the dance was opened in 1967 with Berger and Luckmann's work *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. And the term "social constructivism" has been stuck and is used with much pleasure by the followers of the movement.

In today's literature social constructivism occurs in a weak and in a strong version. The weak version is about, that a line of institutions in society have been produced, and have to be explained, only from social/sociological causes. Examples on such institutions are legislation, for instance about traffic, monetary matters with everything that this include of banks, credit institutions, stock markets etc., standards of behaviour, ethical systems, religion and much more, but not scientific results such as the explanation of the periodic system of the elements, of the chemical connections, or of the laws of gestalt psychology, for just to mention some examples.

The strong version - which among others are framed by the Edinburgh sociologists David Bloor, Barry Barnes and Steven Shapin, and since followed up by a long line of others, among these Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar - is about, that not just the mentioned institutions, but also all scientific results and discoveries, are social constructions.

With the words of Favrholt, then we here speak about a reductionism, which conclusions are so rabid and stark raving stupid, that we hardly can give an account of them without immediately becoming accused of having distorted them – what Favrholt at that time also was by colleagues on the philosophical institute on University of Southern Denmark (by the way a bit the same experience I myself have had with my discovery of the Matrix conspiracy. I will return to that).

But Favrholt must tell them that they are barking up the wrong tree, and in his examination of social constructivism there is, as he say, not any distortion. He has with much care worked himself through the many social constructivistic works with constant thought on, that we have to give the opponent all the credit, which at all can be mobilized, before we present our critique.

## **The sources of inspiration**

The social constructivists have many different starting points for their argumentation. Favrholt begins with a short outline of these sources of inspiration, and waits with the critique of them until the whole of social constructivism has been characterized.

A quite obvious starting point is the demonstration of the actual differences, which exist between all the world's cultures. From the 16 century and forward, where they through expeditions and colonization got to know many new cultures, people were inclined to perceive foreign cultures as primitive, and at best, as early stages for our own blessed civilization. In the 20 century ethnographers and anthropologists taught us to perceive foreign cultures as cultures in their own right – even customs, which to us appeared absurd, had their meaning, when you looked at the cultural wholeness, which they were a part of. Herewith was opened the way for relativistic views concerning standards of behaviour, rules of moral and religions. What if we generalized this relativism to all world-images? Could it be thought, that other cultures could contain valid alternatives to our own concepts of truth and indisputable logic? Repercussions of this cultural relativistic wave we among others find in W.v. Quine, who thought, that our time's natural science, as a key to explanation, in the principle is lying on line with the Greek mythology – not more true than this, though a bit more complex.

Unfortunately there arised a myth, which, according to Favrholt, has shown to be the most firm lie in the 20 century science, namely The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, which is about, that the Hopi Indians in New Mexico have a quite other language than ours, and therewith quite other concepts about time and space, concepts, which even should be closer to the theory of relativity than our own concepts about it. It has since shown, that this hypothesis has no foundation in reality.

A part of the success of the Sapir-Whorf-myth, has been the structural linguistics, which was developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Louis Hjelmslev. Instead of studying the development-story of language, or the meaning of the word's content, or conceptual extent, we should study language itself as a structural formation – in the starting point without looking for, what language was about. This led to the conception, that language so to speak rises before reality in the sense, that we structure reality from language. The baby is at the beginning in what Bergson called a stream of experience, but as it acquires language, it structures reality from the given linguistic structure. There are, as Favrholt says, pieces of truth in this point of view. For instance it is clear, that our division of humans in children, teenagers, youngsters, adults, middle aged, elderly, old and very old, is included in forming our experience of the surroundings – and it is also clear, that this division is cultural dependent. We

also see, that the division of the spektrum of colour varies from language to language. For instance in the language Bassa, as spoken in Liberia, the colours yellow, orange and red, are under one called "ziza". An even larger incongruity in the area of colours you can find between our division of colours and the division of the Bellona-people. On the Bellona-islands they simply haven't got our superior concept "colour" and not the ordinary main categories yellow, green and blue, but only three colour terms: light, dark and red.

Oh yes, Favrholt says, in Greenlandic they have 35 terms for snow, what cause, that the Eskimo sees something quite different, than we do, when he looks over the landscape. But here we again have one of the popular myths, which hasn't got any foundation in reality. There doesn't exist more terms for snow in Greenlandic than in English. But correct is it though, that colour terms, division of people in age groups and other linguistic structures, have a certain influence on the experience of the surrounding world. However, Favrholt says, unfortunately we also on this area see that philosophers generalize a valuable observation to an all-embracing vulgarity. For now again to refer to Quine, whose influence on contemporary philosophy not must be underestimated: Quine thinks in fully seriousness, that we never fully can understand what a person with a, to us, foreign tongue, means with the words he uses. There will always be a fundamental uncertainty in a translation from one tongue to another – by Quine formulated in *The Principle of Indeterminacy in Translation*.

That tongues can be different regarding divisions, categorizations, and that language can be determinant for, how we structure parts of reality, are relationships, which, according to Favrholt, have lead several social constructivists on the wrong track. The relativism, which they have thought to be able to find support in here, have many of them furthermore seeked to substantiate with reference to the late Wittgenstein, to Karl Popper and to Thomas Kuhn.

Because, have we not learned from Wittgenstein: There doesn't exist a sacred formation, which is called "language"; but there exists a number of ways of using language, the so-called language-games, which are connected with different "life-forms" in the language users. The individual words and concepts are not labels on things in a reality different from language. Their significance, meaning, appear by the way, they are used in. "The meaning is the use", as it is claimed. Looked at in this way, language is nothing else, and more, than a defined way of behaviour, and herewith the way is opened up for a relativism, because just like our daily behaviour is controlled by some norms, which we more or less unspoken have accepted, in the same way our words and concepts are controlled by some rules of use, which in similar way have been created through a mutual agreement. We give hands, when we

say hello to each other – and in a similar way we state, that it is a matter of an electrical spark, when we see a lightning. The first we call convention, the other we think is truth. But to speak about a lightning as an electrical spark is just a linguistic convention, which isn't truer than a handshake – it is claimed. To use the expression "electrical spark" correct, just means, that we follow some agreed on rules. The rules are social constructions, - and therefore not anything, which a physical reality imposes us – it is said.

H.M. Collins, one of the leading social constructivists, writes, that if we ask a person, who is educated in an European school, to continue the row 2, 4, 6, 8, he or she will probably continue this by saying: 10, 12, 14, 16, etc. True enough, Favrholt says. There are many possibilities. In other cultures they will perhaps continue the row in a quite third way. According to Collins – who, according to Favrholt, is a master in fallacies – this is a proof of, that the series 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12 etc. - that is: the two-times table – isn't anything else than a social convention.

Theorists of science such as Russell Hanson, Popper and Kuhn, have made a big thing out of, that all data are theory-loaded, which means, that we never are confronted with a theory-neutral observation. Once we have a theory about something, we begin to see all experiences, observations, data in the light of the theory – they are being distorted, so that they come to be consistent with the theory. As a rule the presentation hereof is illustrated with the figures from gestalt psychology, for instance Rubin's vase, the stair, which can be seen either from below or from above, the figure, which can be seen as either a bird or a bunny, etc.

When they give examples from science it is always from physics, which, because we haven't concluded the whole story about the elementary particles, the super string theory etc., is an open-ended affair, which gives scope for ontological interpretations. Social constructivists often refer to these relationships, just like they find support in Popper's falsification criterion and Kuhn's paradigm concept. That a theory according to Popper has to be fundamentally falsifiable in order to be able to count as scientific, is taken as an expression of, that no theory is absolutely true. Theories therefore don't seem to be dependent on a special correspondence with actual conditions, but rather to be human formations, social phenomena.

Kuhn's theory about the development of physics – implemented in the concepts about normal science, anomalies, crisis, revolution and the formation of a new paradigm – contains a relativistic moment, which Kuhn never succeeded in getting eliminated. Thereby his whole presentation comes to stand as a sociological account for the development of physics – by many conceived as the final explanation.

Many find a confirmation hereof in the condition, that a line of data often can be explained from more than a theory. Here we have, what is called the Duhem-Quine-Thesis: our experiences are *underdetermined*. We form theories to explanation of them, but we can't exclude, that they can be explained from quite other theories. In extension hereof we find several philosophical conceptions, which are characterized as anti-realistic, because underdetermined theories can't commit us in ontological sense.

I will explain Thomas Kuhn in relation to how he is abused in NLP (read about NLP in my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**).

NLP is founded by Richard Bandler and John Grinder.

John Grinder denies, that his and Bandler's work is an eclectic hodgepodge of philosophy and psychology, or that it even builds from the work of others. He believes that what he and Bandler did was "create a paradigm shift."

The following claim by Grinder provides some sense of what he thinks NLP is:

*My memories about what we thought at the time of discovery (with respect to the classic code we developed – that is, the years 1973 through 1978) are that we were quite explicit that we were out to overthrow a paradigm and that, for example, I, for one, found it very useful to plan this campaign using in part as a guide the excellent work of Thomas Kuhn (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions) in which he detailed some of the conditions in the midst of paradigm shifts. For example, I believe it was very useful that neither one of us were qualified in the field we first went after – psychology and in particular, its therapeutic application; this being one of the conditions which Kuhn identified in his historical study of paradigm shifts. Who knows what Bandler was thinking?*

As a comment to this the critical thinker Robert T. Carroll says: "One can only hope that Bandler wasn't thinking the same things that Grinder was thinking, at least with respect to Kuhn's classic text."

Kuhn did not promote the notion that not being particularly qualified in a scientific field is a significant condition for contributing to the development of a new paradigm in science. Furthermore, Kuhn did not provide a model or blueprint for *creating* paradigm shifts! His is an historical work, described what he believed to have occurred in the *history of science*. He made no claim that anything similar happens in

philosophy and he certainly did not imply that anything NLP did, or is doing, constitutes a paradigm shift.

But the use of the concept of paradigm shifts is very popular within New Age, where a constant stream of new (revolutionary) systems (New thinking), often contradictory, are claiming, that it from now on is impossible to think in “old” ways anymore, without accepting their systems. The failure is due to their constructivistic ways of thinking; that is: relativism and subjectivism.

In the Danish philosopher Finn Collin’s very instructive book *Social Reality* is stated a line of the sources of inspiration which form starting points for social constructivism – also some of the above-mentioned. But there are many. Here just yet an example:

Knorr-Cetina has written an article with the title “Strong Constructivism – From a Sociologist’s Point of View”, in *Social Studies of Science*, 1993. Herein she claims, with Immanuel Kant as support, that reality is amorphous, structureless. Kant discriminated, as well-known, between “Die Welt an sich” and “Die Welt für uns”. The world in itself has no structure. It is first through our perception, that it appears as something in time and space, with things, substances, cause-connections etc.; – that is: as “Die Welt für uns.” That is to say that the world, which existed before humans arised, neither existed in time or space, nor did it consist of things and properties, jungles, blue fish or dinosaurs, - we can’t say anything about this at all. Knorr-Cetina compares this with a dough, which we cut up and make cookies of – which, according to Favrholt, is a false analogy, because the “Ding an sich”-world accordingly can’t have any substances – and herewith she introduces the point of view, that all scientific theories must be understood as “cookie-cutters”, as social constructed cuts in the formless dough.

If you as an intellectual want to have success in the world today, you need, according to Favrholt, to be relativist. The social constructivism is in fine harmony with both Derrida’s deconstructivism as well as Lyotard’s postmodernism. “Who decides the conditions for that something is true?” Lyotard asks. His answer is, that the only “proof” of, that the rules of science are good, is the agreement of the experts, consensus. Therefore truth must be replaced by force.

You might think, that most people will find Lyotard’s statement frightening. Unfortunately this is not the case. Far the most think it is a fantastic expression of wisdom. Management theorists continue the thought in their favorite slogan: “It is not facts, but the best story, which wins!” It is also an example of the hate towards truth-seekers, scientists, philosophers and other critical thinkers, which exists today. And

we also see it in the New Age environment and self-help industry, where they demand that science has to be integrated with "alternative sciences." A typical sign of that ideology has replaced science and philosophy. As mentioned: this ideology I under one call The Matrix Conspiracy (see my articles **The Matrix conspiracy**, **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**, **The pseudoscience of New Age and reductionism**, and **Six common traits of New Age that distort spirituality**).

### **Social constructivism. The weak version**

The first time social constructivism marks itself is in science of sociology, among others in Max Scheler (1874-1928) and Karl Mannheim (1893-1947), but both give place for scientific facts that can't be explained sociological. It is continued by Robert K. Merton (b. 1910), who points out, that different social and economical needs develop technological innovations, and herewith begins the long controversy between externalists and internalists within the history of science. It is Merton's conception, that social factors for instance can influence the way a discovery is expressed and practised, but not the content of the discovery itself. This is accepted by most historians of science, but the externalists think that even the progression of the exact sciences have to be explained only from social, political, cultural and economic conditions, whilst the internalists accentuate, that it is "the problem's inner logic", which runs the work.

Favrholdt has, in his scientific-historical work with Niels Bohr's cultural and philosophical background, struggled for an internalistic conception, but such is, according to Favrholt, dependent of who you are, and what you are researching in (see my article **Quantum mechanics and the philosophy of Niels Bohr**). If it is about H.C.Ørsted's discovery of electromagnetism, then you are forced to work externalistic. And there are now many, who claim, that *only* the externalistic approach has meaning – because even discoveries are social constructions.

Here they go a step further than Berger and Luckmann did in *The Social Construction of Reality*, but it is a step, as Favrholt says, they have set the scene for themselves. The social reality is, according to Berger and Luckmann, fully created by Man himself. In all societies Man forms habits, and out of these habits there grow institutions. The habits are in this way externalized, and the institutions are understood as objective formations, which come to constitute the whole social world. When children are born into this social world, the habits are internalized, the children are socialized, and therewith the social world in a certain sense exists independently of the people who are populating it. And in this sense society is a human product. When a human being is born, the institutions are there already. When we – us now

and here – were born, there not just existed sun, moon, stars, mountains and trees, but also weekdays, hours, degrees of longitudes and degrees of latitudes, money, universities, religions, nations etc. And there also existed the institution science. Is this more real than for instance the money institution, with thereto belonging banks, stock markets etc.? That is the question. If the answer is yes, there are, according to Favrholt, needed a profound argumentation – and Berger and Luckmann abstain from giving a such with the reason that truth and falseness are concepts which philosophy must take care of. If the answer is no, we end, according to Favrholt, in the strong version of social constructivism: all scientific data and lawfulnesses – also of natural science – is social constructed.

### **Critique of the weak version**

But already in the formation of the weak version sociology ought to put the brakes on. Because what is meant with that society is a human product? Is Man only a social being? We must take it for given, that a number of traits of the human behaviour are hereditary determined; that is to say: either present at birth or as something, which are developed through maturation – for example in an interplay with the surrounding environment – but as something, which under normal circumstances can't develop different than they do. When we are born, we are as human beings endowed with a line of reflexes, which aren't social constructions. Breath, heart function and everything else, which are controlled by the autonomous nervous system, are neither social constructed. The condition that we grow through childhood, achieve a certain height and weight, that our arms are of equal length, that we have five fingers on each hand, a defined eye colour etc., are neither social constructions, but genetic controlled conditions. All biological maturation phenomena are hereditary determined – regardless of whether they are marked by environmental factors.

The English psychologist Macdougall tried in *Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908) to clarify which human instincts are involved. He pointed, among others, at the following: hunger, thirst, sex, exploration of the surroundings, parental care, and something so simple as to avoid dangers. Whether we here will speak about instincts or needs is in a way all the same. What is the case is, that at any rate some of these forms of behaviour, for instance those, which are due to needs for sex, food and drink, are genetical determined. The way in which we eat, drink, and practise sex, can vary from culture to culture, but the needs are common to all humans – they are trans-cultural.

Man is a thinking being and Macdougall was hardly on the wrong track, when he thought, that also the human curiosity, the desire for investigating things, for investigating his surroundings, also is genetical conditioned. On his time they knew

nothing about the genetic code. Now we know, that a great deal of the human behaviour – and probably also a great deal of our thinking and life of feelings – are genetical conditioned.

When we now closer have to define the social or cultural in relation to the natural given, we must, according to Favrholt, turn to social psychology – not psychology and not sociology. Social psychology deals with the interaction between individuals; that is to say: the investigation and clarification of, how individuals are affecting each other, communicating with each other, forming groups and norms in community etc., etc. An example on a social psychological research could be the clarification of "the pecking order" within a class or a rocker group: Who is "the alpha dog", how does he practise his power, how are the group's norms formed, etc. Do there apply lawfulnesses for groups in general (sport clubs, street gangs, religious movements etc.)?

But since many of such structures seem to be genetical determinated – we find them for instance in lions, wolves, baboons, bees and ants - , then you can't claim, that they just are social constructions. They can to a certain degree be cultural dependent, what therefore means, that they can appear in a way, which vary from one culture to another, but they are not just something social.

In the same way we must realize, that a line of norms concerning everyday dealings, dressing, moral etc., etc., are geographical determinated, for instance the Inuits' old custom of the host making his wife available to the overnight staying male guest in the igloo. There of course exist many thousand of such examples. Here we again have to state, that it is not a question about something, which only has a sociological explanation. Other conditions are demographic determinated. For instance can a small society get along with ordinary exchange of goods, but with the formation of large societies and large cities, a monetary system becomes a necessity. And demographic conditions are not something, which can be explained only from sociology.

In the weak version of social constructivism there is a constant reference to the diversity the cultures between as explanation of, that everything must be social constructions. What they overlook are the common features of all cultures, from the most primitive to the most complex. In all cultures there are strict rules of moral and standards of behaviour concerning the fundamental needs; in all cultures there is a religion; in all cultures they discriminate between good and evil, between children and adults, between women and men, between health and sickness, between life and death. Death, the biological death, is not a social construction. Whether one believes in an afterlife, a never-ending bliss, a transmigration of souls, or whether one

considers the biological death as the individual's final extinction, are of course defined by a line of social factors, but also by other conditions. But the physical death, and the disease, which leads to it, is not a social construction.

Favrholdt says, that we generally can criticize the supporters of the weak version of social constructivism for not giving a clear definition on objective existence. It is of course correct, that we are born into a society where there beforehand not just exist sun and moon, but also traffic regulations and monetary systems. But both traffic regulations and monetary systems can be changed, and even be abolished, through common human decisions. That is not the case with the sun and the moon – and unfortunately neither with disease and death. In the weak version of social constructivism it is necessary to draw a line between the absolute and the conventional – something which is neglected in the greater part of the literature.

### **Social constructivism. The strong version**

As mentioned, the Edinburgh-sociologists represent, inspired by among others Kuhn, social constructivism in the strong version. To any scientific theory applies that it is a social product. The possible truth or falseness is not determined from whether it is consistent with reality or not, because reality is – as they claim – also a social construction. So here there is no need for drawing a line between the absolute and the conventional. As Mary Douglas formulates it, then there are some, who think, that logical and mathematical truths are indisputable, and others, who think that, quote: "the physical world is real and thought is a process of coming to know that real external reality". Absurd talk, according to her. What we need is "a theory of knowledge in which the mind is admitted to be actively creating its universe." What is worth researching in - for historians of science and theorists of science - is *how* theories become produced in the different societies, *why* they become produced and *why* they become accepted.

Sociologists such as H.M. Collins, Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, have taken the consequence of this program and have carried out studies of scientific environments in the same way as ethnographers study primitive people, or as animal psychologists study the behaviour of packs of wolves. Famous is Latour's and Woolgar's work *Laboratory Life. The Construction of Scientific Facts*, which is a close study of the work on The Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California. In the book there is a careful account with illustrations of the institute's arrangement, the behaviour of the individual researchers, the titles of the books which are lying on their desks, who eats lunch together, who talks with who, which microscopes, there are used etc. The book reproduces taped conversations, but the only thing, which isn't an object for Latour's and Woolgar's investigations, is the scientific content of the

conversations, the articles, the experiments and the microscopic investigations. They only register the external circumstances in connection with what they call "a construction of a fact", and they state, that what some considers true only shows in a consensus among the colleagues of the institute. The scientific results appear by negotiation, is their claim.

It is in accordance herewith, that Latour and Woolgar in the rest of their works not are able to discriminate between discoveries and inventions. Latour thinks for instance that it can't be true, that newer investigations of Ramses 2's mummy shows, that he died of tuberculosis. Because how should he be able to die of a bacillus, which first was discovered, and therewith social constructed, by Robert Koch in 1882? Because, as Latour writes: "Before Koch the bacillus had no real existence". This absurd claim he follows up with a presumption about, that Ramses 2 must have died of a tuberculosis-like sickness, without making himself clear, that such a sickness, according to his own theories, also must be a social construction. And the same must by the way apply to the whole of the Egyptian antiquity. And to both Ramses 2 and Robert Koch.

A similar absurdity we meet in Woolgar's book *Science. The Very Idea* in which it is claimed, that America didn't exist before Columbus discovered America. He tries to show, that our concept about America is a social construction, and that Columbus and Amerigo at that time disagreed highly about what it was they had discovered, and on basis hereof he claims, that there wasn't any *physical* land – what we now call America – before Columbus discovered it in 1492. His thesis is, that it is not the physical, which is represented in the discovery, but the representation, which is creating the physical data. H.M. Collins agrees and writes, among other things, "It is not the regularity of the world that imposes itself on our senses but the regularity of our institutionalized beliefs that imposes itself on the world."

The strong version of social constructivism often uses quantum physics as a kind of "proof" for its claims, but this is based on another great lie in our time. I have shown this in my article **Quantum mysticism and its web of lies**. Favrholt has himself made account for it in his work with Niels Bohr's philosophy. This you can read about in my article **Quantum mechanics and the philosophy of Niels Bohr**.

Alan Sokal, a physics professor at New York University, was also shocked to see the absurdity in social constructivism and its abuse of quantum mechanics. In the autumn of 1994 he submitted an essay to *Social Text*, the leading journal in the field of cultural studies. Entitled "Trangressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," it purported to be a scholarly article about the "postmodern" philosophical and political implications of twentieth-century physical

theories. After review by five members of *Social Text*'s board, Sokal's parody was accepted for publication as a serious piece of scholarship. It appeared in April 1996 in a special double "Science Wars" issue of the journal devoted to rebutting the charge that cultural studies critiques of science tend to be riddled with incompetence. At that time, the journal did not practice academic peer review and did not submit the article for outside review by a physicist.

On its date of publication (May 1996), Sokal revealed in the journal *Lingua Franca* that the article was a hoax, identifying it as "a pastiche of Left-wing cant, fawning references, grandiose quotations, and outright nonsense...structured around the silliest quotations (by postmodern academics) he could find about mathematics and physics". The article was stitched together so as to look good and to flatter the ideological preconceptions of the editors.

Sokal's hoax is today acquiring the status of a classic *succés de scandale*, with extensive press coverage in the United States and, to a growing extent, in Europe and Latin America (see my article **The Sokal Hoax**).

Nonetheless we see the same postmodern claims in the New Age environment. In the New Age movie *What the Bleep do We Know* we see a combination of documentary-style interviews, computer-animated graphics, and a narrative that describes the spiritual connection between quantum physics and consciousness. The plot follows the story of a deaf photographer; as she encounters emotional and existential obstacles in her life, she comes to consider the idea that individual and group consciousness can influence the material world. Her experiences are offered by the filmmakers to illustrate the movie's thesis about quantum physics and consciousness.

Some of the ideas discussed in the film are:

- The universe is best seen as constructed from thought (or ideas) rather than from substance.
- "Empty space" is not empty
- Matter is not solid. Electrons pop in and out of existence and it is unknown where they disappear to.
- Beliefs about who one is and what is real is a direct result of oneself and of one's own realities.
- Peptides manufactured in the brain can cause bodily reaction to emotion.

In the narrative segments of the movie, Marlee Matlin portrays Amanda, a deaf photographer who acts as the viewer's avatar as she experiences her life from startlingly new and different perspectives.

In the documentary segments of the film, interviewers discuss the roots and meaning of Amanda's experiences. The comments focus primarily on a single theme: *We create our own reality*. David Albert, a philosopher of physics and professor of Columbia University, who according to a *Popular Science* article is "outraged at the final product" because the filmmakers interviewed him about quantum mechanics unrelated to consciousness or spirituality but then edited the material in such a way that he feels misrepresented his views. The same trick is used in another New Age movie *The Secret* (see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**).

The director, William Arntz, has described *What the Bleep* as a movie for the "metaphysical left".

In the film, during a discussion of the influence of experience on perception, Candace Port (a neuroscientist, who discovered the cellular bonding site for endorphins in the brain, and in 1977 wrote the book *Molecules of Emotion*) notes a story, which she says she believes is true, of Native Americans being unable to see Columbus's ships because they were outside their experience. According to an article in *Fortean Times* by David Hambling, the origins of this story likely involved the voyages of Captain James Cook, not Columbus, and an account related by Robert Hughes which said Cook's ships were "...complex and unfamiliar as to defy the native's understanding". Hambling says it is likely that both the Hughes account and the story told by Port were exaggerations of the records left by Captain Cook and the botanist Joseph Banks. Historians believe the Native Americans likely saw the ships but ignored them as posing no immediate danger.

It is also very likely that Candace Port has heard about Steve Woolgar's book *Science. The Very Idea*.

The movie has been described as "a kind of New Age answer to *The Passion of the Christ* and other films that adhere to traditional religious teachings." It offers alternative spiritual and scientific views, characteristic of New Age philosophy, including critiques of traditional science, as well as critique of religion's moral values (for my view of the problem of dismissing traditional religions, read my articles **The value of having a religion in a spiritual practice** and **A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**).

### **Critique of the strong version of social constructivism**

There exists an argument, which you can use against all reductionisms, namely that they relativize themselves (see my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**). Against the strong version of social constructivism the

argument would be like this: Since all scientific laws are social constructions and therefore not true, but just conventions like the road traffic act, then all social lawfulnesses and all social data are also just conventions, which haven't any absolute validity. Therefore social constructivism is not true – we can at all times come to an agreement, that it has to be replaced by another conception, which at all points contradicts it.

Another and even better objection is, that you as social constructivist necessarily must presume the existence of other humans – otherwise we would never be able to establish anything social and never any consensus. But that implies that we can't claim, that other humans are social constructions. They are not "cookies" cut out of a dough. They exist. They are living organisms, in which there happen biological processes, which not are social constructions. The metabolism, absorption of oxygen and segregation of carbon dioxide follow laws, which not are social constructions. But that implies, that the molecular biological laws, the chemical laws and the quantum mechanical laws neither are – and herewith the whole social constructivistic program in the strong version is wiped out.

In his book *Socialkonstruktivisme* the Danish author Søren Wenneberg attacks the strong version, but according to Favrhøldt he doesn't quite get to the bottom in his critique, because he in fact accepts one of the main theses of the social constructivists, namely that language is a social construction – or with Saussure's phrase: Language is a social institution. It sounds reasonably and plausible, because we can all agree about, that language has been created in the human community, and since this is a social formation, language must be a social product. Said in another way: Though we feel, that scientific concepts have some superhuman character, then we must accept, that all scientific concepts, just like all other concepts, are human made. But this implies that all science, also natural science, is a social construction.

The strongest argument against this conception is Favrhøldt's own argument, which he has developed on the background of inspiration from Niels Bohr and the quantum mechanics – paradoxically enough, since social constructivism sees quantum mechanics as a argument *for* their thesis (again: see my article **Quantum mechanics and the philosophy of Niels Bohr**). In addition the argument is in accordance with traditional spiritual conceptions and mystical experiences, as for example the Taoist philosophy of Yin and Yang.

Language is, according to Favrhøldt, in one sense human made, but contains a line of traits, which aren't human made. That something is human made doesn't mean, that all its essence is human made. Human beings have created the gunpowder out of saltpetre, coal and sulphur, but the very condition, *that* the gunpowder can explode by ignition, isn't created by Man. Human beings have created the clock, but the very

condition, that a stretched spring can drive the gear wheels around is not human made.

Take something like the concept  $\pi$ . Humans have created the concept "circle", the concept "circumference", the concept "line", the concept "line segment" and the concept "diameter". But even though all the concepts are human made, then *the relationship* between the concepts isn't human made. The relationship between the length of the diameter and the length of the circumference for any given circle is  $\pi$ .  $\pi$  is an irrational number, an endless, non-periodic decimal fraction which first ciphers are 3,14159.....Since the number of decimals are endless,  $\pi$  can in a certain sense never be thought by any human being, if you by thinking understand, that we should be able to create a conception, which we should be able to see "for our inner eye". But  $\pi$  is a relationship, which must be accepted, if you will carry out calculations, in which it is included. According to Favrholt we here has an example of, that two concepts, which are human made, and in addition can be visualized, are standing in a relationship to each other, which not is human made.

Well, somebody might say, mathematics has always been something strange, perhaps we can, as social constructivists, put brackets round this science – so far. But the case is after all, that a line of the concepts, which we have to create, in order at all to be able to describe everyday relationships, also are in specific relations to each other – relations, which not are human made. For instance it is in all tongues so, that we speak about distances from one place to another. And all humans agree, that it takes a certain time to walk or run from one place, A, to another, B. Moreover we realize, that the faster we run, the lesser time it takes to reach from A to B. Here we have a set of concepts: "distance", "place", "time", "movement", and "speed", that have relations to each other, which not are human made.

What does Favrholt mean with this? He means, that if we want to describe, or just speak about, how long time it takes to walk from Odense to Gudme, then we must use these concepts in a certain way in relation to each other if we want to discuss that problem. It was also so 1500 years ago. At that time our ancestors knew, that the faster we move from Odense to Gudme, the lesser time it takes. And should someone at that time have claimed, that the faster we run, the longer time it takes, then his fellows would have taught him, that he hadn't learned to speak correctly.

But what is it that dictates the correct speech here? It is the constitution of reality. We can arbitrarily create thousands of concepts – about animals, vegetation, humans, stars, actions, weight, heat, light etc. – but if we want to communicate unambiguous, then we must use a line of concepts in a quite certain way in relation to each other. And this way is not always human made. Often it is nature, which dictates how we

have to use the concepts in relation to each other in order to be able to think and speak unambiguous.

According to Favrholt the natural sciences are precisely characterized in relation to the social- and human sciences by, that there all the way through only is one possible way to use a given concept in relation to other given concepts. For instance: before Ørsted people had formed concepts about electricity and magnetism, but it is first after Ørsted's discovery of electromagnetism, that we know how these concepts have to be used in relation to each other. Here we have to do with a dictate from nature, so to speak, a dictate, which is not cultural determined. And if we look deeper we see that there in language are a number of traits, which not are cultural determined. For instance: all humans, regardless what tongue they express themselves in, have to keep the principle of contradiction if they want to communicate unambiguous to each other. But regardless how we formulate the principle of contradiction – for instance "a thing can not both exist and not exist" or "a sentence can not both be true and false" – we must add "in one and the same moment", and hereby we see, that the principle can't be understood, unless we have a concept about moment, what again implies a concept about coincidence between two things, which move in relation to each other, with which the concepts movement and distance also enter into the image.

Therewith it appears, that if you want to think and speak unambiguous, then logic can't be seen as isolated from a line of fundamental concepts in everyday language and the specific way, which they have to be used in relation to each other. Favrholt has analysed these things in what he calls the core in everyday language, and it appears, that the core in everyday language is a common area for all the about 6000 tongues, which exist. The core in everyday language is closely connected with our possibilities of action, and since humans have similar conditions of action, regardless what culture they belong to, their use of a line of fundamental concepts is the same all over the world. In the daily dealings with things it is, in any culture, so, that we burn ourselves on fire, that we drown, if we are too long time under water, that we die (that is to say: that our bodily functions cease sometime), that we can't sense without sense organs, that we can't move without having a body, that actions can't be reduced to sequences of experiences, etc.

So language is, according to Favrholt, not a pure social product. Its structure is in large scale dictated by the physical constitution of reality and by our active and sensuous approach to this reality. All concepts are human made. But to a great deal of language it applies, that the relations between the concepts not are human made.

### **Critique of the sources of inspiration**

When we in the light of this return to the many sources of inspiration for social constructivism, which I mentioned in the introduction, we see, that already these contain fallacies. In a certain sense the whole program of Saussure and Hjelmslev is mistaken. You can very well make a structural analysis of language isolated from everything else, but you can eventually not explain, why language has the structure it has, without implicating semantics, without looking at what language is about. The structure of language is defined by the constitution of reality and our cognitive situation. And therewith lapses also Wittgenstein's thesis, that the use of words and concepts just is certain arbitrary – social – determined rules.

Also Kuhn and Popper are touched by this critique. Perhaps it is not so evident, that the point of the theory about, that all data are theory-loaded, also falls away. But it can be refuted otherwise.

The mistake in the viewpoint is, that we claim that *all* scientific data is theory-loaded. In fact it is rare that data is distorted in the light of a theory. The normal is, that we have to do with contradictory theories, which deal with the same – not theory-loaded – data. For instance: both Lamarck's evolutionism and Darwin's theory of evolution are about the same: the development of the species. And the examples are in a certain extent the same, when the two theories are placed towards each other: the long throat of the giraffe, the fur of the bear, the claws of the cat, etc. The two theories were based on Linné's classification of the, at that time known, animal- and plant species. Linné had himself the theory, that the whole system once and for all was created by God. Linné, Lamarck and Darwin all the time speak about the same data, but interpret them different.

And concerning the relativity people wish to stick on scientific theories, the relationship is the same. It might well be that change of paradigms takes place and that some theories are in danger of becoming falsified, but will anybody claim, that Harvey's theory of the blood circulation is false or just a temporarily guess? Can you claim, that the theory about that Earth is round, is not fully verified?

### **Individual constructivism**

Central in the discussion about human nature has always been the question, whether this nature is innate and therefore a more or less eternal and changeless entity, or whether it, in the main, is a result of the outer circumstances, whereby it can be changed through a change of these.

Today this theme is discussed under the slogan about heredity and/or environment. A bit simplified you can sketch out the two extremities as follows: on the one wing they claim, that it only is the hereditary – today understood as biological and genetic –

factors, which determine the human nature, and that the individual person fully is a result of the concrete genes. The human nature is universal and changeless in the same way as the genes are common and unchangeable. A science fiction perspective, which perhaps soon is a reality, is that a genetic manipulation of the genes can be a possibility for changing the nature of Man. The apprehension, that human nature in the main is universal and changeless, can be seen in for instance Plato, Christianity, Freud and Lorenz, whose theories by the way are very different.

The other wing claims however, that it only is the outer circumstances – for instance environment and upbringing – which plays a part in the individual person's development. In accordance with this conception it is practical meaningless to talk about a human nature as something wonderful and universal. If you in a certain historical period, in a certain society, think that you can find a line of common traits in Man, then this is merely due to, that these individuals all are a result of the same outer influence – the same environment. If you can control and change these outer circumstances, you can also fundamentally change the nature of Man. Here is the apprehension of the relativity and variableness of the human nature, represented by names such as Nietzsche, Marx, Sartre and Skinner, whose theories meanwhile in other definitive points are highly contradictory. Both social constructivism and individual constructivism belongs to this other wing.

In the following I will discuss the individual constructivism.

According to Nietzsche the will to power is the basic power of all life. He therefore thought about a special meaning of the word will. Normally the will is understood as Man's ability to bring a more or less reasonable decision out in life. And ahead of the will's effort goes the consideration. But Nietzsche's will to power is neither connected to reasonable considerations, nor consciousness. On the contrary it describes life's fundamental character of striving towards increase.

Will is normally a psychological concept. It describes an ability, or an aspect, of the human consciousness. In contrast to this Nietzsche is seeing it as an ontological, or metaphysical, concept. The fundamental idea is, that if we shall understand the multifold expressions of all life, then we must interpret them as outcome of will to power. This idea led to Nietzsche's revaluation of all values. The eternal values are only a slavemoral without reality and truth. They are illusions or fictions. Therefore he dethroned reason as the ability to insight in the eternal values. Body, desires, and nature, are the central in Man, not reason. God is dead and the world is chaotic, empty, absurd; something, which Man himself must control. Man must himself create his values: a master moral created by the so-called superman.

Now, if we take Nietzsche, then his idea about the will to power has to do with the outgoing movement of time, the future; but as an ontological principle. He would reject the whole above-mentioned cosmology, the divine source of it all, the destructive backmovement of time, the past, all the karmacial energylaws etc. So what he is talking about is the becoming of everything, becoming and not being; that is: a state of non-being, nothingness, which only you yourself can fill with meaning. So - though Nietzsche is talking about the will to power as a creative force - this is not something positive connected with life itself. Nietzsche's view of life itself, the eternal recurrence of the same, is a view of life devoid of values. God is dead.

According to Nietzsche there neither exists a sensuous, a material, or a spiritual world given in advance. Everything are created by being interpreted. Nietzsche believed that the will - that is to say: the defeating, the remodeling, the striving - is something creative. As told, then the will to power, according to Nietzsche, is a creating power. That this power is the basic power in Man means, according to Nietzsche, that all expressions of the human life must be understood as forms of will to power; intake of food, arrangement of the everyday life with home and clothes, cultivation of nature, as well as sensation, feelings, thinking and will in usual sense - are expressions of the will to power. Nietzsche is not least thinking about the will to power in the image of art. All human unfolding is actually a creative process where a content, or a material, is formed. Life is seen as a work of art.

A similar thought exists in the so-called self-production thesis, which is the thought about, that Man is the being, who creates himself through his history, and thereby controls his own freedom. The thought exists in the German idealism, for instance in Fichte, Schelling, Hegel. Both Existentialism, as well as Marxism, also builds on the understanding of the freedom of Man to form his own life, and that this is an unconditional value. Freedom is a good thing, a demand and a responsibility. What it is about, is the freedom to be the creative power in your own history. In the Existentialists it is the life-story of the individual, in the Marxists it is the world-history of the community.

The self-production thesis builds on the thought, that Man is in a continual state of becoming. The concept formation also often becomes used in connection with the concept of becoming. In my book **A Portrait of a Lifeartist** I have examined this in details in the section *The Lifeartist as a Desirous Being*.

With this Nietzsche introduced a quite central concept: perspectivism. Through our interpretations (language) we directly construct the world. And you must therefore have the will and power to create new values, and you must have the power to give

them name in a new way, because namegiving is the same as an unfolding of power. Or else you end up as a slave.

To live is to will, to will is to create values. The will to power is becoming through us, and in that way we get control over the things through a perspective.

It is now easy to see how much the modern management theory and coaching industry is inspired by Nietzsche: the relativistic and subjectivistic ideas about that it only is the individual himself who, through his interpretations, or stories, can supply the world with values – or rather, not supply, but directly create it like a God; the denial of the past, and the orientation towards future; the superman idea about being a winner, a success, a person standing on the top of the mountain; the preaching about that it is not facts, but the best story, which wins.

Also existentialism can be used to justify these thoughts. The act-oriented ideas of existentialism match as hand in glove with a capitalistic-liberalistic ideology about being the architect of your own fortune, the right for each individual person to seek his own idea of happiness – the philosophical point of view, that there isn't any objective value-goals for the human life, only individual subjective choices. That is: value-subjectivism.

In my article **Humanistic psychology, self-help and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**, I have mentioned the danger of cutting off the otherness in existence. Heidegger and Sartre both think from Kirkegaard's philosophy of existence, but without his Christianity and humanism, and therefore they end in subjectivism and irrationalism. They both show, in different ways, what the danger is in subjectivism and its belonging irrationalism. Irrationalism led Heidegger to Nazism, though only for a shorter period, and Sartre had difficulties explaining why you not as well could choose an anti-humanistic project of life such as Leninism or Nazism.

The New Thought movement, or New Thought, is a spiritual movement, which developed in the United States during the late 19th century and emphasizes metaphysical beliefs. It consists of a loosely allied group of religious denominations, secular membership organizations, authors, philosophers, and individuals who share a set of metaphysical beliefs concerning the effects of positive thinking, the law of attraction, healing, life force, creative visualization, and personal power.

The three major religious denominations within the New Thought movement are Religious Science, Unity Church and the Church of Divine Science (so it is important to know, that there is a special religious movement behind the management theories

and the self-help industry, which everyone today, through education and work, is forced to accept).

The main theory is also here the subjectivistic belief, that your thoughts create reality. By focusing on positive thinking, and by avoiding everything you find negative, you can create your life in accordance with your needs, feelings and wishes. The “positive” is identified as success, money, sex, material glory, etc. Examples of book-titles are: “Prosperity Through Thought Force”, “The Science of Getting Rich”, “Think and Grow Rich”.

All the above theories is today seen in a whole tendency of time within school, folk high school and continuing education, where you focus on so-called ”personal development” and ”Personality-developing courses” in connection with demands about lifelong learning, continuing education, readiness for change and flexibility; precisely what management theory and coaching are all about.

For instance they use Sartre’s scriptures as a request for uninhibited and egoistic self-expression, where the individual person is letting his choices decide everything. The existentialists say that Man has the freedom, through his choices, to be the creative power in his own history. As management theorists and coaches say: ”It is not facts, but the best story, which wins!”

In the existentialists the choice gives reasons for all meaning, but can’t in itself be given reasons for in anything. The viewpoint is called decisionism, because values at base are founded on a choice, or a decision.

The ideology is in that way extremely ingenious, because it precisely is based on an assertion about, that you have the freedom to create your happiness.

Ideologies have always been destructive for Man. They are a psychic disease. Where the destruction in the great totalitarian ideologies obvious comes from outside, then the destruction in Consumer Capitalism comes from the inside. It is namely so, that the demand about lifelong learning, continuing education, readiness for change and flexibility, have led to, that human being's freedom, contrary to the assertion, becomes taken away from them. It is for instance impossible in the society today to follow a feeling about having a call in life. Unless what you dream about, matches into society, you will be forced to change, to find a new project. You shall be able to become a success and a winner, and this you can only become within the society's frames and ideals.

And the coercion is there. In order to be able to have a job today, you have to go on personality-developing courses, which all are based on management theory, coaching and psychotherapy, frightening often mixed with New Age religiousness, for instance Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) – again: see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**. And it is all more or less governmental accepted as valid curriculum in all educations (management theory seems directly to have been imported into the state as ideological weapon). Frightening because we in other areas are so much concerned about separating religion and state. There is no secularism when it comes to the psycho-religiousness of the self-help industry.

Personality-developing courses are about that you should be able to adapt the company's development. And this change-demand is not only applying to the working-life. You shall also be able to change your private life, your personality, your thoughts and feelings, so that they fit into the company's ideals. And all of it happens more or less in a context of treatment. Personality-developing courses are virtually the same as being forced in psychotherapeutic treatment – psychotherapy is namely an integrated part of the whole ideology.

If you are unemployed the coercion is much more obvious. Here the, often hopeless uninducted, coaches and psychotherapists, are in clover days; an abuse of the intelligence of those of the unemployed, who have a much higher education.

We live in a postmodern society, where the distinction between reality and appearance/superficies is about to disappear. Reality is often the images, we receive through the stream of information. And it becomes more and more difficult to see, which objective reality that lies behind. It seems more and more to be the images, which are real, and not some behind lying reality. In that sense all images are equal true - (because there is no objective instance to decide what is more true than something else) - but they are not equal good, for some images are more fascinating than others, some images affect us more than others. Therefore the expression of the image has come in focus. The expression of the image – its aesthetics – decides, whether it fascinates us or bores us. What apply for today, is the intensity and seduction of the expressions. The new truth criterion is, whether something is interesting or boring. Eternal values such as goodness, truth and beauty fall more and more away.

The death of the eternal values doesn't only apply for reality, but also the personality. The individual human being lives in a space without truth, in a time without direction, and with an information flow so huge, that the manageability beforehand has to be given up. How are we to live then? Well, the management theorists claim,

you do this by creating yourself in a never-ending new production. The personality then becomes a persona (mask), an eternal change of role, because when the role begins to stiffen, it becomes uninteresting and boring. New is good, as these theorists say. What before characterized the personality's relationship to the world, was a call. Now the relationship has become a project (or as the management theorists say: a good story, a good branding, a good spin), which is formed, quickly is being carried out and dropped for the benefit of a new project, that can maintain the constant demand for intensity and seduction.

It is precisely the management theories, which are lying behind the companies' much talk about the employees' willingness to personal development, flexibility, innovation and readiness for change. Words, that appear in almost any job advertisement.

And therefore also so much bet on PR; that is: not only concerning consumer goods, but also concerning people, for example politicians. The image of the politician in the media is today more important for his choice than the politics, he may advocate. Politics becomes, like everything else, a ware, which has to be sold through good stories (branding, spin). Everything becomes a business, which have to be runned economical. The business community of the management culture, with its active leaders, is being transferred to all areas of life, where everything is being evaluated from if it can be sold, not from the Source of wisdom: the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

So the management theories, and its belonging self-help industry, have actual become a common accepted ideology. The intention is to help people using their full potential, to help them in having success, both in work and in private life. The management theorists call it a win-win situation: both the private life of the individual, as well as the company, where the individual is employed, get profit by it – as they claim. What it in other words is about, within these theories, is to become something (be focused on the future), to get success, to conquer a place on the top, to become a winner. The virtues are self-assertion, storytelling, ambition and will to change. The terms of coaching and self-help are closely connected with these ideals.

As mentioned I claim that this is part of a very dangerous ideology, which I under one term have called the Matrix Conspiracy. The background for the word Matrix, used in my context, is the movie Matrix (the word Matrix is actually a mathematical concept, which is too complicated to be explained here).

In our time it is the very popular to compare the consciousness with a computer. Among others in the supporters of the new materialism, which the development of computers with still more extensive programs, neural networks and so on, have been

a source of inspiration for. For instance the American philosopher Daniel C. Dennett, who in his book - with the ambitious title *Consciousness Explained* - seeks to explain consciousness, partially through computer analogies, partially through neurology and psychology.

Within cognition psychology the so-called "information processing theory" has been dominating for a number of years. In this theory is focused on the "inner psychic" processes looked on as symbolic information processing in analogy with the processes which happens in computers.

Both in Eastern and Western philosophy they have always worked with the so-called Dream Hypothesis; the philosophers have always reflected over, whether life is a dream. These philosophical questions have always followed them: whether we sleep, whether we dream this long dream, which is life? How can we know that life not is a dream? How can we know, that we are not lying sleeping somewhere, dreaming the whole world?

Descartes created his own variant of the Dream Hypothesis, the Argument of the Evil Demon: How can I know, that I am not deceived by an evil demon concerning all realization?

In the discussion about the reliability of our realization you often meet a variant of Descartes' Argument from the Evil Demon. The variant (the so-called Brain-in-jar Hypothesis) says as follows: Some day surgery will have reached so far, that you will be able to operate the brain out of a human being and keep it alive by placing it in a jar with some nutrient substratum. At that time the computer research will perhaps have reached so far, that you will be able to connect a computer to such a brain and feed it with all kinds of data, so that the brain thinks that it is a human being, who lives in the real world with all the experiences, memories etc., this is implying, while the fact is that it only is a brain in a jar (read more in my article **The Dream Hypothesis and the Brain-in-jar Hypothesis**).

It is this hypothesis the movie *Matrix* is based on. Here humans are used as a kind of batteries (slaves) for machines, that get their energy by supplying them with a virtual reality, while the fact is, that they only are lying sleeping in a jar, giving their energy away.

There certainly exist computer scientists, who think, that you can understand the consciousness as "soft-ware" and the brain as a "hard disc" - (Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) is for example very close to this thought) - and that you in very few years will be able to decode a human being for its whole content of

consciousness, immediately before it dies, and therewith provide its soul an eternal life – admittedly on a discette, but what the hell, it is after all always better than to pass into nothingness, and the discette will after all be able to be played again and again.

I don't talk about people as batteries for machines, but as batteries for an ideology: The Matrix Conspiracy. An ideology is a malfunction in the human mind, which functions with Machiavelli's implied, terrible, assumption, that the end justifies the means, and where the means to get there is to make people into slaves for this goal. Today people undoubtedly are being made into empty consumer machines. There is no doubt either, that we, through the teachings of the Matrix Sophists, are being supplied with some kind of virtual reality, that seems to justify Machiavelli's famous and notorious assumption – for instance through elimination of critical thinking, which thereupon is replaced by magical thinking.

It is a fact, that we today see an ideology behind the democracy, where true spirituality, philosophy and science systematical are sought destroyed; that is: the destruction of the best tools Man has in his love of wisdom, and quest for truth.

The main theory of this ideology is relativism. As mentioned: there both exists an individual version of relativism, and a collective version. The individual version is called subjectivism (or individual constructivism). This version is often connected with a right-wing liberalism. The other version is a collective relativism, cultural relativism (or social constructivism), which often is connected to a left-wing socialism. However both are common in distorting both science and human rights. Both are demanding "alternative" views of science, and for example also human rights. And both are introducing intellectual apartheid in different ways, by seeking to eliminate critical thinking.

Both subjectivism and relativism claim, that there doesn't exist any objective truth. Truth is something we create ourselves, either as individuals or as cultures, and since there doesn't exist any objective truth, there doesn't exist any objective scale of truth. Therewith they also say, that we live in a Matrix, a dream, a kind of virtual reality, we have created ourselves, and that there is no chance of getting out of this. Therefore the best is to be interested in finding ways of getting on in this world, rather than being interested in finding ways of discovering the truth (read more in my article **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**).

To teach people this, is the main job of the Sophists of the Matrix Conspiracy: Management theorists, New Age coaches, Nonviolent Communicators, Neuro-linguistic Programmers, Law of Attraction gurus.

But this is in opposition to the message of the movie the Matrix, which is, that we should create a rebellion, and try to get out of the illusion. In that way you can say that the new Sophists are the “machines”, or the rulers of the Matrix, which keep people as slaves.

All truths are in this Matrix said to be equally true and equally valid, and if one person’s truth, or one culture’s truth, try to intervene in the truths of other individuals or cultures, then this is considered as an aggression. Here the mind-control, the ingenious manipulation, of peoples’ minds, begins. Because through this we have reached the highest level of postmodern development for better or for worse. The same fully individualized core of personality, which makes us able to step out of the past’s fixed and subconscious attachment, has itself become our main interest, center for our identity in a degree, that almost all our awareness are directed inwards in a global seen exceptional narcissism. That is one of the ways the Matrix keeps us in the illusion.

But isn’t narcissism what for example social constructivists try to avoid? Yes, but with the opposite result – they haven’t examined the inner thinker’s (the Ego’s) ingenious ways of using thought distortions in order to defend itself. Individually we have namely created a large scale self-image, which in a quite high degree is based on assumptions/ideas. This self-image we almost continuously defend, by filtrating the impressions we receive from the world. We want to be in peace with our self-images, and quite convenient the Matrix therefore has created a cultural pluralism (=culture relativism), which forbid actual value judgment. I have my truth, and you have yours. Respect! Self-accept! I am Okay, you’re Okay! It all run together in a fear of hierarchies, where it is political incorrect to claim that something is higher than something else. “You judge”, is the same as “you condemn.” (see my article **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**).

The Matrix Conspiracy has in this way succeeded in creating an illusion of, that it is a kind of sacrilege (intolerance/thought-crime/old-thinking) wanting to utter yourself about, what is good and evil, true and false, beautiful and ugly, at the same time as the Matrix Sophists do this themselves in all possible quibbling ways, under cover of concepts such as tolerance or new-thinking – a kind of thought police.

Ego-worship has in that way become a common accepted ideology. All this is a part of the Matrix Conspiracy. But why is the Matrix Conspiracy so focused on the ego?

Because the ego is the central element, that is feeding the Matrix with energy. The ego is the main battery of the Matrix. The reason is, that the Ego always is in a state of becoming. Becoming is the central concept in personal development: all the time to be in a state of becoming something else than what you are, a constant striving from past to future, where the goal is constantly increasing success. In this you give your energy to that part of the Matrix ideology, which is Consumer Capitalism.

(Another part of the Matrix ideology is Chinese Communism, which I fear will melt together with Western Consumer Capitalism in what I call the Matrix Hybrid - read more about this in my articles **The Hermeneutics of Suspicion (the thought police of the self-help-industry)** and **why I am an apostle of loafing** and **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**. The left-wing side of constructivism, social constructivism, could very likely replace Chinese Communism, and the right-wing side of constructivism, individual constructivism, is already a central part of consumer Capitalism).

Contrary to true spirituality where being is the central, being in the sense studying what you are, to be what you are, to give up past and future, and be in the Now with what you are. In this the energy is flowing away from the Matrix, back to yourself. That is also why I'm considering the art of loafing as a part of the rebellion against the Matrix Conspiracy.

Becoming is the central concept in the false spirituality of the Matrix Conspiracy. Being is the central concept in true spirituality.

So, psychotherapy (humanistic psychology) and coaching (constructivism) can be seen as new, large, meaning-carrying world-images in a psychologized and therapized age. Even though they, in their sources of inspiration, at first specify two quite different views of Man and his possibilities and purposes in the world, they are common about explaining humans from a conception about, that humans have lost (or all the time are in risk of loosing) himself and therefore constantly have to work with personal development in order to find himself (psychotherapy and the dream of a lost past) or to become himself (coaching and the hope of a richer future). You can say that the two world-images both are based on the claim, that a human being not *is* himself, before he *becomes* himself, and that both world-images see lifelong therapeutic self-improvement as a presumption for, that a human being can become and live authentic.

The two world-images can in other words be seen as two versions of the same superior psychologizing understanding of life, which the Danish researcher of religion Iben Krogstad calls the mythology of authenticity. This mythology is so to

speaking a compilation of the two world-images into one. According to the mythology of authenticity the course of a human life is as follows (here inspired by Krogstad's examination (Krogstad 191-192, 2011):

- Man comes to the world as himself: as untouched core (humanistic psychology/psychotherapy) or unlimited possibility (constructivism/coaching).
- During childhood other humans, or the culture, takes over the management of Man. Thereby he loses himself (his self-possession) and becomes another.
- Human beings live unconscious without awareness about, that they don't possess themselves. they live non-authentic as a "we" (instead of an "I"), and out of what they "ought" and "must", (instead of what they "can" and "will").
- Humans experience problems (life crises, sickness, divorce, low self-esteem etc.), or they experience a need of changing in connection with challenges on for instance the workplace.
- Through psychotherapy or coaching Man discovers, that he has lived non-authentic; that is to say: controlled by others and without contact with himself (with his own core – psychotherapy and the dream of a lost past - or with his own potentials – coaching and the hope of a richer future). He discovers, that his problems or wishes of change are due to, that he not so far has been in possession of himself.
- Through psychotherapy or coaching Man begins to disentangle from the leadership of others and takes himself in possession. The other humans exist in the subconscious mind and therefore have to be segregated through therapeutic self-cultivation. When this has happened, Man can himself decide, how he will react to reality. At the same time he gets in contact with his hidden resources (to either becoming himself as he was once – psychotherapy and the dream of a lost past – or to become the other, he wants to become – coaching and the hope of a richer future).
- When the individual human being through the subconscious mind has taken over the control of his own life, he can place life-goals, which is in accordance with the one, he is or chooses to be. The authentic human being lives with inner accordance – and he expresses himself by creating accordance between his inner and the external world.

- Because he has realized, that the explanation of problems has to be sought in his relationship with himself, and because this relationship all the time is under influence from outside and can't be expressed once and for all, Man is in need of regularly repeating a therapeutic journey towards himself. He has to work with himself continuously in order to remain loyal towards himself as "greater than" his conscious self.

So the mythology of authenticity defines Man as a being, who continuously need to cultivate himself therapeutical. The mythology does so by making Man into a problem to himself. In the constructivistic world-image (coaching and the hope of a richer future) the problem becomes formulated very positive as a promise: "You have not yet actualized what you have the potential for". In the humanistic psychological world-image (psychotherapy and the dream of a lost past) the problem rather becomes formulated as a threat: "You are all the time in danger of, that others draw you away from yourself".

But as Krogstad points out: when the self-help industry tells people, that they through personal development and self-cultivation, can become themselves, it opens the doors for its own built-in paradox. It promises people liberation and praises the responsible and self-leading human being – but creates at the same time people, who are dependent of continued therapeutic intervention. The more people are told, that they can treat themselves, the more they are in the risk of being made into uncritical objects for therapeutic treatment.

The widespread psychologized, emotionalized and therapized belief in the hidden aspects of humans (the unconscious) has not only given humans a new way of self-creation, but also a new outer definition of new authorities (self-help consultants, practitioners, identity-experts, therapists, coaches, spin doctors), who are characterized by, that they neither want to be authorities or to be looked at as authorities. People in the mythology of authenticity will no longer suppress others or be suppressed from the outside, they want to express others and themselves be expressed from within. But the expression doesn't come by itself; it has to be established in a self-help process, which builds on the idea that people have a chronic authenticity-problem and therefore are in need of treatment.

The self-help industry, and its belonging therapeutic techniques, thereby exposes the paradox, that the more resource-filled a human being is conceived to be, the more it has to be supported therapeutic. The more self-actualizing a human being becomes, the more it is in need of help to actualize itself. And the more responsibility a human being is said to have for its own life, the more this same human being, basically, is

considered as a victim, as non-authentic, and therefore as powerless (read more about this paradox in my article **Self-help and The Mythology of Authenticity**).

The paradox is rising because of the self-help industry's goal-oriented ideology, where the supreme good is lying out in the future, and where the end therefore justifies the means. The goal is an idea, a point out in the future, projected by the mind, where salvation is coming in some form; a form which is based on the ideals created by the New Thought movement: success, prosperity, personal power, health, beauty, material glory.

Philosophy and spirituality are in opposition to all kinds of ideology (again: see my article **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**). In philosophy of existence (and in true spirituality) the concept of being are covering the concepts of being yourself, of authenticity, autonomy, decisiveness and power of action. It is also covering the concept of happiness: the existential and life-philosophical concepts of reality, co-operation, movement, safety and meaning. Being yourself is therefore the same as being yourself present in the now, no matter what you are, no matter how much you are suffering, how poor you are, or how incompetent other people are conceiving you to be (see my article **Suffering as an entrance to the Source**). Being yourself present in the now (passive listening presence, silence, or meditation) will by itself awaken a spirit of greatness.

In the self-help industry all this is turned upside down because of the ideological aspects. The second aspect of the above-mentioned paradox is therefore, that instead of focusing on being (where the self-help industry has the word authenticity from), it presses people to focus on becoming. In philosophy of existence (and in true spirituality) the concept of becoming is covering the concepts of trying to become something else than what you are, where you imitate others, are a slave of others ideas and ideals, and where your actions are characterized by irresoluteness and doubt. In short: non-authenticity. It is also covering the concepts of suffering: the existential and life-philosophical concepts of unreality, division, stagnation, anxiety and meaninglessness.

It is this aspect of the self-help industry that has made me puzzled over that this industry actually is supporting what you in traditional philosophy and spirituality consider as the four philosophical hindrances for the opening in towards the Source. But not enough with that, it directly hates the corresponding four philosophical openings (see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

This leads to the third aspect of the paradox, namely the thought distortion I have called The Hermeneutic of Suspicion (see my article **The Hermeneutics of**

**Suspicion (the thought police of the self-help industry) and why I am an apostle of loafing).** The self-help industry ends up in a prejudiced worldview, where it condemns being; that is: it not only condemns what people are (we saw that it basically considers people as non-authentic and powerless if they have not accepted their ideology and therapeutic techniques), it also condemns people who actually are themselves present in the now, people who live in accordance with their own essence, and who have achieved that self-forgetfull openness and absorption in the world, which is a condition for love, spontaneity, joy of life and wisdom: critical thinkers, (think for yourself), the true philosophers and spiritual masters (read more about this paradox in my article **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**).

Why? Because the teaching of such people will be in direct opposition to the teaching of the self-help industry: they will focus on being and not becoming

### **Latest news!**

Strasbourg, April 7, 2011. The 47 Member States of the Council of Europe are close to finalizing a new convention that defines “gender” as Social Construct.

So, a quite certain trend within a quite certain single branch of science (Sociology), shall from now on define what a human being is. This trend is called social constructivism (or social constructionism), and is the latest craze in reductionism; that is: a pseudoscientific point of view with a political agenda.

So, we see, that my theory about the Matrix Conspiracy is very well alive and in progress.

*All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: [www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com](http://www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com)*

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