

Morten Tolboll

Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology

Humanistic Psychology (Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Rollo May) is a fundamental inspiration for the management theories and therefore for the whole of the self-help industry (see my article **Management theory and the self-help industry**).

The humanistic psychology is based on a biological view of human nature; or said in another way: it believes that humans entirely are desirous beings (see my book **A Portrait of a Lifeartist**). Carl Rogers is therefore in his self-actualization theory focusing on the emotional experience of the individual. Abraham Maslow is in his self-actualization theory focusing on different levels of needs in the individual. Rollo May is in his existential psychology focusing on the will and wishes in the individual.

If you focus on these aspects of the human nature you will find your true authentic self, they claim. Like the wisdomtraditions Humanistic Psychology namely have an idea about, that Man has a sovereign (or even spiritual/divine) core. So, it is from here we have the concepts of the self-actualizing and personal developing human being, and, as a result: the authentic, sovereign, autonomous, competent, resource-filled human being; concepts, that are central in the whole of the self-help industry. But which also are showing something of a paradox, or contradiction, because this therapeutic self-actualization has to be supported by an army of coaches and psychotherapists. The more resources the human being is conceived to have, the more potentials it has, or is claimed to have, the more support it needs – more therapists, more coaches, more courses etc. – in order to develop himself (read more about this paradox in my article **Self-help and the Mythology of Authenticity**). This paradox shows, that something is going wrong in this world-view, and in the following I will show why.

What is common in humanistic psychology is that the individual actualizes his full resources or potentials; that is: that he finds his authentic self. This thesis has been developed in many various forms, for example it is also this thesis that is lying behind the concept of positive psychology. Positive psychology has its roots in the New Thought movement, and is claiming that if you focus on your positive thoughts,

feelings, needs, wishes and will, and are ignoring the negative oppositions, then you can attract anything you want (the “positive” is in New Thought understood as material glory, money, success, personal power, sex, health, beauty) – see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**.

It is, according to the Humanistic Psychology, therefore only the individual’s *own* subjective evaluation, which can provide something with value. There neither exist valid values, which come from the community, or objective values, which come from nature, the universe, or life itself. Nothing has value in itself, unless it comes from the individual’s subjective experiences, needs, will and wishes.

The Humanistic Psychology’s view of morals is namely not only a subjectifying, which attributes the source of morals to the subjective itself, but also an emotionalizing, since it is the individual’s *feelings*, which decides the moral quality of something. What it is about, is to do what “*feels*” right. It is the individual’s emotional experience of something, which defines values, not conversely. And this is fully in thread with the ideology of Consumer Capitalism, where the customer (and his or her’s experiences, wishes, will and needs) always is right. The consumer society, the therapeutic self-actualization and the subjectifying of the moral, go hand in hand. The moral – the individual’s relation to himself – is therapized, and the moral is subjectified.

But what is this self? Is it the same as in the wisdomtraditions? No, and it is here the problems arises.

Our suffering, our painbody is according to the wisdomtraditions, through the inner evaluating ego, which the painbody is constructed around, connected with the more dangerous depths of the collective history of the astral plane, which also are a kind of dark, ancient inertia, which opposes any change of the ego (see my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can’t heal it**).

That is also the reason why you, through psychotherapy, can’t heal Man from the ground. In order to heal Man from the ground you need to go into a spiritual practice. It is only within the religions and their spiritual traditions they have knowledge and names for the more dark sides of the astral plane’s collective history. The West has very precisely called this factor the original sin. The East has called it negative karma. The concepts indicate, that the inertia projects beyond the personal history (growing up conditions, traumatic bindings, painful experiences etc.) and far down into the collective inherit-backgrounds of history (genes, environment, society-ideals, the archetypes and the primordial images of the dreams, fantasies, fairy-tales, myths, and finally: instincts inherited from the animals). It is a factor, which is lying in the

evolution itself, in the genes, in the collective subconscious, in the collective images of time.

When therefore psychotherapy requires a change, then the instinctive survival-preparedness in us reacts and protests. Man has survived on willfulness and a consciousness-structure, which mental and psychic sign is Egocentredness. The bigger Ego, the bigger survival chance. The Humanistic Psychology's view of the "authentic" self is therefore confusing this self with the ego.

Seen from a spiritual perspective, this instinctive survival strategy (the Ego) appears as a resistance, an invincible inertia: original sin, negative karma. You can't, by psychotherapeutic strategies, free the consciousness from its attachment to this inertia. You can therefore not dissolve or dilute or convert the original sin through psychotherapy. Only the intervention of the Source (God, Christ, the enlightened consciousness) can basically help Man with a transcendence of the negative karma of the original sin. But in order to, that a human being should be able to receive this help from the Source (gift of grace), then this requires an eminently precise and profound preparation. And as part of this preparation serve the true spiritual practice within the religions (see my articles **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with spiritual practice** and **The value of having a religion in a spiritual practice**).

So, when you in this way do your part of the work, then you will discover that the enlightened consciousness (God, Christ, Buddha), already have cleansed the negative karma and taken on, and forgiven, the original sin. All enlightened teachers of this Earth (Rumi, Krishna, Francis of Assisi, Rabia, Meera, Yeshe Tsogyel, Teresa of Avila) are doing the same: they take on the original sin and are purifying it for us.

But religion has in humanistic psychology, and in the self-help industry as such, been reduced to psychology (feelings, will and wishes, – Carl Rogers and Rollo May), spirituality has been reduced to biology (needs – Abraham Maslow), and philosophy has been reduced to ideology (consumer capitalism). So, traditional religious and philosophical practices have in Human Psychology, and in the self-help industry as such, been reduced to psychology and psychotherapy. Spirituality has in this way been turned upside down. In my book **A Portrait of a Lifeartist** – in the section about needs - I describe how the ideology of needs distorts human nature.

In my article **Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is an instrument of psychic terror** I describe the reductionism in another way (NVC is directly inspired by humanistic psychology). In its way of claiming, that all human behaviour stems from attempts to meet a small set of human needs, NVC is namely a reductionism. The founder of NVC, Marshall Rosenberg, is for example proclaiming that, "all needs are universal; every human being in the world has the same needs."

Reductionisms reduce or devalue the many aspects of a human being (for example history, time, rationality, spirituality, communication, truth, meaning, beauty, suffering, passion, love, etc., etc., - or said in one word: the wholeness) to a phenomenon of a single type. In NVC – as well as in Maslow's version of Humanistic psychology - this phenomenon is needs.

Needs are in NVC seen in relation to two types of feelings: feelings when your needs are satisfied, and feelings when your needs are not satisfied (on NVC websites you can find lists of fundamental needs and the two types of feelings). So NVC is about how you can get your needs satisfied. But when you reduce, for example universal values such as the good, the true and the beautiful, to needs ("Universal needs"), then the whole thing is being turned upside down, because then your being is seen as something not-yet satisfied, a state of becoming, and therefore desire. And with becoming and desire you have the ego: the direct opposite of the good, the true and the beautiful (remember that in for example Buddhism they see desire as one of the main poisons of the mind). In my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings** I have investigated this *turning spirituality upside-down paradox* which the whole of New Age and the self-help industry are characterized by. Also see my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind** for a deeper explanation of the epistemological and ethical shipwrecks all reductionisms end up in.

Where spirituality traditional is about the elimination of the ego, then the ego has become an object of worship within the self-help industry. Spirituality has been distorted.

In his book *The Good Life* the Danish Life-philosopher Mogens Pahuus writes, that if you ask about, what the old Scandinavians saw as the highest and the greatest in life, the ecstasy of life, then the answer would be, that it is self-assertion – the assertion of oneself and the family. He also writes, that you in Christianity find a diametrically opposite view of self-assertion, – both in its Catholic form as in Protestantism. In Saint Gregory and Thomas of Aquinas haughtiness/pride/self-assertion was the first and greatest of the seven so-called deadly sins. And in Luther self-assertion nor was a goodness, but the vice over all vices. It is the seven deadly sins Dante in *The Purgatory* must look in the eyes one after one, in order to be able to progress. He must use the discrimination, which is the purification process, where you look your destiny in the eyes and do penance after having realized how your perspective distorts reality.

So self-assertion is a vice. Self-assertion is a kind of self-interest, where everything turns around the Ego, and therefore makes the mind mediocre. To live in a world,

which is controlled by self-assertion, without being self-assertive, means, truly, to love something for its own sake, without seeking a reward, a result; but this is very difficult, because the whole world, all your friends, your relatives, struggle to achieve something, to accomplish something, to become something.

Today self-assertion once again is considered as a virtue. The gurus are the many advocates for the market and the economical competition, as for instance several management theorists. And the education-instrument is the self-help industry. The disciples are the consumers; that will say, that this outlook of life obviously is shared by most people in our society: that it is about becoming something, to get success, to conquer a place on the top of the mountain, to become a winner. Mogens Pahuus believes that the modern ideal about becoming a success, a winner, is a perverted ideal. The society praises a self-assertion, which has gone over the top, and there dominates a self-assertion, which is a vice, because it both spoils the life of the self-assertive, and the lives of those, whom the self-assertive measures himself in relation to, and whom he wants to overpass.

Pahuus mentions some of the forms of self-assertion: 1) Vanity, which is a vice, because the vain-full always is bearing in mind, how he or she looks like, or is considered like, in the eyes of others. 2) Ambition, which is a vice, because you here constantly are on the way forward, or upwards. 3) Haughtiness, which is a vice, because you here, in your feeling of own superior value, look down at others, are letting others feel their inferiority; that is: because haughtiness is unethical. But also in the arrogant himself, haughtiness is destructive: it isolates. 4) Joy of power. The ethical seen most violating form of self-assertion is the joy of having power over others, of controlling others, or oppressing them.

Pahuus quotes Alfred Adler and says that the above-mentioned forms of self-assertion are attack-characterized. But there also exists a non-attack characterized form, as for instance the hostile isolation, anxiety and bashfulness, which you see in the *Underground Man* in Dostojevskij's small novel *Notes from an Underground*.

The vice in the different forms of self-assertion is that it leads to an unreal life.

True spirituality is in the end about going beyond all concepts and ideas, because language and linguistic mappings is the main reason for our distortions of reality, and therefore our suffering. It is in its nature absolutist. In order to go beyond all concepts and ideas it must be possible to discriminate between the language and the real, the map and the landscape, subject and object. It therefore builds on an objective truth-criterion, which is lying in a reality, wholeness, or otherness, that transcends us. As Niels Bohr says, then it is reality (the wholeness/the order of nature), that puts *us* in order, and not us that puts reality in order (see my article **Quantum mechanics and**

the philosophy of Niels Bohr). Discrimination is a central aspect of critical thinking (my book **A dictionary of thought distortions** is a manual in critical thinking, and therefore philosophy).

The self-help industry is, contrary to this, defending a relativism and a subjectivism, which doesn't allow this. And this is a bit of a paradox, because a lot of the self-help gurus are claiming, that their teachings are spiritual, yes even that they are spiritual teachers.

According to the self-help industry then the language *is* the real, the map *is* the landscape, the word *is* the real. Such a lack of discrimination between language and reality, and therefore between subject and object, is a central aspect of magical thinking.

It is, according to relativism and subjectivism, not possible to go beyond all concepts and ideas. But you can change these. That is a central idea in the self-help direction called Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) – see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**. Though NLP is saying that the map is not the landscape, then it paradoxically also is supporting a subjectivism, that says that we can't go beyond our mappings, we can't know what the landscape is in itself. This of course introduces a Socratic question: If it is true, that we can't go beyond our mappings and get knowledge about what the landscape is in itself, from where does NLP then know that the map is not the landscape?

Anyway, what it is about within NLP, and the self-industry as such, is to change your language, maps and words so that they fit into your wishes, needs and desires, and in that way you can become whatever you like, and you can create whatever reality you want – that is: according to your ego. As the management theorists say: “It is not facts, but the best story, that wins!” And they often do it in a mix of interpretations of Shamanism and Western theories of hypnosis (see my articles **A Critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork, Regression psychotherapies, James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy and Hypnosis, hypnotherapy and the art of self-deception**). But in true spirituality this is the same as enlargening your distortion of reality.

It will be interesting to follow how new theories within the self-help industry, and in New Age, in the future, in large scale, will be based on the ability to tell a good new story. Communal reinforcement is a thought distortion, which directly will be used as a means for this. Communal reinforcement is social phenomenon in which a concept or idea is repeatedly asserted in a community, regardless of whether sufficient evidence has been presented to support it. Over time, the concept or idea is reinforced

to become a strong belief in many people's minds, and may be regarded by the members of the community as fact.

Often, the concept or idea may be further reinforced by publications in the mass media, books, or other means of communication. There is no doubt about that the self-help industry (which is a strong advocate for the use of hypnosis and hypnotherapy) will be made propaganda for through mass media phenomena such as Transmedia Storytelling, Alternate Reality Games (The Blair Witch Project is an example of an Alternate Reality Game), Viral Marketing/Internet Hoaxes and Collaborative Fiction.

The phrase "millions of people can't all be wrong" is indicative of the common tendency to accept a communally reinforced idea without question, which often aid in the widespread acceptance of urban legends, myths, and rumors.

This will often be mixed with an ability to use modern technology within computer science and production of movies. Make a great website, and tell a story like in a Hollywood movie, and you have success. The latest within New Age is for example the so-called WingMakers Project. The difference between a Hollywood movie though, and a New Age guru, is that the New Age guru is claiming that his story is true, though very well knowing, that the whole is a fiction.

It is interesting, that the creator of the WingMakers Project, Mark Hempel, already now is defending his story as being true, against critics, who say that the story is a hoax. Hempel precisely have a background working in the computer and IT industry (see my article **Time travel and the fascism of the WingMakers Project**).

Or take the Human Design System, which is created by Alan Robert Krakower, who claims to have received it in a vision, whereafter he calls himself Ra Uru Hu. He was a well-educated and successful businessman, who worked as a contractor and magazine publisher with own advertising agency (see my article **A critique of The Human Design System**).

These kinds of story-telling will be the future of New Age and the self-help industry, and it will be amusing to follow, what the next "true" story will be.

Anyway, the paradox in the self-help industry is, that its build-in subjectivism and relativism are implying, that there isn't any objective truth-criterium in any wholeness, or reality, that transcends us, at the same time as it is talking a lot about transcending everything. According to the self-help industry we create truth and reality ourselves through our linguistic mappings, and because there is no objective truth-criterium to decide the truth, then all such mappings must be equally true. This

is implying that the “new age”, which for example New Age is talking about, can’t be said to be more true than the “old age”; violence and hate must be seen as having the same truth as non-violence and compassion.

But the idea about that we can create reality as it fits us, is the reason why self-help gurus in extreme cynical ways are abusing science as it fits them, and use all kinds of unrealistic exaggerated grand titles about themselves (for instance the world’s greatest money coach, and so on in the same style). Because if they just think it is true, well, then it magical must be true. This is especially seen within the movement of the law of attraction (Again: see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**).

In the following I will in five sequences show the consequences of what happens when you reduce traditional religious and philosophical practices to psychology and psychotherapy. The five sequences are:

- 1) The temple in Delphi
- 2) Becoming and being
- 3) The confusion of the ego with the spiritual essence
- 4) The psychopath
- 5) Back to the temple in Delphi

1) The temple in Delphi

The self-help industry is talking about that it is important to know thyself. That is not something new. Over the door of the Apollon Temple in Delphi was written: “Know thyself.” And the same concept can be found in all true spiritual traditions.

But the conception of, what it means to find yourself, has been turned upside down in the self-help industry. Earlier the concept of finding yourself, was to find your place in relation to the Gods. At that time it was about being yourself without becoming arrogant and reckless (ego-inflated), and therewith commit hubris (see my article **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**). The intention was to develop yourself in relation to something else than yourself. And the same thing can be seen in other true spiritual traditions.

In accordance with the authentic spiritual traditions the movement of time is a power, an expression of energy, which follows some laws. This power moves in wave-movements, pendulum-movements, in situation-movements, as well as in circulation-movements. The universal laws of energy in the movement of time are known as Tao, The Dharmalaw, Karma, Destiny, Hubris-nemesis, Logos, The will of God, etc.

The Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna said, that the Now's regularity in the function of the energy, is due to, that energy works as streams and dividings within a superior wholeness. And because the wholeness is a reality, each part will always fit into an equivalent part. This means, that each part only can be understood in relation to its negation; that is: what the part *not* is. At first this is implying, that each part come to appear as part of a polarization-pair or a pair of opposites – just like in the teaching of Yin and Yang. Secondly this is implying, that each part only can be understood in relation to everything else; that is to say: in relation to the wholeness.

So the more you, through the Ego's evaluations, isolate these parts from each other, the more the abandoned parts will work stronger and stronger on their polar partners. Therefore these polar partners in their extremes finally will swing over in their opposite extremes. Another aspect of this regularity, or another way to describe this regularity is: energy returns to its starting point. And since everything in this way only works correlative, yes, then Nagarjuna claimed, that you actual can't say anything about the wholeness, only about the parts. Therefore he called the wholeness for the emptiness (śūnyatā) – a teaching, which had one quite certain purpose: the neutralization of all the dogmas, theories and viewpoints which ignorance has created.

Here is the main reason why the self-help industry has lost true spirituality out of sight: the Ego-worship, which shuts itself away from this wholeness. Today the wholeness, or the otherness, has been eliminated, and only the development of the self, or the Ego, is left. And the Self/Ego is your personality; therefore personal development (self-improvement). The problem with this personal development is that it has developed into a never-ending development, an egoistic philosophy. For an understanding of the necessity of an "Otherness" in spiritual practice, see my article **The philosophy of Krishnamurti**.

2) Becoming and being

The Ego always is in a state of becoming. Becoming is the central concept in the self-help industry: 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. 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.

Becoming is the central concept in the false spirituality of the self-help industry. Being is the central concept in true spirituality.

Becoming is actually the main hindrance for the opening into the source, the Good, the True and the Beautiful. It contains four philosophical hindrances for the opening in towards the Source (as mentioned I have described this in my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

Another problem with, that the self-help industry today is on the fixed curriculum in all educations is that life becomes one long examination, where you constantly have to develop your personality. An unavoidable part of the daily life is evaluation and continuous assessment of yourself, and what you do and feel. You can't avoid it. Therefore it is an ideology that penetrates everything. The workplace uses professional companies to mark and grade our performance and effectiveness. Our spouses relate runningly to, whether we continued are worth loving and living together with. Educators and schoolteachers call us in for meetings, where words are put on, whether we are good parents.

It becomes a lifelong examination, where we constantly strive after becoming something else, something more and better; a never-ending personal development. But instead of finding our inner "self", we become more and more stressful and insecure about, whether something is good enough. Anxiety and depression are spreading everywhere. What the self-help industry doesn't seem to understand is that discomfort, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear – are created by too much future and too little presence in the Now. Here we again have a paradox, because the self-help industry is talking a lot about being the now, at the same time as it, in its worship of becoming, doesn't allow this. Again: read more about this paradox in my article **Self-help and The Mythology of Authenticity**.

As I have shown in my article **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**, I claim that a new dangerous kind of feminism plays a central part in this tragic comedy.

3) The confusion of the Ego with the spiritual essence

Both self-help and true spirituality are, as mentioned, common in the belief, that humans have a divine core, which the goal is to reach. But the self-help industry is confusing the Ego with this divine core. And the main reason is that it has shut itself away from the wholeness, and the otherness.

And the starting is also the same: namely ignorance and suffering. But the paradox is, that when you start a self-help program, which is based on the above-mentioned confusion, then you make the ignorance and suffering even larger. That is the ingenious trick of the self-help industry in order to keep us as slaves (see my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**). The divine is simply a seducing persuasion-program.

A main reason for this is all the incompetent teachers in the self-help industry. It is teachers, who most often only have taken a weekend-course or two (for instance in NLP and coaching), whereafter they with their certifications go out, and are beginning telling people about philosophy, spirituality, life-philosophy and existence-philosophy. That is: teachers without any philosophical education.

Actually philosophy today has been directly removed from all theories of learning, and therefore you also have shut away the possibility for educated philosophers to get a chance on this market. A weekend-certification as NLP-coach, is today more valuable than an university degree in philosophy, even though both is about life-philosophy. If you want a book published, or appear in the medias, the best is to advocate the self-help industry. That is a fact, and an example on, that we here, from the highest political levels, can see some preferences and choices! You can in fact see the concept of personal development described in EU's project on lifelong learning, education and management theory. My concept of the Matrix Conspiracy is precisely developed because I quite seriously think, that we here see the beginning of one of the most dangerous, global spreading, ideologies of our time (again: see my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**).

So when you today make a self-help program into a guide for your life, it can encourage the development of narcissistic and egoistic human beings. The self-help industry is an expression of a "me-me-me-and-then-perhaps-you-if-it-serves-me-logic". This logic is not written in the many self-help books. Perhaps on the contrary. Here it is pouring with homespun philosophical rules of living. Egoism is nevertheless a logical consequence of that self-centredness, which goes hand in hand with the movement of the self-help industry. It is the hidden agenda, where it basically is about, that it is me and only me, who through *my* inner journey shall develop towards *my* self. Others are without importance in that connection. The result is the lonely personal developing human being, who works in order to find nothing else than herself.

4) The psychopath

If a person really succeeds in adopting the advices of the self-help books she really gets a problem. Not only does she have to fight with the never-ending development, and the egoism. She is also becoming a serious problem for her surroundings. Because she is now, as the Danish psychologist, Nina Østerby Sæther, says, a potential psychopath.

On a course about psychopaths Nina Østerby Sæther realized, that there was many similarities between psychopathic traits, and the advices, which are given in self-help books. It made her point out some frightening resemblances.

Though some of the self-help books' advices might sound similar to true spirituality (most often they directly quote and use spiritual texts), taken out of context, then you have to remember how the wholeness and otherness have been removed. Religion and philosophy have been reduced to psychology and psychotherapy. And when this happens it takes a totally wrong course.

The resemblances are:

Smarter

The psychopath: a psychopathic trait is to be extremely self-centered, and experiencing yourself as smarter than most. The conception of your own abilities and importance is unrealistic exaggerated.

Self-help: In one of the American self-help guru Wayne Dyer's books it is written that: "there is nothing wrong in perceiving yourself as perfect", and "don't be afraid of your own greatness".

More violent

The psychopath: Psychopaths can't take critique, resistance or defeats, something they express with violent anger or aggression.

Self-help: In the Danish self-help guru, Thoele's book "Courage to be yourself", she writes that it is "unhealthy not to give expression for your anger" (wrong! - see my article **Cathartic psychotherapies**)

Seeking experiences

The psychopath: Psychopaths have a big need for new experiences, and routine and monotony often have a provocative effect.

Self-help: Thoele writes: "If a child behaves poor and dull, we take its temperature. Why is it then we feel, that it is alright for ourselves to flow through life in an ordinary and boring way?"

Impulsiveness

The psychopath: The behaviour of the psychopath is characterized by impulsiveness. He follows the thoughts and lusts of the moment without thinking over the consequences, or future goals or actions.

Self-help: Dyer writes: “I have myself experienced, that you can live totally in the now, and I therefore know, that it is true” (this sounds like spirituality, but remember, that there is a big difference between instinctive reactions from the past, and being in the Now. Being in the Now can't be without self-forgetful absorption in the otherness, or in the wholeness. You are certainly not a person able to be completely in the Now, if you also are focusing on your own greatness and perfectionism).

Seeking excitement

The psychopath: Psychopaths are seeking excitement and therefore have a large will to run risks.

Self-help: Thoele writes: “I choose to live! To me this means a yes to take risks....if secureness has been achieved on the cost of stimulating and creative development, it will just strangle us.”

Indifference

The psychopath: The psychopath gives expression for having certain rights, which do, that he don't need to follow normal laws, rules, or even any moral.

Self-help: Thoele writes: “I have the right to say no, without bad conscience...I have the right to be different than what is expected of me.”

This is just one example on the many “alternative” interpretations of human rights, which are happening in the culture of self-help. Freedom of speech is today typically used as a justification of offending other people (see my article **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**). Another aspect of this is how positive psychology encourages people to ignore what they find negative (see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**).

Without empathy

The psychopath: The psychopath understands other humans from their actions, and is lacking the ability to familiarizing himself with others' thoughts and feelings. He has no problem with establishing relationships, but lacks the ability to attachment. Furthermore he often instrumentally uses others with the help of manipulation, where others are used in order to get his own lusts and needs satisfied.

Self-help: Thoele writes: “Emotional independence is a human right. Others’ expectations can be seen as hindering elements, and the goal is most possible release from these.”

You could also simply mention NLP, where “great communication skills” are seen as the ability to persuade others to do what you want (see my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**)

Guiltless

The psychopath: The psychopath doesn’t know what a sense of guilt is. He has a conspicuous tendency to explaining away, or rationalizing, his social problem-creating behaviour.

Self-help: The Danish self-help guru, Thorsøe, writes in his book *A little guide to modern quality of life*, that: “Guilt is meaningless, when it comes to feelings. Actual I would like to have the word guilt removed from language.”

Though guilt is a negative feeling, then Thorsøe obviously doesn’t understand, that this negative feeling contains a message about that there is something you have to change in your behaviour, precisely because you can’t escape an order of reality, which is beyond your control. But in a typical subjectivistic and relativistic way, he thinks, that you only feel guilt, because humans have constructed this concept.

Similar things are happening, when for example New Thought gurus think, that they without consequences can re-formulate the karma thought, so that it supports the ego, because this is a much more “positive” interpretation, than the old “negative” interpretation (see my articles **The New Thought movement and the law of Attraction** and **James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy**).

This distinction between old-thinking (negative) and new-thinking (positive), is, as already mentioned, happening again and again in the self-help industry. See the thought distortion *NewSpeak* in my book **A Dictionary of Thought Distortions**.

The below example illustrates Thorsøe’s rationalization of behaviour, which in the eyes of many people will be regarded as unethical, egoistic and irresponsible. The personal experienced story is an extract from Thorsøe’s self-help book, and are, without any self-reflection at all, introduced with the purpose of teaching his readers about personal development (self-improvement!) and modern quality of life:

Gymnasium teacher Thorsøe’s young student Line entrusts him, that she is sexual attracted by her new stepfather Erik. Teacher Thorsøe analyses the situation, and tells his student, that ”the structure in her emotional world quite clearly is an

attraction towards experienced, charming men”, and that she must accept herself. The student accepts the analysis, and...

The solution came from an unexpected angle: on a school journey to London Line discovered, that Erik wasn't the only answer to her fascination of experienced men. She had such a crush on me (Thorsøe), that I for a short while had trouble controlling the course. But since my own life of feelings also was in an un-released proces of renewal, it became a positive, and in reality necessary experience for both of us. When we came back to the usual surroundings – her school and my wife – we had to shorten the course, what influenced Line more than actually planned. But otherwise it is a good model: two persons, in each their crisis, help each other with taking the tiny step, that can bring them forward. (Thorsøe 1996: 36).

While Thorsøe legitimates the affair with his student using the concept about personal development (= psychology), it can, when using a moral perspective (= philosophy), be critized on several points. Thorsøe's relationship with Line can be regarded as both manipulative and instrumental, and moreover can his behaviour be understood as irresponsible and without compassion for his wife.

So, with starting point in moral (philosophy), we see, that it in practice is difficult to separate the personal developing person from the psychopath. We also see, that a subjectivistic moral – that is: a moral defined by the individual's feelings (psychology) – is no moral at all.

Nina Østby Sæther concludes, that the self-help books don't have any alibi against producing psychopath-like, self-actualizing humans. The psychopathic traits are simply lying smouldering in the books. Her moral is, that the self-actualizing psychopath can be seen as an “actual social character in the Western society”, supported by a whole industry of self-help books.

But when you think about how many people who are reading the self-help books, then it however is striking, that there then isn't that many psychopaths running around (yet). But the paradox in this is, that people seldom totally succeed in liberating themselves from a moral, that doesn't come from themselves. As a rule they have some kind of ethics they can't escape from (because they can't escape from the otherness, or the wholeness). The real psychopath hasn't got any ethics.

But this doesn't validate the self-help industry.

5) Back to the temple in Delphi

In accordance with the universal laws of energy, it is correct, that the thoughts and mind of Man are participating in creating the world, even the physical, but not in the way the self-help industry indicates it, yes, the self-help industry actual directly commit Hubris.

This misunderstanding consists in a lack of discrimination between compensatory karma and progressive karma. Compensatory karma could also be called negative karma, while the progressive karma could be called positive karma. The negative karma is caused by the ego, or when the thoughts' pendulum swings out in extremes, while the positive, progressive karma first will arise when the ego has been eliminated, and the thoughts are in balance between the extremes (read more about karma in my article **What is karma?**).

In connection with this, it is important to know the difference between a selfish use of energy, and an unselfish use of energy. You can also term this as a demonical use of energy, and a spiritual use of energy, or as black and white magic.

The Ego-religion and the Ego-exercises are the Ego's incessant confirmation or denial of the Ego: "it is no use with me!"; or: "wonderful me!". Both, either the denial or confirmation of the Ego, maintain the Ego-process, the Ego-identity and the Ego-centralization. The Ego's religion and exercises are the Ego's needs and longings and will: I want to, I think, I believe, I feel, I wish, I hope, I think, I believe, I feel, I wish, or, in its most common core: I, I, I....

The ordinary Ego-consciousness functions by being identified with the physical world, with instincts, sexuality, emotions and collective ideals. The traditional religious and philosophical exercises work through these aspects by means of, for example the core which exists in the basic monastic vows: poverty, chastity and obedience. These promises work with a restructuring of the Ego's ownership to things, food and power, and they re-structure sexuality and emotions. First thereafter the mystical process can begin. No kind of psychotherapy can bring about this.

The Ego-religion and the ego-exercises (as encouraged in the self-help industry) are black magic, satanism, etc. The Ego is a demonical structure, and it attracts demonical powers and energies, which also have been created by the Ego phenomenon. The same energy-process and function, which realized spiritual teachers use, can therefore be used for other purposes than spiritual. When the energy-processes of the astral plane's collective history are used spiritual, then the Ego, in its egoistic isolating and self-affirmative function, steps aside, and the energy is turned into the Now, and therefore in towards the Source and the spiritual dimension. The people, who around a spiritual teacher, constitute an energy-mandala, are in this way made transparent for a higher common human spirituality.

In a lesser realized person's use of energy the contact with, and the ability to manipulate with such collective forms of astral energy, can be used for other purposes than spiritual. It can be creative, Ego-affirmative, political, demonical and so on.

The powers that, by realized spiritual teachers, are given to others' disposal in healing, energy transmission and spiritual information exchange, the same powers can themselves be turned in through the Ego-structures, and therewith into past and future, and fragmentation (conflict). In this way there can be opened creative channels, created super Egos, created political leaders and popular seducers (in my article **The philosophy of Karen Blixen** I have investigated these phenomena in depth).

These phenomena are well known from history and from literature. In the story about the temptation in the desert, we can see these possible ways of using the energy pictured in anticipated form. Here you see the possibility of using the freedom and the power, to elevation of the Ego and the consequent power and material glory. But Jesus abstains from this deification of the Ego. It is also known from the Faust myth, described by for example Goethe and Thomas Mann.

When you in a selfish way use the powers from the collective history of the astral plane, and which demonical astral beings will help you with (because the ego phenomenon is their magnet of attraction) you can create personal power and material glory. That is the essence of black magic. But you will eventually meet the compensatory karma, or Nemesis.

You can in short not use these energies as you want to; that is: through, for instance, "positive" thinking.

The eternal circling around your own dreams, desires, success etc. will in other words be contra-balanced through the opposite categories. The self-help industry here exposes itself, and its followers, for the possibility of Nemesis.

An example: as soon as your thoughts spread themselves too much out in an extreme, the energy-system compensates by seeking to bring itself back to the balance of the middle. The system does this by seeking over towards the opposite extreme (for instance from perfectionism to feeling of fiasco). That is: through a contrabalancing, a compensation. The energy works as a pendulum. The more energy, which is invested in the one extreme of a pair of opposites, the larger the swing in the opposite direction becomes.

Now, if you test the self-help industry in relation to this law, then the law will say: the ideals about power/perfectionism/success only exist in relation to their opposites, namely powerlessness, fiasco, loss.

If you are extremely occupied by your own success, the system will seek to balance your thoughts by bringing them over in the opposite extreme, namely the powerlessness and the fiasco. It is therefore evident, that these modern ideals about being a success and a winner are participating in creating a swing over in stress, anxiety, depression – or failure, fiasco. The case of the self-help guru James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy is an example of how it happens in a context of New Age Shamanism (again: see my article **James Arthur Ray and the sweat lodge tragedy**). Another example of the dangerous consequences of New Age Shamanism is Holotropic Breathwork (see my article **A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**)

What is applying for the individual person, also is applying for the collective and for nature. You can therefore also watch these laws of energy in groups, societies, world-images, yes, in the whole of mankind, as well as in the Universe.

Today the Ego-extreme is reflected in countless fields. Too much energy is invested in armament; too many atomic weapons; too much pollution; too unequal distribution of the riches of the Earth; too unequal distribution of the food and fruits of the Earth. And first of all: too many people are too focused in their Ego; they accumulate energy to their Ego, to oneself; or to the family Ego; the company's Ego; the national Ego.

Now, if you look at the energy-law, then this is the energy in its one extremity. With necessity the energy will swing over in the opposite extreme. And this will not happen in a silent way, when you consider the enormous moment which is in the actual extreme, and it will happen very simple: through pollution of the environment, through disease (aids, cancer and other) through warfare, terror, crises, inner mass psychotic collapses, and through natural disasters.

However, a true spiritual practice is to be aware, when your thoughts move too far out. In the situation you can therefore try to remember the opposite extreme and seek to bring it in. This makes the situation much more true (this is actually also a quite central aspect of critical thinking – see examples in my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

The awareness itself is in the Now, in the oneness of the opposites, and therefore in the fulcrum, which is the unmoved being in the centre of the circular movement of time. Also when something else fluctuates and dances between the swings of the

extremes. Therefore the training of the awareness in itself will gradually prevent, that there is given impulse to the swings. It is the Golden Mean, which Aristotle and Buddha talked about, and which Lao Tse describes in his book Tao Te King.

The Golden Mean can generally be formulated as the art of balancing between the extremes *too much and too little*.

To strike the Golden Mean is an art of life, and to strike this path is a necessary suggestion for how we can prevent compensatory karma to happen, both in our own lifes, as in the world.

All articles and books referred to are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com

Copyright © 2014 by Morten Tolboll.

Terms of use:

http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.en_US