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Self-help and the Mythology of Authenticity

In my first book **Meditation as an art of life – a basic reader** I presented what I call the four philosophical hindrances and openings in towards the Source. I presented them in order to show what I think characterizes the spiritual practice, as it exists in all the traditional wisdomtraditions. Ever since I have become increasingly puzzled over, how the self-help industry - which claims to work in accordance with spirituality, and also are inspired by philosophy of life and philosophy of existence - is turning all this upside down. The paradox is that while the self-help industry is claiming to create the authentic, autonomous, resource-filled and competent human being, at the same time is doing the exact opposite: it is making people dependent of therapists, coaches, others ideas and ideals; making them modeling and imitating so-called successful people, etc., etc.

The one face of this paradoxical Janus head is the empowerment culture, the other face is the victimization culture (and the connected recovery movement).

In this article I will explain this paradox, and I will show that the difference between the self-help industry and spirituality is that where authenticity in the self-industry is the same as becoming another (authenticity is a dream, a mythology), then authenticity in spirituality is the same as being what you are (authenticity is reality); or said shortly: the difference between becoming and being. I will also show, that the reason for this turn is ideological founded.

The article is divided into eight parts:

- 1) The two world-images of the mythology of authenticity
- 2) Central aspects of the mythology of authenticity
- 3) The dream about becoming another
- 4) From religion and philosophy to psychology

- 5) From religious myths and rituals to psychology and therapy
- 6) The ideology of the authenticity-mythology
- 7) The four philosophical hindrances and openings
- 8) Becoming versus being: false spirituality versus true spirituality

1) The two world-images of the mythology of authenticity

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, who 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 article **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 former soldier from the special forces, 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.

Humanistic 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.

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 religion has in humanistic psychology and self-help industry 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 this way been turned upside down. See my article **The devastating New Age turn within psychotherapy**). Read more about humanistic psychology in my article **Humanistic psychology, self-help and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**

Constructivism

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.

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 sociologism, 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. Both the weak and the strong version somehow claim that reality is social constructed from our language, or linguistic mappings.

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.

The individual constructivism has the same ideas. According to Nietzsche there neither exists a sensuous, a material, or a spiritual world given in advance. Everything are created by being interpreted. 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.

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.

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 succes, 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.

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 (read more about constructivism in my article **Constructivism: the postmodern intellectualism behind New Age and the self-help industry**).

2) Central aspects of the mythology of authenticity

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 in explaining humans from a conception about, that humans have lost (or all the time are in risk of losing) 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 Krogsgdal calls the mythology of authenticity. This mythology is so to speak 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 Krogsgdal's examination (Krogsgdal 191-192, 2011):

1) Man comes to the world as himself: as untouched core (humanistic psychology/psychotherapy) or unlimited possibility (constructivism/coaching).

2) During childhood other humans, or the culture, takes over the management of Man. Thereby he loses himself (his self-possession) and becomes another.

3) 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").

4) 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.

5) 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.

6) 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).

7) 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.

8) 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 (I explain this problem-making of oneself in the last section of this article: **Becoming versus being: False spirituality versus true spirituality**).

In the constructivistic world-image (coaching and the hope for a richer future = the empowerment culture) 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 victimization culture and the connected recovery movement) the problem rather becomes formulated as a threat: "You are all the time in danger of that others draw you away from yourself".

The mythology of authenticity, as Krogstad here has described it, very much reminds about what the American psychology professor Frank Furedi has called "The Therapeutic Manuscript" (Furedi 2004, 91). This manuscript is a kind of un-written and very outspread script about how life typically forms itself to a human being, and how a human being through therapy all the time is in need of becoming healed. In accordance with this manuscript every single plane in a human being's life represents a kind of risk: human relations are the source of repeated emotional damages, and these damages have to be healed again and again through therapeutic intervention. Frank Furedi therefore sees the therapization of the late modern society as a kind of cultivation of fragility.

It can sound paradoxical in a time which praises the autonomous and self-responsible human being, but the spread of the therapeutic manuscript through psychology and therapy is precisely participating in educating people in believing, that they are irresponsible, helpless and therewith dependent of treatment (Furedi 2004, 119). People quite simply learn to see themselves as vulnerable victims, who all the time become exposed for assaults and therefore constantly have to be helped, supported, healed.

With the industrial modernization Man has cultivated a mind, which can solve almost any technological problem; that, which the German philosopher Habermas calls the instrumental reason. But apparently human problems have never been solved. On the contrary mankind are about to be drowned in its problems: problems concerning communication, the relationship with others, heaven and hell. The whole of the human existence has become one extremely complex problem. And apparently it has been like that through the whole of history. Despite the knowledge of Man, despite his millenniums of evolution, Man has never been free from such problems.

The solutions to such problems require a communicative (philosophical/spiritual) reason, a reason, which understands the human community. But as Habermas says,

then we are not using such a reason, on the contrary we are using an instrumental reason on human problems, where it only should be used on technical problems. We seek to solve human problems technically, where they should be solved in a philosophical way. The systems (the market, the economy, the bureaucracy, the systems) have colonized the lifeworld.

An aspect of, that the instrumental reason has conquered territory from the communicative reason consists in, that we in connection with human problems treat each other as means or as items, which have come on the wrong course (the treatment society). It is interesting, that the New Age movement, which actually should be a spiritual alternative to this, and be an advocate for a communicative reason, on the contrary is one of the most aggressive advocates for the instrumental reason. This is due to its psychologizing of philosophy. New Age is possessed with all kind of self-invented forms of treatment, and with pseudoscientific attempts to justify them as science. Often they manipulative use instrumental/scientific inspired terms about their methods, but which are without any scientific meaning at all. It is just a rhetorical trick to persuade people to pay the fee.

So, in the mythology of authenticity people are seen as a kind of victims. Through childhood and the influence of others they have lost themselves or their original self-feeling. In the therapy – as Krogstad understands broadly as all personality developing work, whether it takes place at a therapist, in courses, in in-service training, or at home alone – people once again get the possibility for letting go of their roles of victims. At the same time they also, in accordance with the mythology of authenticity, get the possibility for actualizing their subconscious potentials.

In this way the mythology of authenticity keeps, in accordance with Krogstad, its own practice – that will say therapy in broad sense – alive through the assertion about the chronic lack of authenticity. This lack comes to expression in the myths about Man as a victim of others' assaults, or as victim of the who-do-you-think-you-are attitude and other cultural limitations. Krogstad says, that just like the Christian church (especially formerly and in its Catholic form) roughly said determines Man as a sinner, which regularly has to get absolution, and just like the church through this ritual revival of the faith keeps the faith "alive", in the same way the mythology of authenticity defines Man as a lost or not yet gained self, who regularly has to heal (humanistic psychology) or form (constructivism) himself in the therapeutic practice. In this fundamental way the myth-rite-system maintains itself: the mythology refers to the therapeutic practice, and the practice revives and revitalizes the mythology. All in a continuous, circular movement.

So, as Krogstad says, on the one hand the authenticity-mythology paradoxically enough confesses Man as independently, while it on the other hand makes Man dependent of therapeutic help (broadly understood as both therapy, dialogues or self-therapeutic work) by defining him as a damaged or not-yet-genuine individual, which is in need of constant personal development.

3) The dream about becoming another

The conception about that a quite ordinary person in the starting point not yet is himself or not yet is fully realized, is in accordance with Krogstad also the conception about, that Man in reality *is* another (psychotherapy and the dream about a lost past) or *ought* to become another (coaching and the hope for a richer future). The problem "I am not authentic" becomes today often expressed more positive in the mainstream-assumption that people *always* are something more and greater than they believe they are. There are always hidden potentials and resources to fetch in the individual. To become yourself is therewith in accordance with the mythology of authenticity the process, with which Man actualizes himself as potential and goes through an extensive transformation to the better.

With the promise about a transformation to the better the mythology of authenticity has in accordance with Krogstad a fundamental feature in common with another of the large-scale suppliers of myths in the age of authenticity: the advertising industry. The modern advertising culture induces the hope, that you quickly and easily can replace one identity with another, that you through a consumer-defined change of life-style can transform your life thoroughly. You can so to speak through consumer-choices become an *other* and *better* version of yourself. The problem of authenticity (that you not yet are yourself) and the longing, which arises from this problem (the longing after becoming yourself) is in this way today parallel with the indirectly claim of the advertising-world to people about, that they constantly need new products, which can make them into new and better people.

Both the advertising-industry and the self-help industry draw on the story about Man as a not-yet; a story which reduces the present to branches of the future and looks at people as potentials, and not as something already realized. Both industries profit in this way, Krogstad thinks, from the authenticity-mythological propaganda about the dream about, that you in reality *are* another (humanistic psychology) – or that you always can *become* another (constructivism). In the now Man is insufficient, he is always on a station *before* himself, and therefore all the time must be future-oriented. You can also say, that both advertising-industry and authenticity-mythology put forward *growth* as the solution to the late modern human being's problems.

In the humanistic psychological world-image and in the constructivistic world-image this growth-ideology not only expresses itself as a promising invitation to become a better, more fantastic and life-capable other, but also as a threat. Lack of authenticity actually becomes connected with danger: the person who lives unconscious without knowing and unfolding himself, basically risks to become both psychical and physical sick. In accordance with humanistic psychology restrained feelings will at some point begin to express themselves in inappropriate ways, for instance as pains, illnesses, depression or stress.

The request for growth becomes in this way not alone what Krogstad calls carrot-stories which focus on the possibility for getting a better life – but also a kind of whip-stories. They are whip-stories because they tell Man that he is a self-explaining being with positive intentions alone, and whose suffering *always* is a *symptom* on, that something is wrong (that he thinks wrongly). Therewith they also tell that suffering is a from within coming request for personal growth, which – if it isn't obeyed – leaves Man as self-made (though *unconscious* self-made) inappropriate behaviour, illness and suffering. The punishment of lack of authenticity – that will say: lack of personal development and self-expression – can in the growth-ideology be tough.

So personal development is in accordance with the world-images not only about all the good, you can become, but just as well about the evil, which can happen if you don't obey the demand of growth. You can say that the growth-conception of the authenticity-mythology not only solves "the problem of happiness" by justifying achievement, success and health from within, but also solves "the problem of evil" by explaining fiasco, unsuccessfulness and illness from the individual human being's lack of authenticity. To be in non-growth is to risk yourself and your own health.

In that sense the growth-demand in the two world-images is so fundamental, that non-growth is being made sickly. The healthy person is the person who works with himself – the sick person is the person who *not yet* has reacted on himself, realized himself, actualized his symptom-giving potential. Growth is considered the touchstone of normality, and therefore absolutely necessary.

In that way we, in accordance with Krogstad, today see a rising tendency to anomalizing or making non-growth sickly. Today we increasingly adapt or treat conditions, which before were regarded as normal conditions (this also happens in the pharmaceutical industry). Today the therapeutic market with its enormous supply of everything from self-help books which is sold in bestseller-numbers, to therapy for couples, birth coaching, communication training, general personal development, life-coaching, management training and business-coaching, obviously isn't reserved sick

people, but on the contrary is a market which recruits clients *alone* in these clients' quality of being parents, partners, mothers, fathers, child rearers, employees, leaders, colleagues – shortly said: in their quality of being humans in an individualized and psychologized culture. You can say that being human in the age of authenticity is to have constantly "potential" for therapeutic treatment – a potential which becomes mythologized and legitimized through the new world-images, while they increasingly becomes outspread as the mainstream-understanding of life.

From many interests, for instance professionalism and economical, the late modern world in this way *treat* people as "not-yets" with constantly referral to authenticity-mythological stories about human psycho-social development. Seen from this growth-perspective the individual person as "present" is being problematized and therewith made to subject for therapeutic attention, at the same time as the now in more general sense has lost its right.

In a growth-oriented culture which praises Man as resource-strong, the eye of what someone or something *not yet* are, has paradoxically enough become immensely sharp. When people and professions in the age of authenticity look at themselves and each other, they in large scale do this with the future's eyes, and seen with the future's eyes the now has not yet become future, and therewith basically not *good enough*. When the future becomes everythings scale, change becomes, in accordance with Krogstad, to a touchstone of human normality. The late modern Capitalistic society praises the changeable, growth-oriented, personal developing and flexible person – contrary to the stable, past-oriented and finished person (Sennett 1999).

The Danish ethnologist Kirsten Marie Bovbjerg has with starting point in NLP Courses shown how this future-orientation comes to expression in the working life, where the view of Man as a potential in large scale forms the starting point for the industry of employee-development and modern management (Bovbjerg 2001). Through the potential-idea the Capitalistic growth-ideal therefore increasingly colonizes humans' experience of themselves. As potentials people get market value and are being made into substance as merchandise or shares you can invest in; the self becomes habitat of resources, which can be extracted and cultivated with the future as only horizon.

This therapeutic potential-eye on Man comes in accordance with Krogstad to expression in a number of other places than in the actual psychological and therapeutic practice. It also appears in the spread of personal development methods to the pedagogical world and to the school system, where teachers increasingly have taken the emphatic therapist's role, and where acknowledgement and focus on the individual pupil's resources and development-potential has become a quite natural

approach. It also appears in the rising demand for self-improvement techniques, in the last years especially in the phenomenon coaching (constructivism) which focus always is concrete action, and which therefore expresses the conception, that you always can do something about something.

The increased speak of and use of sexologists is an expression of the same development. And finally it is in accordance with Krogstad quite certainly not accidentally that they also in the entertainment-industry in these years are intensely occupied by the undiscovered and un-cultivated talent; by exposing the ordinary person who in reality appears to be unusual fantastic, to be a hidden star, to have so-called X-factor.

4) From religion and philosophy to psychology

In the traditional religions the divine is defined as an otherness which transcends Man. Man only becomes himself by being in relation with this otherness, which precisely in its power of otherness is eternal and endless, and which determines Man both existential, conceptual (thought and language), ethical, cognitional and metaphysical: that will say: it defines Man in philosophical sense.

Through a few truly spiritual practising men and women there has in all great religions arisen a spiritual practice which represented, not only a rediscovery, but in some cases an intensification of the light of an original teaching, universal and common to all mankind. Thus Gnosticism and Mysticism arisen in the early and medieval Christianity, Sufism in Islam, Hasidism and Cabbala in Judaism, Advaita Vedanta in Hinduism, Zen and Dzogchen in Buddhism.

Unlike the established religions this teaching is laying its emphasis on realization and inner transformation. And it is this which constitute the *philosophical* element in the spiritual practice.

It is therefore I make much out of involving the concept of philosophy, for thereby to explain the essential role this concept has in the meditative process. This is because that the concept of spirituality, with the progress of psychology in the Western countries, far too often is being psychologized, with a lot of distortions, and misleadings as result. The psychologizing of the meditation-concept itself - that is to say: the psychologizing of the philosophical aspects of the meditation-concept - is namely a reductionism; that is: a distortion of human nature.

In the following I will use the word God in the above-mentioned sense, and describe the psychologizing tendency. Note, that even though they in some of the above-

mentioned directions use similar concepts as in self-help industry, for example the concept “self”, then this “self” also is defined in relation with an otherness.

In a secularized world, where God as ”explanation” of the occurrences of life plays a still lesser role, psychology steps in on the ground with a modern system of explanation. Today, where people long ago have stopped explaining the ups and downs of life through a God or other cosmic powers, still more people explain themselves through psychology. They turn their eyes inwards. Introspection is a quite central concept in the method which is used in the self-help industry; contrary to the traditional spiritual traditions where the only possibility for discovering yourself is to see your relationships as a mirror.

The system of explanation which today replaces the old cosmic system with for example God and Devil, is in this way in very high degree a system of *self*-explanation, which in widely extent draws on psychology as the teaching about, and the interest in, the human inner. People today more than ever relate to themselves, and their own past, when they have to explain why they are standing in a given life-situation. And when the course of the world has to be explained in a psychologized age, it often becomes explained as a product of the growing up conditions of single individuals and consequently psychical conditions.

This psychologizing of Man has with the self-help industry been led to its temporarily extremity. In self-help environments most people try to find an autobiographical-psychological explanation of everything: the individual person is fully explained from within by the subconscious mind. In the self-help industry the explanation of the world’s condition is basically the hidden positive intention in the individual person, which has a line of inner hidden agents in form of the so-called subconscious parts. It is these parts, and their mutual interplay or struggles, which create a human being’s behaviour. The behaviour is all that, which as outcome of something else, come to expression in a human being’s thinking, feelings, conceptions, body and communication with others.

A self-help practitioner refers (as a principal rule) neither to God, society or coincidence, when he becomes ill, abandoned, sacked, loved, employed or healed. A self-help practitioner will typically look into himself, into his own subconscious, after explanations. In the same way the world’s general condition to a high degree also is understood from the inner of single individuals. After all, the world’s problems are essentially the result of single individuals’ lack of personal development and self-insight, and they can therefore best be solved by that every single person so to speak gets control of his personal development. The more authentic people, the better the world.

As a kind of psychologized utopia the mythology of authenticity promises, in accordance with Krogstad, salvation through the individual human being's work with himself. When the individual becomes authentic (find again and expresses himself) it is happening for the best of *both* own and the collective. There is no opposition between personal development and community; the individual's journey inwards expresses that the individual is on the way into a collective journey; when the individual becomes whole, the collective becomes healed. Conflicts, crises and class struggles basically arise because people not have worked with themselves; because they not are enough personally developed, because they act from un-released childhood traumas (psychotherapy) or un-released potentials (coaching). The world is problematic because it consists of psychical wounded or un-unfolded humans, who are acting from a lack of consciousness about themselves.

Until people becomes aware and able to integrate the repressed parts in themselves, until they therewith become *whole* and *healed*, they are in accordance with the new world-images reduced to be limited and as such not appreciative towards others; they are reduced to be un-constructive, intolerant and in other ways inappropriate in their behaviour towards both themselves and others, not at least the children they are parents of.

Krogstad refers to a NLP-practitioner who says:

“Original sin is that we carry our childhood's traumas with us. If you for example have grown up with an absent father, then you often come to be absent towards your own children.”

So, victims without self-insight are in accordance with this way of thinking inclined to produce new victims in a world, where original sin has been reduced to the determinism of the childhood trauma.

We here explicitly see the reductionism. I have before explained that our thinking, as well as our painbody, not only has a personal history, but also a collective and universal history (see my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it** – where the concept of original sin is explained). And I am not speaking about the collective or the universal in psychological sense, as for example Jung's or Stanislav Grof's collective subconscious. I speak about both the collective and universal history as ontological and metaphysical karmacially structures, which are lying in the wholeness; accordingly not in the psyche (see my article **What is karma?**). The psyche doesn't contain the wholeness as humanistic psychology is claiming. That would be an example of the thought distortion called *Nondual bias*.

Nondual bias arises when you describe something as nondual, while forgetting that you can't describe anything without implying the negation of it.

The only thing that can be said to be nondual is the wholeness. The wholeness is lying in human relationship with the otherness, and only in the relationship it can be discovered, not by way of introspection. See my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with mystical experiences, A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**, and my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**.

Both the collective and universal history are in this reductionism cut away, and that is a problem, when you at the same time work with spiritual practice, for example meditation, which with time will bring both the collective and universal history for the day, and that will say karmacially structures. It will cause the danger of spiritual crises, perhaps especially the "positive" aspect of a spiritual crisis, namely the ego-inflation (see my articles **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena**, and **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**).

Within the alternative environment of New Age and the self-help industry intellectual ego-inflation is extremely widely spread, and when the game, as here, is about the development of Man, about the depths of the mind, about archetypical powers, about the source of life, then intellectual ego-inflation can be a hazardous play. When the intellectual knowledge begins to approach philosophical and religious areas, wisdom of life, meditation, spirit, then the ego can misjudge itself by being intoxicated by its intellectual understanding of deep phenomena.

The reduction of all this to something inner-psychic (where the deeper collective and universal history have been reduced to the personal history) is self-deception, it is ego-inflation – and it will unavoidably lead to misguiding of others.

The psychologizing of explanation has a line of historical causes, but when it today has become so outspread, then this, in accordance with Krogstad, is closely connected with, that many people find it difficult to navigate in a globalized and increasingly unpredictable world. Many structural connections are today out of human control, the everyday life has to the individual person become risky and unpredictable, and therefore many increasingly turn to themselves and their own control sphere, in order to practise a kind of control with themselves, their own body, their own life style.

Control makes us feel powerful, which is a good feeling. And feeling that your own thoughts are in control of everything that happens is comforting to many people, for example the New Thought idea about that your thoughts can control an universal law called the law of attraction, which will give you anything you desire, if you just use

your thoughts in the correct way (see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**).

Is there any harm in this? What's the harm in obliterating truth and reality in favor of what you want to be true? A great deal of harm can come from deluding yourself that you can control your health or your wealth, or somebody else's health or wealth, by your thoughts and prayers or other superstitious actions.

In my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it**, I explain how the painbody, through the inner evaluating ego, is connected with the more dangerous depths of the astral plane's collective history; you might call it original sin or negative karma. This you can't control.

In my article **The value of having a religion in a spiritual practice** I describe that only an intervention from 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 be able to receive this help you must do your part of the work: the spiritual practice. Many years. And this means that you need to re-structure the ego's ownership to things, food, power, sexuality and emotions. First thereafter the mystical process can begin.

The magnet of attraction, which the ego is controlled by – (the ego's identity with the material world: instincts, sexuality, emotions, desire, collective ideals, ownership, power) – will in a true spiritual practice loose its attraction. Very few people will be willing to do this. On the contrary many people have today done an illusory work of trying to re-define this ancient wisdom, so that the magnet of attraction directly is becoming the object of worship. That's what the law of attraction movement is about.

Another aspect of the true spiritual practice is that you break the automatic process of compensatory karma, which is closely related to laws of nature, cycles of life, yes actually pure causal regularity of mechanical kind. It would an illusion to connect such things with a superior intentional divine order (see the thought distortion *Intentionality bias*).

Furthermore you have your free will either to continue to be identified with the area of compensatory karma, or break with it, into the area of progressive karma (where the mystical process begins) – about karma see my articles **What is karma?**, and **A critique of Stanislav Grof and Holotropic Breathwork**.

In Taoism and Zen they talk about the concept of Wu Wei which means non-activity, passive listening presence, non-control, non-interfering, which lead to Tzu-jen, spontaneity and naturalness. In Zen they for example talk about that when practising

Wu Wei you are letting the grass grow by itself. Also the Stoic concept of *Apátheia* (the Stoic calmness) is about this - which you by the way find in all wisdom traditions. So, it is puzzling that they in the Self-help industry often quote these wisdom traditions as if the self-help ideology is in perfect harmony with these. The fact is that the self-help industry is an extreme example of the illusion of control, when believing that you via the "power of thought" can attract (control) everything you can dream of.

Illusion of control is related to Ego-inflation

That the eye for larger structural connections falls away for the benefit of focus on the individual person and his problems can in accordance with Krogstad be seen as a kind of resignation, where people draw themselves back to themselves and at the same time give up themselves as cultural critical beings. Yes, critical thinking – and that will both say philosophy and science - is directly under attack, partly from constructivism, which forms the postmodern intellectualism (and therefore the ideology) behind New Age and the self-help industry (see my article **Constructivism: the postmodern intellectualism behind New Age and the self-help industry**); partly from the psychologizing demand for therapeutic solutions to everything.

In a complex world, where problems are explained from the actions of the individual, and where actions are explained from psychological dispositions, it is not strange, that you increasingly turn to therapeutic solutions to enormous structural problems. The psychologizing therewith risks to contribute to a kind of cultural anaesthesia, or intellectual laziness, which all the time reduces the individual person to have to explain himself from within, instead of relating critical to things which may arrive from outside. Conversely the self-help industry's reaction to outside coming critique indeed also - rather than answering the critique in objective form; that is: via argumentation – is demanding that the critic has to explain himself from within – as if it was a kind of psychotherapeutic inquisition. And this explanation is demanded to avoid philosophical argumentation; that is: critical thinking. It requires that you accept to be in a therapeutic situation, and explain yourself *only* in psychological terms. This therapeutic approach to everything is seen in its most extreme form in Nonviolent Communication (see my article **Nonviolent Communication (NVC) is an instrument of psychic terror**).

Krogstad claims that with the psychologizing of everything, the subconscious in Man quite simply becomes ascribed the intentions which before were ascribed to God. "Response" becomes increasingly inside; meaning is coming from within; both the world and the individual are depth-psychical defined. The struggle for a better world

therefore no longer takes place on an outside political, philosophical or religious scene, but rather on an inner battlefield. It is not the world, which has to be controlled – it is the individual human being's own hidden inner.

5) From religious myths and rituals to psychology and therapy

Dependent on definition of religion and agenda you can discuss, whether the new world-images and psychotherapies together constitute a new kind of religion, or whether they otherwise constitute something quite different. It is characteristic of both New Age and the self-help industry, that the fewest practitioners want to hear talk about, that they should be part of a religion – partially because religion in accordance with the common comprehension is about God (and self-help isn't), because religion is a teaching (self-help only consists of techniques), and because religion often suppresses the individual person (self-help is claiming to set Man free).

But both psychology, and the many methods which belong to the psychologizing, in many ways look like religion in more traditional sense, and there is quite explicitly talk about a new ideology; that is: ideology as understood in relation to philosophy, which I will explain later in this article.

Both religion and psychology are using certain world-images which *explain* the world, and make use of a line of rituals which are used to change the individual and the condition of the world. And what is more important: both within religion and psychology they all the time refer to something which is hidden for the individual person, but which can be contacted and interpreted both by Man himself and by the experts.

In the classical Christian system the experts are first of all experts in God, but in the psychologized system the experts are experts in the psyche with all its hidden, subconscious layers. You can in accordance with Krogstad claim that "the subconscious" has taken over the transcendent God's function as place of explanation, and that this subconscious now becomes interpreted by therapists as a kind of priests who are experts in interpreting the signals of the subconscious mind. Since we have to do with a hidden power – something invisible which works on a different plane in life than what we directly understand or have access to – the experts get a very big role to play. They have as experts precisely specialized in understanding this invisible reality, how it arises, how it gives signals, and how it works both inside the individual person and in the interaction between people. They are the mediators who have to help the individual to understand himself from this hidden. Because there is something hidden going on we are in other words also cultivating a need of

professional "interpreters" who can pass on and interpret that which we not ourselves can look through, but which plays an essential role in how our lives work out.

Just like people in premodern time believed in an outside power, God, and therefore as something obvious adapted themselves a priesthood, still more people today believe in the inner, subconscious potential and therefore quite obvious go to see psychologists, psychotherapists and coaches in their attempt of understanding and explaining themselves.

Another way of saying it is that the classical, religious longing after God has become a new longing: the longing after a self; a different self, a more genuine self; or perhaps just a self. Something which is standing firm in a world where everything else all the time risk to fall. This longing becomes dictated by the new world-images and kept alive through therapy as their fundamental ritual. Therapy here has to be understood very broadly. It can both be the concrete therapeutic conversation between a psycho-expert and a client, or it can be therapeutic exercises the individual practises at home alone after having read self-help books.

So in accordance with the new world-images it is not sin and lack of God, which are the fundamental problems of Man – it is rather traumas and lack of authenticity. To work with personal development is therefore about trying to heal traumas and come in contact with yourself. In a time where religion increasingly becomes replaced with psychology people no longer want to be sinners. They want to be themselves, and preferable all the time in another and better version.

Regardless of whether you choose to see the new world-images and their rituals – psychotherapy and coaching – as a religious system, or not, it is evident, that they to a high degree sell their services on the same market as religion in classical sense. When people today have to find out who they are, and how they want to live, they in far higher degree go to the psychologist or the therapist than to the priest. The church is lying far away and good out on the hill and becomes used to solemnities: baptism, confirmation, wedding, funeral service and Christmas. The everyday life and the life-perspective of the individual are no longer neither the area of the church or of Christianity (or other religions). Under any circumstance you can say that modern people with the new world-images and therapeutic rituals today has discovered alternative, or at any rate supplementary, ways of explaining and cultivating themselves, and that psychology and psychotherapy in practice are in progress of taking over that market of meaning, which before in special degree belonged to religion and philosophy.

The psychotherapeutic practice has today got a line of the functions which before in marked degree belonged to the church: confession has today been turned into psychotherapy, church service has become replaced by psychotherapeutic rituals and the church's traditional administration of a superior system of explanation of both the single person's daily life and of life altogether has today got competition from psycho-experts, who also work with both explanation and meaning. Alone the number of therapists measured against the number of priests, speak for itself. In Denmark there approximately are 2000 vicars, while there after Krogsdal's estimation are *at least* 15.000 NLP-practitioners with a minimum of a basic education in NLP. Add to this a far larger number of people, who are shortly educated in NLP, for example in connection with after- and in-service training, as well as an unknown number of NLP-coaches.

If you spread the perspective out and only see NLP as a small subdivision of the general psychologizing and therapization of the late modern life, you can include the tens of thousands of therapists, coaches, sexologists, psychotherapists and psychologists (and in yet farther sense: educators, teachers, social workers, etc., etc., etc.), who today become consulted by individual persons, families and larger groups, from variants of authenticity-mythological basic stories.

The market of meaning and explanation are therewith, Krogsdal thinks, today to a high degree handed over from, for example, Christianity and the church as institution, to a multifold and numerous series of practitioners, of which NLP-therapists, NLP-coaches and NLP-consultants only constitute a lesser but eminently expansionary part. They are both participating in formulating many peoples' quest for identity (Who am I? Who do I preferable want to be? Where shall I go?) and to give the answer to the same questions; questions which before were answered by religion and philosophy. The answers are now usually: you are more than you believe, you'll preferable be a more genuine version of yourself, and: you have to go the way, which is true to *you* (In my book **Meditation as an Art of Life – a basic reader** I have given a line of answers to a line of similar fundamental philosophical questions, but from a *philosophical* perspective, and *not* a psychological; or said differently: from a non-reductionistic point of view).

Since we at the same time today as society increasingly praise the freedom of the individual, two questions become quite decisive for the individual person: How do I gain power over my life? And how much can I actually myself control and plan?

In accordance with the new psychologizing world-images the answers are: You take power over your life by developing yourself constantly – and you can control your

existence much more than you know, in fact, you can create your life as it suit you, alone through the power of the thought.

The new world-images and their accompanying rituals therewith noticeably effortless connect with the old, liberal virtues and with the increasingly neo-liberalization of views of human nature and views of life in a late modern growth-society: a human being's life is first of all his own responsibility, and the others' lives are first of all the others' responsibility. Everybody have in the starting point the potential to live and unfold self-responsible, and they *ought* to make optimal use of this potential. The ideal human life is the life where a person makes his own life-decisions, sets his own agenda, takes largest possible responsibility for himself, steps in character and in all ways strives after acting as an independently and masterful person.

But at the same time as the new world-images accordingly go hand in hand with an individualistic and liberalistic view of human nature, they are paradoxically enough also instrumental in cultivating a market for therapeutic treatment. On this market many people increasingly learn to see themselves as vulnerable and disposed, and at the same time they therewith learn, that they are in need of therapy or of working therapeutical with themselves, if they want to have an optimal and – especially – *authentic* life. It is this paradox, which in accordance with Krogstad, is clinging to the therapization of life: that the more the ideal about the independent and authentic person becomes outspread, the more treatment and practitioners are needed.

In the premodern society, where a transcendent God still existed, and where people to a high degree understood themselves from this God, it was not a pronounced life-task to go beyond themselves. Towards God you remain small. Today, where God so to speak has moved into the human subconscious, or where the path to God at any rate goes through this subconscious, things have become more complicated. People can no longer understand themselves as tiny and "finished" towards a larger, outside power – or they can't, as in traditional spirituality, understand authenticity as just being what you are, no matter how insignificant or negative it might seem in relation to your own or others' ideals. They rather understand themselves as including something great and unknown, which all the time have to be explored and unfolded – shortly said: "treated". They are not finished in advance, they are all the time on the way; on the way of finding, becoming and out-living themselves in a changeable world, where nothing anymore is standing eternally firm. There exists no outside centre of rotation of the human life, no outside firm point which you can see the world from. But instead there exists the conception about the authentic self as the place the world can be seen from. And this has to be continuous seeked and developed through therapeutic treatment, where authenticity is understood as that to become another.

Nor is it therefore longer, as the most obvious, the church, you return to when life has to be interpreted into a larger meaning – it is rather therapy. It is in therapy you find yourself, feel yourself, exceed yourself and create connection and meaning. Where the self no longer becomes defined through religion and cosmology it looks like that it precisely is about to become the assignment of therapy continuously to connect people with their actions – assist them in creating correspondence between what they fundamentally are (humanistic psychology) or choose to be (constructivism) – and what they deal with and make in the world.

Therapy has in other words become the place, or the refuge, the world in a psychologized age can be seen and understood from. Therapy becomes a new "order", a new stabilizing factor in a changeable human life. It is in a very large degree therapy which unravels and collects the threads of life for the individual person. Therefore Krogstad also thinks that you can see therapy – in broadest sense – as more than only a means of personal development. Therapy is a personality developing process which has to be repeated and repeated, and it therewith also itself becomes a goal. To go in therapy increasingly *in itself* becomes a fixed point, yes perhaps even the red thread in a flowing and changeable world.

Self-help, psychotherapy and coaching are today an example of how people constantly are reduced to having to find, develop and explain themselves from psychologized ideas about the human life. God as explanation is no longer seriously current in an off-traditionalized and secularized world. We have therewith been set free from the large, traditional religious communities and of religion's superior education of believers to think and live in quite certain ways – but on the other hand our existence has in the same breath been psychologized and we have therewith been made available for new, individualized forms of therapeutic intervention.

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.

As mentioned in the beginning: The one face of this paradoxical Janus head is the empowerment culture, the other face is the victimization culture (and the connected recovery movement).

Fortunately some other critics have also discovered this paradox, for example the investigative reporter Steve Salerno in his book *SHAM – How the Self-Help Movement Made America Helpless*, and the American lawyer and writer Wendy Kaminer in her book *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions*

Self-help: To millions of Americans it seems like a godsend. To many others it seems like a joke. But as Steve Salerno reveals in his groundbreaking book, it's neither—in fact it's much worse than a joke. Going deep inside the Self-Help and Actualization Movement (fittingly, the words form the acronym SHAM), Salerno offers the first serious exposé of this multibillion-dollar industry and the real damage it is doing—not just to its paying customers, but to all of American society.

Based on the author's extensive reporting—and the inside look at the industry he got while working at a leading “lifestyle” publisher—SHAM shows how thinly credentialed “experts” now dispense advice on everything from mental health to relationships to diet to personal finance to business strategy. Americans spend upward of \$8 billion every year on self-help programs and products. And those staggering financial costs are actually the least of our worries.

SHAM demonstrates how the self-help movement's core philosophies have infected virtually every aspect of American life—the home, the workplace, the schools, and more.

Salerno shows the paradox by claiming that SHAM has two polar camps: One camp is Victimization. The other camp is Empowerment. And Salerno exposes the downside of being uplifted, showing how the “empowering” message that dominates self-help today proves just as damaging as the blame-shifting rhetoric of self-help’s “Recovery” movement, which are connected with the Victimization culture.

SHAM also reveals:

- How self-help gurus conduct extensive market research to reach the same customers over and over—without ever helping them.
- The inside story on the most notorious gurus—from Dr. Phil to Dr. Laura, from Tony Robbins to John Gray.
- How your company might be wasting money on motivational speakers, “executive coaches,” and other quick fixes that often hurt quality, productivity, and morale.
- How the Recovery movement has eradicated notions of personal responsibility by labeling just about anything—from drug abuse to “sex addiction” to shoplifting—a dysfunction or disease.
- How Americans blindly accept that twelve-step programs offer the only hope of treating addiction, when in fact these programs can do more harm than good.
- How the self-help movement inspired the disastrous emphasis on self-esteem in our schools.
- How self-help rhetoric has pushed people away from proven medical treatments by persuading them that they can cure themselves through sheer application of will.

As Salerno shows, to describe self-help as a waste of time and money vastly understates its collateral damage. And with SHAM, the self-help industry has finally been called to account for the damage it has done.

Wendy Kaminer’s book *I’m Dysfunctional, You’re Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions* is a non-fiction book about the self-help industry.

The book is a strong critique of the self-help movement, and focuses criticism on other books on the subject matter, including topics of codependency and twelve-step programs.

The author addresses the social implications of a society engaged in these types of solutions to their problems, and argues that they foster passivity, social isolation, and attitudes contrary to democracy.

Of the self-help movement, Kaminer writes: "At its worst, the recovery movement's cult of victimization mocks the notion of social justice by denying that there are degrees of injustice."

Kaminer also criticizes the lack of a free-forum for debate and reasoning within these groups, noting that those who disagree with the tenets of the organization are immediately branded "in denial", similar to the way a fundamentalist might characterize a free-thinker as a heretic.

Kaminer gives a deconstruction of the history and methodology of some of these groups, which are depicted in the book as simplistic and narcissistic. She blames New Age thinking for encouraging "psychologies of victimization."

She explains a two-step process used to write a popular self-help book: First, "Promote the prevailing preoccupation of the time," (either health or wealth) and then "Package platitudes about positive thinking, prayer or affirmation therapy as sure-fire, scientific techniques."

Kaminer maintains that self-help has negative effects on both politics and personal development.

Kaminer acknowledges that there are those who have real problems and receive benefit from groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, but she also "picks apart the tenets of the recovery religion – for she sees striking parallels with religious fundamentalism."

In addition to Alcoholics Anonymous and the codependency movement, other books and self-help movements critiqued in the book include Norman Vincent Peale's 1952 book *The Power of Positive Thinking* and Werner Erhard's *Erhard Seminars Training "est" organization*.

The writings of Mary Baker Eddy, and Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* are also analyzed and critiqued.

Though Kaminer "ridiculed the excesses of self-help psychology and theology," she approved of the motivational work done by Rabbi Harold Kushner.

Kaminer criticized the effect that talk shows have on American society, and recounted how a producer for The Oprah Winfrey Show coached participants to "jump in" and interrupt each other on the show.

Kaminer writes that it is not the content that appears on talk shows that is the problem, but rather that "they claim to do so much more than entertain; they claim to inform and explain. They dominate the mass marketplace and make it one that is inimical to ideas."

At the time of the book's publication, Kaminer cited a statistic from industry sources asserting that ninety-six percent of the population in the United States were victims of codependency and warped family upbringing.

Note: In connection with the postmodern intellectualism (subjectivism and relativism) I claim that both the Empowerment culture and the Victimization culture are closely related to the power of reductionism in our culture. When you today ask: what is a human being? Then most people answer, that Man "is a product of heredity and environment". This has become a whole ideology in the Western world, and a fundamental part of the Illuminati aspect of The Matrix Conspiracy. It is actually a kind of sociobiology, or social Darwinism.

If Man only is a product of heredity and environment, then he has no longer any responsibility for his actions. Even the murderer, who is standing accused in court, is able to defend himself with, that he basically can't help, that he has committed a murder. Firstly he was born with some unfortunate genes, which made, that he wasn't all too clever. Therefore he was bullied in the school, and thereby he was developed to become aggressive and hot tempered. All this caused, that he in a certain situation committed a murder, but this he could not help. Heredity and environment led him precisely to this situation. Guilty? No, many people would say today, he is no more guilty, than a person is to blame, that he came to cough in a place filled with smoke. No, on the whole it is society and environment, which are to blame for the murder.

When you are advocating a reductionism and are claiming, that Man *is nothing else than* for example a product of heredity and environment, then concepts such as responsibility, guilt and duty loose all meaning. And it becomes meaningless to talk about human ideals. Why admire people, who have achieved something great? They have only good genes and a beneficially environment. Why condemn people, who

spoil and break down society? They can't help it (read more about this in my article **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**).

6) The ideology of the authenticity-mythology

The paradox of the Janus face of Empowerment and Victimization 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.

Philosophical education has its basic objectives, first, the disposition to seek truth, and, second, the capacity to conduct rational inquiry. Training scientists, for example, requires the inculcation both of an ethic of inquiry – do not fabricate or distort results, take care to prevent your hypotheses (or desires) from affecting your observations – and the techniques of inquiry appropriate to the discipline (my book **A dictionary of thought distortions** is a manual in rational inquiry, or critical thinking).

There are of course many different forms of philosophical education, corresponding to the numerous ways in which truth may be pursued (my own method is philosophy seen as an art of life – see my articles **What is philosophy?** and **Philosophical counseling as an alternative to psychotherapy**). Nevertheless, these forms of education share two key features. First, they are not decisively shaped by the specific social or political/religious circumstances in which they are conducted, or, to put it the other way around, they are perverted when such circumstances come to have a substantive effect. There is no valid distinction between “Jewish” and “Aryan” physics, or between “bourgeois” and “socialist” biology; truth is one and universal.

Secondly, and relatedly, philosophical education can have corrosive consequences for political (and/or religious) communities in which it is allowed to take place. The pursuit of truth – scientific, historical, moral, or whatever – can undermine structures of unexamined but socially central belief.

Ideological education - (today through the mythology of authenticity, and in broader sense: The Matrix Conspiracy) - differs from philosophical education in all these respects. Its purpose is not the pursuit and acquisition of truth, but rather the formation of individuals, who can effectively conduct their lives within, and support, their political (and/or religious) community. It is unlikely, to say the least, that the truth will be fully consistent with this purpose. Nor is ideological education homogeneous and universal. It is by definition education within, and on behalf of, a

particular political (and/or religious) order. Nor, finally, does ideological education stand in opposition to its political (and/or religious) community. On the contrary, it fails – fundamentally – if it does not support and strengthen that community.

Ideology altogether is a psychic disease. You are not in doubt about, that ideology is a psychic disease if you look at its collective manifestations. It appears for example in the form of ideologies such as Communism, Liberalism, Conservatism, National Socialism and any other nationalism, or in the form of rigid religious systems of faith, which function with the implied assumption, that the supreme good lay out in the future, and that the end therefore justifies the means. The goal is an idea, a point out in a future, projected by the mind, where salvation is coming in some kind – happiness, satisfaction, equality, liberation, etc. It is not unusual, that the means to come to this is to make people into slaves, torture them and murder them here and now.

That a thought-system has developed into an ideology shows in, that it is a closed system, which is shared by a large group of people. Such a closed system has especially two distinctive characters: 1) It allows no imaginable circumstance to talk against the ideology. 2) It refuses all critique by analysing the motives in the critique in concepts, which is collected from the ideology itself (an ideology always thinks black and white, and therefore always has an anti-ideology, an enemy image, which it attribute on to everyone, who don't agree).

An ideology is therefore characterized by, that it is not able to contain, or direct refuses, rationality and critical thinking. We all know how dissidents have been killed, jailed and tortured under totalitarian ideologies.

Ideologies are using propaganda in order to get their “truths” forced through. In that connection they use thought distortions. Thought distortions are “techniques”, that, unconscious or conscious, are used from an interest in finding ways of getting on in the world, rather than an interest in finding ways of discovering the truth. Thought distortions are the background for poor reasoning, diversionary ploys, seductive reasoning errors, techniques of persuasion and avoidance, psychological factors, which can be obstacles to clear thought (again: see my book **A Dictionary of thought distortions**).

Critical thinking, or philosophy, is in opposition to thought distortions. Critical thinking is about spotting thought distortions, and examining them by presenting reasons and evidence in support of conclusions.

In philosophy you focus on, what cooperation and conversation require of you in order to that you at all can exist: that you speak true (don't lie), that you are prepared to reach mutual understanding and agreement (don't manipulate), don't make an exception of yourself (but treat others as equals). From this rises the eternal moral values (as for example that it is wrong to lie), and generally our ideas of right and justice: the so-called human rights, the idea about the individual person's autonomy and dignity: you shall treat the other *not as a mean, but as a goal*.

7) The four philosophical hindrances and openings

Philosophy and spirituality are in opposition to all kinds of ideology. 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.

The self-help industry is today often calling its method positive psychology. It has especially three sources of inspiration:

1) The American New Thought movement, which is the subjectivistic belief, that your thoughts are creating reality, and that by focusing on what you find positive, and avoiding what you find negative, you can create your life in accordance with your wishes, feelings and needs (see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**). The “positive” is identified as success, money, sex, personal power, material glory, etc.

2) Humanistic psychology is the belief, that if you focus on your emotional experiences, needs, will and wishes, you will find your authentic self, which is claimed to be more or less divine. Religion has in that way been reduced to psychology. Humanistic psychology is a central inspiration for management theory (see my articles **Humanistic psychology, self-help and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**, **The value of having a religion in a spiritual practice** and **Management theory and the self-help industry**).

3) The postmodern intellectualism (constructivism) which supports the subjectivistic and relativistic idea, 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 it also says, that we live in a Matrix, a dream/fantasy, 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 being interested in finding ways of discovering the truth (see my articles **Constructivism: the postmodern intellectualism behind New Age and the self-help industry** and **The Matrix Conspiracy**).

This conspiracy is characterized by the mythology of authenticity. As mentioned: it has two world-images, which are closely connected: humanistic psychology and constructivism. And the two methods used by these world-images are psychotherapy (humanistic psychology) and coaching (constructivism). It is a mythology because it isn't something real, it is the dream about becoming another, a life in a constant state of in-authenticity; in contrast to true spirituality, which you could call the reality of authenticity, because it here is about being precisely what you are, no matter how insignificant, or negative, it might seem in relation to your own or others' ideals.

The five main programming technologies of this conspiracy are Management theory, New Age, Nonviolent Communication (NVC), Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP), The law of attraction.

It is on the background of these sources of inspiration, that the self-help industry is turning the philosophical hindrances and openings upside down, so that the

hindrances are considered as positive, and the openings are considered as negative. I call this the 666 aspect of the Matrix conspiracy. In the following I will present the philosophical hindrances and openings, and explain the 666 turn further:

The philosophical hindrances are (the mythology of authenticity is written in *italic*):

1) A rational where you take your assumptions, conceptions and values for absolute truths (*hereunder the subjectivistic and relativistic point of view that the power of thought can create reality as it fits you*) and hereby end up in a contradiction between your thoughts and lived live.

2) A life-philosophical, where you are circling around your own past and future (*the idea that you should get in contact with your hidden resources to either becoming yourself as you once were: humanistic psychology and the idea about your inner core, and its method: psychotherapy and the dream of a lost past – or to become the other, you want to become: the constructivistic idea about your potentials, and its method: coaching and the hope for a richer future*) and hereby are creating a closed attitude, inattention, absent-mindedness and ennui.

3) An existence-philosophical, where you in your opinion formation and identity formation strive towards being something else than what you are (*the dream about that you in reality are another (humanistic psychology) – or that you always can become another (constructivism)*), where you imitate others, are a slave of other's ideas and ideals (*life is about becoming something fantastic and/or becoming a success; you ought to model fantastic and/or successful people; the conception of Man as chronic in-authentic, a victim who constantly has to heal (humanistic psychology and psychotherapy) or form (constructivism and coaching) himself in the therapeutic practice; psychotherapists and coaches as the new authorities*), and where your actions are characterized by irresoluteness and doubt.

4) A spiritual where you are identified with your lifesituation, are dependent on political or religious ideologies (*the supreme good is lying out in the future, and therefore the end justifies the means; you ought to find ways of getting on in the world rather than finding ways of discovering the truth; it is alright to use thought distortions in this quest*) and where you hereby exist on a future salvation. And this evaluating fragmentation is the separation of the observer and the observed.

According to the traditional wisdomtraditions these four hindrances constitute a malfunction in the human mind. And it is this malfunction, which is the cause of the ignorance of the source of life. Ignorance is again the cause of suffering. In this way spiritual practice becomes a practice, which seeks to correct this malfunction. And

therefore the two main concepts in spiritual practice are ignorance and suffering. In that way you get the four philosophical openings in towards the source:

- 1) A rational, where you examine the validity of your assumptions, conceptions and values, and search for coherency between your thoughts and your lived life.
- 2) A life-philosophical where you are present in the Now, and hereby achieve that self-forgetful openness and absorption in the world, which is a condition for love, spontaneity, joy of life and wisdom.
- 3) An existence-philosophical, where you in your opinion and identity formation are yourself in the sense of being precisely what you are here and now (no matter how insignificant, or negative, it might seem in relation to your own or others' ideals), live in accordance with your own essence, and thereby achieve authenticity, autonomy, decisiveness and power of action.
- 4) A spiritual, where you aren't identified with your lifesituation, and where you, independent of religious or political ideologies, live from something deeper: The source itself; the Good, the True and the Beautiful. Said in another way: where essence (the form of consciousness, meditation, the divine source) is one and the same with existence (being precisely what you are, existential presence in the now, life itself, the otherness). And this realized oneness is the wholeness of the observer and the observed.

I am well aware that the self-help industry is using the concepts of the openings as positive concepts (especially the existence-philosophical opening with its concept of authenticity; that it is good to work with yourself, and realize your illusions, etc.), and therefore would disagree with my claim that they see them as negative. The use of the concepts of the openings is also the reason why it can be hard to discover the paradoxes. But the problem arises because they see them as future-oriented goals or ideals. And in order to reach these ideals you need therapy or coaching. And it is in this "practice" they end in the hindrances. That should be easy to see, when looking at the concepts of the hindrances. What they misunderstand is that the openings precisely are a practice in themselves: the true spiritual practice.

Such a spiritual practice can again be said to contain three aspects:

- 1) Critical thinking (spotting thought distortions, created by dualistic unbalance, both in yourself and in others – see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**)

2) Investigating the shadow (ignorance, the unconscious, the painbody, the cause of suffering, your own dark side, the ego – see my articles **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it**, and **Suffering as an entrance to the Source**)

3) The spiritual practice (going beyond all ideas and images – see my article **Paranormal phenomena seen in connection with the spiritual practice**)

The reason why the self-help industry considers these three aspects, and therefore the four philosophical openings, as negative, is as follows:

1) There is no objective scale of truth that can decide whether something is positive or negative; it is entirely your own subjective feelings, that decide what is positive or negative. Therefore thought distortions can be seen as positive means of getting on in the world.

2) The positive psychology of the self-help industry is avoiding and ignoring all negative; that is: your shadow, your ignorance, your painbody, your suffering, your dark side.

3) It is not possible to go beyond your ideas and images. The only thing you can do is to change them into what you find positive.

In my article **Humanistic psychology, self-help, and the danger of reducing religion to psychology**, I explain how the self-help industry, unknowingly, is supporting a kind of black magic, or satanism, which show the essence in the 666 conspiracy, namely that the ego has become an object for “spiritual” worship. This will end in spiritual crises, especially the “positive” aspect of the spiritual crisis called ego-inflation (see my articles **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena** and **The ego-inflation in the New Age and self-help environment**).

The above-mentioned problems lead 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.

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. Often they are apostles of loafing, because they are favouring a person who would react freely and incalculably to external circumstances, pitting their individual liberty against the process of society: the little man eluding the clutches of the traffic warden.

Like Lin Yutang I actually see the art of loafing as democratic in its nature. But, as Walt Whitman is pointing out in his *Democratic Vistas* – it is the ideal of free men and women in the Now, not the ideal of the democratic progress or improvement (today Consumer Capitalism, self-help and growth fanaticism) - just look at Laurence Sterne on his “sensitive journey”, or at Wordsworth and Coleridge, wandering on foot through Europe, with a great sense of beauty in their hearts, but with a very few money.

The philosophical refined pleasure in the art of loafing is something, which costs much less than the lust of luxury. The only thing the pleasure of loafing requires is a creative emptiness, a life enjoyed as it is lived. Play without reason; travel to see nothing; a perfectly useless afternoon spent in a perfectly useless manner – these are the kind of activities that redeem the art of living from the business of living, which also Henry David Thoreau has shown in his *Walden*, where he describes his life in the woods, retired from the world’s ups and downs.

8) Becoming versus being: false spirituality versus true spirituality

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 (the communicative aspect of man) 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.

In true spirituality the relationship is the mirror, in which you can discover yourself (that is: not through introspection). Without the relationship you are nothing. To be is to be in relationship, which is the actual life. You only live in relationship, otherwise you don’t live, life is then without meaning. So it is not because you - as Descartes says: “*I think, therefore I am!*” - that you live.

In my article **The Dream hypothesis and the Brain-in-jar hypothesis** I show how Descartes is the man behind the so-called Dream hypothesis, and therefore for the later version: The Brain-in-jar hypothesis, which is a central inspiration for the movie Matrix, and therefore for my own concept of the Matrix conspiracy. Descartes supports the radical subjectivism, that you can't know whether you are dreaming or not. Everything is our own thought-construction. The self-help industry continues this idea in sentences such as: *I think I am a success, therefore I am a success. I think I am beautiful, therefore I am beautiful. I think I am a failure, therefore I am a failure, etc., etc.*

But it is not because of such sentences that you live. Nor do you live because you produce yourself, as Nietzsche, Sartre, Rorty and Foucault say. You live because you are in the relationship, and it is the lack of ability to understand this, which causes conflict.

The reason why there isn't any understanding of the relationship is that we use the relationship to achieve something, become something, to be remoulded. We use the instrumental reason on human relationships, where it only should be used on technical relationships. It is the thinking's dangerous course, the course of the will to power. The communicative reason has vanished.

But the relationship is the means to expose yourself, because the relationship is to be. It is the actual life. Without the relationship you don't live. In order to be able to understand yourself you must understand the relationship. The relationship is therefore a philosophical sparring partner, a mirror in which you can see yourself. To understand this is to use the communicative reason, which in the context of art of life is a meditative-existential reason.

The mirror of the relationship can either distort or expose the truth about yourself. Most of us see in the relationship, in the mirror, that, we preferably want to see, but we don't see that which is real. We will preferably idealize or escape, and rather live in the future than seeing the relationship in which we are in the moment.

In section 168 in Pascal's *Pensées*, Pascal makes account for, how the present only is used by the past as a passage to the future, and therefore the relationship – which is something, which is in the moment, and not in past and future – becomes meaningless, wherefore there arises conflict. Conflict arises because we use the present as a passage to the future or the past.

The mind is a result of the past, which is based on time and its images. Without the past there is no thought. But the thought, which is a result of the past, can't

understand the present, since it only uses the present as a passage to the future. The future is in this way always a becoming. As Pascal claims, then the present is therefore never seized, though the understanding exclusively is lying herein.

As long as there is becoming there is conflict, and becoming is always the past, which uses the present to achieve something, to control, remould, and acquire; that is: the will to power. Becoming is purely and simply the thoughtprocess, which goes in a wrong course. Time and the thoughtprocess are therefore also, as Pascal proposes, one and the same.

This becoming is the absent. You can either be absent in the bygone or the coming time. The past or the future sucks life out of the present. Memories, plans or projects are transformed into reality, while reality becomes emptiness. The thought makes itself independent in relation to your reality, and it becomes the whole of reality: it is the separation of the observer and the observed. The unreality in this consists in, that you then only really exists in the hope about a richer future (coaching), or in the dream about a lost past (psychotherapy).

Time will in other words not be able to solve our problems. On the contrary time creates problems. What you are is the Now. In the Now there is no problems. A problem arises because the thought removes itself from the Now. You compare with earlier, or you hope and desire something else. The thought slides off from the Now's facts, the existential condition. And the Now's facts, seen from the thinking's past or future, can become a problem. And consequently you make what you are into a problem.

Thinking never belongs in the Now. To think is to remove the mind from the Now, the present, what you are. The thinking is therefore the absent. Only meditative-existential you can be in the Now. You can say, that meditation is a quality of the Now, and therefore a quality of what you are. In meditation - the passive listening presence - there therefore doesn't exist any problems, only facts. You only understand in the Now – not tomorrow and not yesterday – always in the Now. In this way understanding is timeless. You can't understand the next life and next year. To think is to remove the mind from the Now.

If you choose to be in the thoughts you either are ahead in the future or behind in the past. You either think about the past in memories, sorrows, traumatic bindings, bad conscience, associations etc., or you think about the future in plans, hopes, longings, wishes, conjectures, worries. Totally seen: the thinking's past and future produces the images in time, a perspective on yourself and the world, the source of unreality and absence.

But the essence in being outside time is eternal present and is not able to be thought. As Kierkegaard says:

”When that to exist not is able to be thought, and the existing person yet is thinking, what does this mean then? It means, that he thinks momentarily, he thinks ahead and he thinks behind. The absolute continuity can his thinking not achieve”. (*Finishing Unscientific Postscript*)

Only meditative-existential you can be in the Now, and therefore realize what you are. The passive listening presence is meditation. Meditation is to see completely with the heart and the mind; that is to say: with the whole of your essence. The human essence is therefore meditation. Meditation is the self-forgetful openness for, and absorption in life itself. The meaning of life is therefore to express the human essence. Human essence is therefore an appearance-form of the Now, of what you are. Why? Because the essence in the human life is meditation. Total existential presence in the Now is meditation. The essence is therefore one and the same with the existence; and this realized oneness is precisely meditation, or the wholeness of the observer and the observed.

So: essence (the form of consciousness, meditation, the divine source) is one and the same with existence (being precisely what you are, existential presence in the now, life itself, the otherness). And this realized oneness is the wholeness of the observer and the observed.

Becoming and being is accordingly two altogether different conditions. Becoming is continuous, and that which is continuous is always binding, clutching, stagnating. Interrelations are binding if they are continuous and habitual. If a relationship only is satisfaction, then it only is a habitual relationship. In the moment it ceases being a habitual relationship, then there is a new quality in such a relationship, and if you enter deeper into it, you will see, that where there is continuance, habit or stagnation, there is a thought-process, which is moving from continuance to continuance, and in this process there is always friction and pain. If you as a lifeartist doesn't understand this continuance, which is becoming, the absent, then there is no being. Being can only be understood when becoming ceases.

Self-assertion in any form (vanity, ambition, arrogance, joy of power) – whether it is for the sake of the group, the individual salvation, or the spiritual realization – is the same as delayed action. The desire, or the will to power, is always aimed at the future. The desire after becoming something else than what you are, is absence in the Now. Becoming is the absent.

But the present, the Now, is of greater meaning than tomorrow. In the Now all time is present, and to understand the Now is to be free from time. Time and sorrow is continued in becoming something. There is no being in becoming something. To be is always now, and to be is the highest form of transformation. Becoming is nothing else than modified continuation of the past, it is the eternal recurrence of the old, and this recurrence is the absent.

A radical transformation only takes place in the present, in that to be in the Now. But there is no being if there is a struggle for becoming something. The struggle for becoming something, the will to power, is the absent, and herein there is resistance and denial, desire and resignation.

Becoming is the thoughtprocess, and both Nietzsche, Foucault and Rorty (and therefore the self-help industry) are seeing this in the image of art, as a creative process, but they don't come out of the intellect, and confuse the thinking, the intellectual training, with the whole of the human unfolding and life itself. They see the whole of the human unfolding as a creative process, which by will can be controlled; that is: controlled by the power of the thought. Life is seen as a work of art, which Man, by will, can model as he wants to. Therefore many self-helpers talk about art of life as if it was the same as in the true spiritual traditions.

But when you as a true spiritual lifeartist understand the question about the creative activity, you will perhaps be able to understand what people mean by striving after something. Is the creative action a result of an effort, and are we aware of the moments where we create? Or is the creative action a feeling of complete self-forgetfulness, a feeling, which arises when nothing intervenes disruptive, when you not at all feel the movement of the thought, when there only is an altogether rich and complete being? Is the creative condition a result of drudgery, of struggle, of conflict, of an effort? We have all noticed that when we do something with great ease and quickly, then it costs no effort, then there not at all is talk about any struggle; but because our existence in the main consists of a line of conflicts and struggles, we can't imagine a condition, a being, where all conflict have ended.

In order to, that you as lifeartist, can understand this being - where there isn't any conflict, this condition of creative existence – it is absolutely necessary to understand the whole problem of your own effort. By effort I understand a human being's striving after becoming something; that is: the will to power, the philosophical will to control and form truth, reality and happiness.

So action as we know it, is in reality a reaction, it is an incessantly effort with the purpose of becoming something; that is to say: a denial of, an effort of avoiding what you are. When you try to avoid what you are, then this is because you confuse the Now's fact with that problem, which the thinking's past and future thinks the fact is. This is an unreal condition, a feeling of loss and emptiness, of insufficiency. And that is precisely what you are, the lived despair. But when you are the emptiness present without choosing, without condemning or justifying, then the understanding of what you are will imply action, and this action is the creative being.

To stop becoming something is to stop accumulating in philosophical sense. Not to accumulate, but to die every day, minutely, is timeless being. The mystics call it a kind of death. The Stoics trained themselves in being present in the Now by philosophizing over the meaning of death in their lives. To philosophize became in that way, in the Stoics, a way of learning how to die. An example of this is the Stoic Horace, the man behind the expression "Carpe diem!" (Seize the day!).

We have no more right to interpret this as an obsession with death, or morbid complacency, than when, in the movie *Dead Poets Society*, Robin Williams makes his students study a picture of the school's old boys. Williams' character is trying to make his charges understand the meaning of carpe diem, the irreplaceable value of each instant of life, and it is with this goal in mind that he emphasizes that all the faces in the class photography, so young and alive, are now long dead. In that way he is a kind of art of life-teacher, a teaching, which unfortunately the school's ideological instrumental reason later succeeded in getting spoiled.

As long as there is a desire after achieving something, and the conflicts, which are a result of this, there will always be anxiety of death.

To be the facts, the existential condition in the Now, present in passive listening, is precisely to be, and this is reality. The passive listening presence is meditation, and in meditation there flows life and energy back from past and future, back to the Now. The energy, the life, which was invested in sorrows and bindings, plans and problems, flows into, and fills the Now, increases the intensity and the consciousness in the Now.

In the happy reality being and reality coincide with each other, essence and existence is an oneness. In reality Man is himself in his being. His being embraces and carries him, and he embraces and fills his being. Reality is an existence, which lives itself. This being is wisdom, what will say the Now, and therefore the fact: what you are. It is a being that has a naturalness in itself. It is a being, which opens itself in and for

itself. It is the existential openness as being, the openness for the relationship; that is to say: for own being, and therewith also for the being of everything else.

Reality can't come to that, which is becoming, the absent which strives; it can only come to that, which is being, to that, which understands what you are, the present. As Kierkegaard says, then the present is the timeless, or the eternal, and also the fullness.

This open presence is like space. It is therefore not something shut inside the psyche.

Read more about the communicative aspect of Man in my book **A Portrait of a Lifestylist**

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

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