

Morten Tolboll

Bridge between Science and Spirituality (The Matrix Dictionary)

Is related to my article on [Anti-intellectualism and Anti-science](#).

It can sound confusing when I speak about New Age as part of the anti-science movement, since New Age seems obsessed with science, and call everything they think and do, for science. But that is because they demand so-called “alternative sciences” which breaks with traditional science. Therefore they are also obsessed with the concept of paradigm shifts.

Example: one of the founders of [Neuro-linguistic Programming \(NLP\)](#) John Grinder denies, that his and Bandler’s work is an eclectic hodgepodge of philosophy and psychology, or that it even builds from the work of others. He believes that what he and Bandler did was “create a paradigm shift.”

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

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

One can only hope that Bandler wasn’t thinking the same things that Grinder was thinking, at least with respect to Kuhn’s classic text.

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

philosophy and he certainly did not imply that anything NLP did, or is doing, constitutes a paradigm shift (read more about the inspiration from Kuhn in my article [Constructivism: the postmodern intellectualism behind New Age and the self-help industry](#)).

The bridge between science and spirituality is an expression you hear all the time within New Age. And they try to create “alternative sciences” all the time. Each new number of a New Age magazine or New Age promoting website with respect for itself, must contain at least one new “revolutionary” new “scientific” theory, which is the beginning to a “paradigm shift” in science. The number of new forms of “alternative sciences” within New Age is therefore today almost comically large.

So, the “bridge” in New Age is built of sand, namely pseudoscience grounded in anti-intellectualism and anti-science.

But could you in fact talk about such a bridge? Yes, and that is philosophy. I have tried to point that out several times, with minimal success.

Science is in fact developed out of philosophy. It is illuminating to step back in history and consider the important role that philosophy played in the ancient world. Philosophy, the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, is regarded as a distinct academic subject today, especially because of the ruling anti-intellectualism. Philosophy in the ancient world, however, represented the discipline of studying the natural world in a rational way, as a variety of scientific disciplines do today. Science and philosophy, considered to be such distinctly different disciplines today, were in effect one branch of knowledge in the ancient world.

Consider the poem that Lucretius wrote in 50 BCE, “On the Nature of Things.” In *The Swerve: How the World became Modern*, Stephen Greenblatt tells a fascinating story about a papal secretary who, in the Middle Ages, traipsed across Europe in search of a copy of this reportedly lost poem. The story of the adventures of this secretary is in itself intriguing, but the actual poem was earthshaking in its time and, interestingly, still is today!

Lucretius’s poem portrayed religions as cruel and superstitious, fueled with ignorance and fear. In his poem, he proposed a scientific world vision in which all things, animate and inanimate, are composed of invisible particles, moving randomly and continuously in a void. There is no creator; living things have come into existence over eternity by random collisions of the particles and have evolved by a process of trial and error. Their purpose is only to survive, reproduce, and participate in a life of pleasure. Humans are not at the top privileged level of existence, and by

understanding their own insignificance and the fact that there is no afterlife they will appreciate the wonder of life and filled with pleasure. The poem, which addressed Lucretius's natural ("scientific") worldview, was regarded as subversive and heretical, and those who openly supported it risked their lives. In fact, in 1600, the Roman Catholic Church Inquisition questioned Giordano Bruno, a defrocked Dominican monk, Italian philosopher, and scientist, and then burned him at the stake for openly supporting the views expressed by Lucretius in "On the Nature of Things."

So, today philosophy can be said to be the discipline that must point out that it is necessary to avoid that science is being mixed with religion, spirituality and/or politics. This is done in philosophy of science, which is a necessary study for any scholar.

Philosophy of science (or theory of science) is a sub-field of philosophy concerned with the foundations, methods, and implications of science. The central questions of this study concern what qualifies as science, the reliability of scientific theories, and the ultimate purpose of science. This discipline overlaps with metaphysics, ontology, and epistemology, for example, when it explores the relationship between science and truth.

Anti-science is a position that rejects science and the scientific method. People holding anti-scientific views do not accept that science is an objective method, or that it generates universal knowledge. They also contend that scientific reductionism in particular is an inherently limited means to reach understanding of the complex world we live in.

But this is a misunderstanding of science, which also trained scientists ought to have knowledge about, since reductionism is a philosophical and not scientific point of view. The sciences ask limited questions about Man, or questions about specific sides of the human life. Such questions are then solved by experimenting, collecting systematic observations and from them draw up theories. The sciences collect systematic experiences and throw out theories, that can be tested through new experiences, or serve as the best explanations.

So, one crucial principle in science is, that a certain theory has to have falsifiability or refutability, or said in another way: it has to be testable. Another crucial principle is the use of abductive reasoning (inference to the best explanation).

Is it testable whether God exists or not? No! Is it testable, that the human consciousness only consists in some physical-chemical reactions in the brain, or that it only is a social construction? No!

Is the best explanation for crop circles, that they have been made by extraterrestrials? Although it is undoubtedly true, that strange patterns are sometimes found in cornfields (crop circles) - it doesn't follow that they *must* have been made by extraterrestrials. There is a wide range of far more plausible alternative explanations of the phenomenon, such as that they have been made by pranksters.

Reductionisms are philosophical, political, religious/occult theories, that seek legitimacy by claiming, that they are scientific theories, while the fact is, that they either not are testable/able to be falsified, or that they abuse the use of abductive reasoning.

And towards this might be added that there are two versions of reductionism. This is important since it seems that these two versions are in war with each other:

The first version for example claims that Man fully can be described and explained with the methods of natural science. This happens in various forms of Naturalism, Positivism and Behaviourism. It is clear that this first kind of reductionism (scientism and pseudoskepticism) are more accepted than the second openly anti-scientific version.

The second version claims, that psychology, sociology or history can give the total and superior understanding of, what a human being is. These viewpoints are described respectively as Psychologism, Sociologism and Historism. It is particular this version which openly claims to be a supporter of anti-science, and accuses the other part of being reductionistic, and demand so-called alternative sciences. This is what we see in the popular culture of New Age.

The first version is mostly the supporter of scientism and pseudoskepticism. Scientism is a term generally used to describe the cosmetic application of science in unwarranted situations not covered by the scientific method. Pseudoskepticism (or pseudoscepticism) is a term referring to a philosophical or scientific position which appears to be that of skepticism or scientific skepticism but which in reality fails to be so.

But both sides are examples of reductionism and are therefore examples of pseudoscience. Pseudoscience consists of statements, beliefs, or practices that are claimed to be scientific and factual in the absence of evidence gathered and constrained by appropriate scientific methods. Pseudoscience is often characterized by the following: contradictory, exaggerated or unfalsifiable claims; reliance on confirmation bias rather than rigorous attempts at refutation; lack of openness to evaluation by other experts; and absence of systematic practices when developing theories. The term pseudoscience is often considered pejorative because it suggests

something is being presented as science inaccurately or even deceptively. Those described as practicing or advocating pseudoscience often dispute the characterization.

The demarcation between science and pseudoscience has philosophical and scientific implications. Differentiating science from pseudoscience has practical implications in the case of health care, expert testimony, environmental policies, and science education. Distinguishing scientific facts and theories from pseudoscientific beliefs, such as those found in astrology, alchemy, medical quackery, occult beliefs, and creation science combined with scientific concepts, is part of science education and scientific literacy.

"Wonder got already from the beginning human beings to philosophize and still does it". This statement from Aristotle goes back to Plato and is also applying for today.

Philosophy begins with, that human beings are wondering. The word philosophy means love of wisdom, or love of learning. The word philosophy also means love of the unknown. The philosophical activity therefore involves the concepts of being critical and asking questions. In this it reminds about science (my book [A Dictionary of Thought Distortions](#) is a kind of a manual in critical thinking, and therefore in philosophy).

But philosophy is not science. Our wonder over Man becomes philosophy, when it reaches the question of Man as such. Philosophy throws out answers to the question, argues for the answers and investigates their consequences. This happens first of all by thinking and meditating over the things, not in an experiential-scientific way.

Philosophy is in that way a deepening of our everyday understanding. It is a reflection over well-known subjects. Its answers lie in continuation of our immediate knowledge and understanding. Similar you can say, that philosophy is a deepening of the forms of understanding, which lie in for example science, art and religion.

Philosophy seeks for *oneness* and *coherence*. This means, that it both ask for the fundamental trait of the essence of Man, and for how all other traits of Man is connected therewith. The answer to, what the essence of Man is, has to throw a light of transfiguration over everything we know about Man.

Philosophy asks the most universal question about Man, the *common* or *universal* which all of us have part in, in spite of the fact that we can behave so different and be studied in so many various ways. Here it is about what, we can call the essence of

Man, and the question is solved, not by experimenting, collecting systematic observations and from them draw up theories. It is only solved by thinking and meditating over everything we already know about Man, and by searching for oneness and coherence in it.

The sciences ask limited questions about Man, or questions about specific sides of the human life. Philosophy asks the most universal question about Man. The sciences collect systematic experiences and throw out theories, that can be determined by new experiences. Philosophy uses alone the tool of reflection and meditation. But the use of reason, thought, logic, consideration and means is shared by science and philosophy.

Philosophy reminds about science, but isn't science. Philosophy asks the most universal question about Man, the *common* or *universal* which all of us have part in, and in that it reminds about religion. They both have focus on convictions and ideas, and see these as a *condition* for feelings, not as a *result* of feelings. They are both engaged in the moral and ethical aspects of the convictions, and especially in the understanding of *the meaning of life*. Moreover they both involve spirituality.

What is then the difference between philosophy and religion?

If you for example take the great religions, then there within these religions arised what I call *philosophical* oriented therapy-forms. Thus Gnosticism and Mysticism arised in the early and Medieval Christianity, Sufism in Islam, Hasidism and Cabbala in Judaism, Advaita Vedanta in Hinduism, and Zen and Dzogchen in Buddhism.

Unlike the established religions then these philosophical therapies presuppose no religious doctrine, ideology, myth or conception (or psychological theory/management theory). They put their emphasis on realization and inner transformation. And the masters within these philosophical therapies are precisely living a philosophical way of life, rather than a traditional religious way of life. And their way of teaching is based on philosophical counseling; that is: they are using reason, thought, logic and consideration.

That means, that the silent assumptions, things that are taken for granted, and premises within the religions, themselves are facing examination in a philosophical way of life. Is there coherence in it? It is self-contradictory? What about one's way of being, is it self-circling or self-forgetful? And what about the autonomy and the power of action? Are you yourself or dependent on others, etc.

So, the true bridge between science and spirituality is philosophy.

All this is completely misunderstood in New Age. The anti-intellectualism in New Age is a hostility to and mistrust of intellect, intellectuals, and intellectualism commonly expressed as deprecation of education and philosophy, and the dismissal of art, literature, and science as impractical and even contemptible human pursuits (art and literature is an exception in New Age, but not in other forms of anti-intellectualism).

New Age advocate distrust of reason and promote feeling and emotion over thought, intuition over logic, immediate action over critical consideration, and results over means. New Age is therefore both a distortion of science and spirituality.

As a result New Age demands the rise of alternative sciences. What New Age is prophesying is a New World Order (New Age) to emerge: the world of alternative history, alternative physics, alternative medicine and, ultimately, alternative reality. Ergo an ideology, and neither science nor philosophy.

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