

*Morten Tolboll*

## Coaching (The Matrix Dictionary)

In Monty Python's movie *Life of Brian* there is a scene, where Brian is talking to a large crowd of people. He shouts: "You are all individuals!" whereupon the crowd shouts in chorus: "We are all individuals!" after which one single man is saying, a bit wondering: "Not me!"

This scene illustrates in a brilliant way the self-contradiction in the individualistic ideology put forward by the management and coaching industry (see my article on [Monty Python](#)).

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

The death of the eternal values doesn't only apply for reality, but also the personality. The individual human being lives in a space without truth, in a time without direction, and with an information flow so huge, that the manageability beforehand has to be given up. How are we to live then? Well, the coaching-industry claims, you do this by creating yourself in a never-ending new production. The personality then becomes a persona (mask), an eternal change of role, because when the role begins to stiffen, it becomes uninteresting and boring. New is good, as these theorists say. What before characterized the personality's relationship to the world, was a *call*. Now the relationship has become a *project* (or as the coaches say: a good story, a good branding, a good *spin*), which is formed, quickly is being carried out and dropped for the benefit of a new project, that can maintain the constant demand for intensity and seduction.

The concept of coaching is created by the so-called management theories.

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

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

These thoughts are of course extremely Ego-fixated. Ego-worship has actual become a common accepted ideology. A whole time-tendency within school, folk high school and continuing education, focus on so-called "personal development". Inspired by for example Sartre and postmodernism you are being encouraged to an unrestrained and Egoistic self expression, where you are letting your choices (story-telling, self-branding) decide everything, in the belief that you through your choices can create a successfull life as it fit you. From the management theorists you hear slogans such as: "It is not facts, but the best story, which wins!"

This story-telling, or self-production, are based on a tendency to exclusively being able to understand the valuable, as what can be measured, counted and weighed. This is of course all right, when it comes to economics, but when we in this way quantify the human life, we end up reifying ourselves; we become dull living deads.

You may call this tendency for 'the CV-culture', 'biographism', 'the coaching-culture' and much more. Human beings become here reduced to automats, which endlessly have to stamp questionnaires, evaluation-schedules, competence-schedules, compose performance-profiles, be send on competence-development courses and teambuilding courses – and finally we have quantified through ourselves in a degree, that we can be reduced to a number on yet a schedule: "I am a number 2, or a number 5!"

The state, the market forces, the company, takes the lifes of humans, and there is no doubt, that it is a question about some kind of totalitarism, a kind of market fascism,

because Man is reduced to a number in an arithmetical problem, which only knows one correct result: profit-maximizing.

Below these tendencies lay in other words a view of human nature, namely the comprehension, that acknowledgement, success, and in last instance, salvation, depend of our own achievements. A human being is shortly said what it achieves, or what we can read out of its CV. While the coaches use many nice words about the individual person's (market)value, the tendencies expose, that the human being herewith loses its dignity. A cost-benefit-ideology, which is about to runaway.

What it is about is the individual's consciousness of competences. It starts already in the preschool class, where the children's competences become written in a kind of servants conduct book, which has to follow them the rest of life. Then evaluations on all levels follow the children and the youngsters up through the school system. What do you want? What are you able to? How will you achieve your personal objectives? Such are the questions to the youngsters. And as an adult it continues: An on-going evaluation, in order to control that you develop your competences.

It becomes a lifelong schooling, a do well-school, an examination-school with the purpose to be able to live up to schedules and consultants. Measurements, tests and plans for you and your life. A never-ending pry into the inner human being, the personality subject to a close, sharply scrutinize.

The consequence of this development is, that people are seen walking around, all the time murmurous on their own biography, for the case, that there should pass an interviewer or a questionnaire.

The problem concerning this development is not, that there is focus on the individual person - it is fine, that we become conscious about ourselves and our possibilities. No, the problem is, that it happens in a cut off space. It becomes an Ego-thinking without a 'Thou' and without a third instance in existence, the Otherness. And without the Other and without the Otherness, your personal biography become an airy fairy CV, namely MY CV, MY competences, MY profile, MY career, MY success, MY choices, MY personality-type, MY values, MY goals.

So within business community (and almost all other areas as well) rules this so-called "coaching-wave". Management theorists believe, that the leader, besides being our leader, also should be our lifecoach, and lead us in how we should live our lives as a whole; that is: also in private. The leader should shortly said be our guru.

Actually coaching origins from the world of elitist sports, where top athletes had personal coaches to get them to do the maximum. This spread to the private business community. And practically all big companies of today use coaching as a part of the continuing education and personal development of the employees. But it all still subscribes on sports metaphors: that you are in action with a world championship every day.

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

However - as already mentioned - the urge to personal development (development of winner-mentality), exposes itself as a part of a superior ideology, namely a defence of the market, of Consumer Capitalism and economic competition.

Coaching is by first view individualistic. It is an instruction in, how *I*, - through my will to change (story-telling, self-branding) - get forced through *my* wishes, *my* dreams, *my* desires. However if you investigate it a bit deeper, you discover, that this Egoistic self expression only is okay as long as it is in compliance with the interests a particular company has in it (or in a larger sense: the ideals of Consumer Capitalism). Your privacy (including you personal development) have to be in compliance with the interests of the company and of Consumer Capitalism. And suddenly there creeps, as with all ideologies, a kind of extremely ingenious Stalinism into it. You have to bow for the collective demand.

Moreover it has become an integrated part of the management theories, that they draw on the New Age movement, perhaps because it sounds interesting and seductive. New Age is a name of a spiritual movement, which draws on many different religious traditions: Astrology, Shamanism, Hinduism, Buddhism, different techniques of Prophecy – which all are seeked integrated with Western psychotherapy. You may say, that psychotherapy, in this combinationform, has become a new religion for the modern Western human being – a religion, which the management theories adds the ideals about being a success. In fact the term New Age is today one and the same as a mixture of spirituality, management theory and psychotherapy. If you go into a bookshop, you can often see, how books about spirituality and management theory today stand on the same shelves.

An example: today most people within school, folk high school, continuing education and business community, have met the concept NLP. Both in education, as well as at work, you will almost unavoidably be forced to work with NLP-theories, which is a directly offence of the rights for people, who don't advocate the New Age-ideology. NLP stands for Neuro-linguistic Programming. NLP is a therapeutic method, which picks inspiration from many different directions within psychology: gestalt therapy, hypnosis therapy, body therapy, neurology, shamanism etc. Some NLP-practicians claim, that it is a method, which is based on a scientific way of thinking, and refuse the connection with New Age. But this rejection is paradoxically enough a trait, which is quite typical for the New Age-ideology, where concepts such as research and science all too often become mixed with spiritual concepts. An example of the lack of ability to understand oneself as philosophy/spirituality/religion, and not science.

For example has there within the New Age-ideology almost gone inflation in the phrase *Research has shown that...* A phrase, which often is used to convince the listener about, that the one who speaks can substantiate what he says with concrete empirical proof. But this could be an example of subjective argumentation, a form of unethical manipulation (often based on wishful thinking), because it is extremely vague to claim that "research has shown" anything, unless you can substantiate the assertion with specific details about the claimed research. Who has carried out this research? Which methods were there used? What exactly did they found out? Have their results been confirmed by others working within the area?

However there are also NLP-practicians, who fully acknowledge the connection with the new spiritual movements. If you look at the NLP-consultants' web pages on the internet, they often present themselves with a spectrum of educations, including astrologers, clairvoyants, shamans and healers.

Today you can almost draw such "spiritual" educations in an automat, if only you have money enough. They are typical taken in a few weekends, after which you get yourself some homemade title as coach, psychotherapist, therapist, shaman, healer, clairvoyant or spiritual teacher of one or the other kind. There almost seem to be speculated in creating new peculiar titles. But such educations can of course not give the sufficient competence, neither spiritual or educational, and there is no doubt about, that there on the grey, alternative market (including the whole of the circus of management theory and coaching) rules a wild growing, uncontrolled market of quackery and scientific/philosophical/spiritual misguiding.

If we for example take the title psychotherapist, then it is very important to be aware, that this title is not a protected title. Anybody can call himself psychotherapist, and

one should therefore be on the alert with people who sign themselves psychotherapist. Competent psychotherapeutic treatment is usually in charge of University-educated psychologists and psychiatrists. For both of these groups of experts it is possible to achieve licence as psychotherapist. But on the so-called grey market there exists, as mentioned, a line of alternative forms of treatment with affinity with mysticism and religiousness, which do not live up to the professional demands, which lie in the authorization arrangements. These people also title themselves as psychotherapists, and it is a deep problem that precisely these people of the grey New Age market practically have patent on personality developing courses in almost all companies.

Coaches make quite a lot out of emphasizing, that their approach is altogether neutral, but underneath it all whispers, as mentioned, the built-in Stalinism of Consumer Capitalism: "Unless you're able to unfold your Ego as much as possible, yes, then there is something wrong with you. You have looser-mentality. Therefore you have to attend a personality developing course!" And such personality developing courses are, as above shown, often one and the same as coming in psychotherapeutic treatment. Psychotherapy's urge to express (live over again) negative feelings, fits namely as hands in glove with the management theories' request for winner-mentality, or Ego-unfolding; that is to say: to the unfolding of an aggressive competitive mentality, where greed and arrogance almost are seen as virtues, and where envy towards them, who are in higher positions, and contempt for them, who are lesser well off, are something completely natural. The Stalinistic element is, that employees often are forced to participate such courses (conversely you can say, that the leaders also is forced to take educations in coaching).

How can this happen, when the coaches themselves say that coaching is a neutral approach, that suits the individual in the best way? Because the whole thing is about how you, with your personality and possibilities, can adapt yourself to society, with the best possibilities for succes. But when you adapt to society, you also adapt to the ideology of society. The coaches don't realize the problematic in this because their approach is an altogether individual approach, that don't have anything to say about the problem of society and ideology itself. They don't have anything to say about criticism of society/ideology. What if this society/ideology is a perverted society/ideology, that creates perverted people? What should one do about that?

As expressed in the book *Selvrealisation – kritiske diskussioner af en grænseløs udviklingskultur* (2005) then the management theories end up in concealing power relations at the workplace, they lead to difficulties assigning responsibility towards children in the schools, they reduce our spouses to means for our personal

development, and remove political incitation and social responsibility by disguising social problems as personal problems.

In the following I will focus on the management theories' psychologizing of the spiritual practice within the original wisdomtraditions.

### **The spiritual practice within the wisdomtraditions**

If you for example take the great religions, then there within these religions arised what you could call *philosophical* oriented therapy-forms, or spiritual practices, often just referred to as the spirituality within the religions. 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 spiritual practices presuppose no religious doctrine, ideology, myth or conception (or psychological theory/management theory). They put their emphasis on realization and inner transformation. Herein the philosophical element. It was precisely these spiritual practices, which Aldous Huxley called *The Perennial Philosophy*.

Now, how do these spiritual practices relate themselves to the management theories' confusion of spirituality, psychotherapy and Ego-unfolding?

The great masters within these spiritual practices ask philosophical questions - that is: *not* in an intellectual way as in the academical philosophy, and *not* as repeating an mantra - no, they ask philosophical questions in a meditative-existential way, as the wordless silence within a strong, existential wonder. They ask into, and are investigating themselves and life with the whole of the body, with life and blood, with soul and spirit, with the brain and with the heart. Simply because this philosophical questioning and inquiry in itself constitute the complete central meditation technique, which opens the consciousness in towards the Source: the Good, the True and the Beautiful. In other words they used philosophical questions as universal coans.

To ask questions in this way has nothing to do with the enquire techniques, they use within psychotherapy and coaching. It is completely central, that the spiritual practices are using *philosophical* questions, because such questions ask after what is common to all mankind, the universal – what you could call the *essence* of Man and of reality. This is because that the Source, the essential in Man and reality, precisely is something common to all mankind, or universal. Psychotherapy and coaching are

only able to ask after the personal (or after content), and can therefore never open the consciousness in towards the Source (the essence), and answer the problems of lifeviews and view of values. Nonetheless this is what they try, especially within the so-called life-coaching. And the answer is the ideals of Consumer Capitalism (even though many coaches don't know, that it is these ideals they coach people in).

In the management cultures' confusion of spirituality, psychotherapy and Ego-unfolding there therefore is a tendency to exclude (psychologize) the philosophical aspects of spirituality. For example they believe, that if you in a meditation practice just sit long enough and concentrate on one or the other object – or visualize one or the other – and mix the whole thing with a bit of psychotherapy, yes, then everything else comes by itself. Here is of course particularly thought of your success, but they also believe, that realization and ethics come by themselves. This they can believe, because they have psychologized/subjectified both realization and ethics. A turn, which especially origins from the so-called Humanistic Psychology (Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow), which is a fundamental inspiration for the management theories. It is, according to the Humanistic Psychology, only the individual's own subjective evaluation, based on the Ego, 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 Ego.

Why this Ego-worship? Within the Humanistic Psychology they often call the Ego for the Self. Like the wisdomtraditions they namely have an idea about, that Man has a spiritual/divine core. But when the wisdomtraditions' philosophical element, through the psychologizing, is left out, there is created breeding ground for many different types of spiritual self-deceit. According to the wisdomtraditions the case is namely, that an important part of the opening in towards this divine core/source, is the realization of what basically hinders this opening – and that is precisely the Ego (the inner thinker). Unless you know *the Ego's* fundamental *nature/essence*, you will not be able to recognize it, and it will deceive you to identify yourself with it again and again. And this is precisely what happens within the Humanistic Psychology, because they don't work philosophical; that is: with realization and ethical practice. Because when you realize the hindrances in yourself (the ignorance), it is, according to the wisdomtraditions, the Source itself - the Good, the True and the Beautiful – which makes the realization possible.

A complete impassable self-contradiction within the management theories is therefore the urge to Ego-unfolding ("winner-mentality"). This is completely inconsistent with spirituality, where the Ego precisely is the central *obstacle* for the



opening towards the Source (another self-contradiction is the coaching-concept's focus on the future, at the same time as they speak about being in the Now).

In spiritual practice you neither try, as in psychotherapy, to urge to express – and hereby live over again - negative feelings. Firstly this is because, that the spiritual practice believes, that negative feelings have some thought-created conditions, which you therefore in psychotherapy don't come to terms with. Secondly it is due to, that both the prompting to express your negative feelings, as well as expressing them, is ethical questionable. This doesn't mean, that the importance of the feelings is neglected in spiritual practice. On the contrary. But you ask in another way: What *are* feelings? What is the *nature/essence* of feelings?

The management theories' many personality developing courses are, because of their lack of philosophical insight, filled with examples, both on the ethical problematic in expressing negative feelings, but also on, that people are thrown out in psychic crises, because they don't come to terms with the actual causes to the problems.

Many psychotherapists and coaches will object, that it for sure also is about expressing positive feelings, unfolding what they call sensitivity ethics. The question is however, what it exactly is, the psychotherapists consider as being "positive". The Humanistic Psychology's view of morals is namely not only a subjectifying, which attributes the Source of morals to the subjective itself (the Ego, the inner thinker), 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 (the Ego'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) always is right. The consumer society, the therapeutic Ego-unfolding and the subjectifying of the moral, go hand in hand. The moral – the Ego's relation to itself – is therapized, and the moral is subjectified.

It is in all briefness important, within these theories, that the unfolding of the Ego's feelings, negative as positive, becomes justified. A therapeutic method to this, is for example the use of the so-called Giraffe language – which I won't hide, that I find completely ridiculous – and which the girls in the Danish comedy serial *Normalerweize* – by the way also make some razzle dazzle at.

The ideal about the Ego-unfolding human being shows itself - as Nina Østby Sæther writes in an article in the book *Sevrealisering* (page 89ff) – in a remarkable way, to remind about the actual behaviour of the so-called psychopath. The resemblance steps forward by comparing the characteristic psychopathic traits with the typical

attitude to life, which is introduced by the management theorists and the coaching industry:

1. Psychopaths are characterized by Egocentrism/grand ideas about own value. They consider themselves as smarter than the most. The understanding of own abilities and importance is unrealistic exaggerated. The management theory is an expression of an individualistic way of thinking, where the main focus primarily is aimed on oneself. As the management theorists says: "It is not facts, but the best story which wins! You can be anything, what you yourself choose to be!"
2. Psychopaths have a low frustration threshold and low threshold for aggressive reactions. In the management theories the tendency to express feelings immediately and heavily, is cultivated. Inhibition of emotional reactions is namely regarded as neurotic.
3. Psychopaths are in need of new impulses, and are easily subjects of boredom. In the management theory the idea about innovation, development and growth lies as a vital need, where experiences stand in the centre. The value of the experiences is measured from whether something is interesting or boring.
4. The psychopath's behaviour is characterized by impulsiveness and lack of realistic long time planning. According to the management theory, then the Ego-unfolding human is characterized by "increased spontaneity" and ability to live in the Now. (As mentioned you shall here be aware of the contradiction between the future worship of the management theories – the winner-mentality - and the ability of being in the Now. There is a big difference between the Ego's instinctive reactions, which origins in thought-patterns from the past, and the self-forgetful spontaneity in the Now, which the wisdomtraditions talk about).
5. The psychopath is seeking excitement, and shows a ruthless indifference for own and others secureness. In the management theories they dissociate from a way of life characterized by secureness and monotony, and urge to take chances and to run risks.
6. The psychopath gives expression of having specific rights, which do, that he doesn't need to follow common laws and rules. By doing so he is characterized by irresponsibility and lack of consideration of social norms, rules and obligations. In the management theories obligations and bindings are regarded as impediment for the Ego-unfolding.
7. The psychopath is characterized by lack of empathy, inability to long relationships, as well as manipulation. According to the management theories emotional independence is a human right. The feelings, thoughts and expectations of others are regarded as restrictive elements for the Ego-unfolding, and the goal is most possible liberation from these.

8. The psychopath is characterized by lack of feeling of guilt and regret, marked tendency to push the guilt at others or to explain away the behaviour, which creates difficulties. Psychopaths often say, that they did something, because they felt for it. Within the management theories all actions can be explained with starting point in feelings, which, according to them, are expressions of the authentic self (the Ego). In this way the management theories in themselves can be regarded as a form of explaining away behaviour that creates social problems. Any action can be legitimized as a necessary expression of your self-realization/personal development (Ego-unfolding).

In his brilliant novel *American Psycho* Bret Easton Ellis mirrors, in an almost comical, reductio ad absurdum way, these connections between the psychopath's traits and the life-ideals of Consumer Capitalism. Here the main character Patrick Bateman (the psychopathic serial killer), precisely lives a life, which is a perfect realization of the life-ideals of Consumer Capitalism.

Ellis cleverly exorcises the zeitgeist of the age of Consumer Capitalism. Written in the first person present tense, the book chronologues the life of a rich New York yuppie, Patrick Bateman, whose existence is dominated by designer clothes, trendy restaurants, tepid pop music, exhausting gym workouts, "hardbody" sex partners, and lesbian porno movies. And did I mention that he is also a mass murderer who tortures and mutilates his (mostly young female) victims in unspeakable ways? Or is he just making this up – telling an interesting story in order not to end up in boredom?

Ellis shows us in this way the innate depersonalization of a consumer culture. Patrick Bateman, although strikingly handsome, atlanteanly fit, and impeccably dressed, is continually mistaken for other people by his acquaintances. Although he repeatedly confesses to his (real or imagined) crimes, he is never taken seriously by his associates, who are much too concerned with their own conceits to even listen to him.

## **Conclusion**

As opposed to the therapies of management theory, coaching, and psychotherapy, then you in a true spiritual practice completely try to transform the Ego's feelings, negative as positive, partially by, through realization work, restructuring their thought-created conditions, partially by the practise of Heartmeditation (ethical practice/training of compassion). In other words, then focus doesn't lie on the feelings, but on realization and ethics. Herein the philosophical element.

*Related:*

[Self-help and the Mythology of Authenticity](#)

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

Copyright © 2017 by Morten Tolboll.

Terms of use:

[http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.en\\_US](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.en_US)