

*Morten Tolboll*

# **The Hermeneutics of Suspicion (the thought police of the self-help industry) and why I am an apostle of loafing**

In my article **The Matrix Conspiracy**, I show how all these tendencies - postmodern intellectualism, management theory, New Age, Self-help and different kinds of reductionisms - today is working as one, global spreading ideology, though it can be hard to discover it, because many of the viewpoints within it seem to disagree in between. You could call it Consumer Capitalism, but there is a danger that this might melt together with Chinese Communism in a strange Matrix Hybrid, which will be the end of democracy and human rights (read futher in my articles **The Sokal Hoax**, **Management theory and the self-help industry**, **Six common traits of New Age that distorts spirituality**, and **The pseudoscience of reductionism and the problem of mind**).

You can very well say that this ideology also has a kind of Thought Police, what I call The Hermeneutics of Suspicion.

In this article I will show what this precisely means. I will also show the built-in paradox it has, and why I myself have become an apostle of loafing. The article is divided into four parts:

- 1) What is ideology?
- 2) What is anger?
- 3) The paradox of the self-help industry
- 4) Why I am an apostle of loafing

## **1. What is ideology?**

What is an ideology?

Ideologies have always been a reflection of time, which manifests itself in the thoughts of human beings, specially the thoughts' direction towards the future. The

collective manifestations of the future have either appeared in form of rigid religious believe systems, or ideologies such as nationalism, national socialism, communism and liberalism. They all function with the implied assumption, that the supreme good lies 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 the salvation comes in some form – happiness, satisfaction, equality, liberation, etc. It has not been unusual that the means to get there have been to make people into slaves, or by torturing them and murdering 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 (read more about ideology in my article **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**).

The ideology today is consumerism, or consumer-capitalism, and the supreme good in the future is constant increasing production, constant increasing consumption. The thought-system behind this ideology comes from the so-called Management theory, which again builds on New Thought, Humanistic psychology, New Age and Postmodern intellectualism - and their relativism and subjectivism.

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

Ideologists can be called Hermeneutics of Suspicion.

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur has referred to the “hermeneutics of suspicion” encouraged by writers such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. What people think, and the reasons they produce, may not be the real reasons at work. It then becomes easy to become suspicious of the motives of everyone, whether as the representative of an economic class or the purveyor of a morality, or just as an individual with psychological problems to solve.

The last mentioned is a typical trait of the management theories and their use of coaching and psychotherapy (for example Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP – see my article **Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**) in leadership theories and personality developing courses. In this way they 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 (self-improvement), and remove political incitation and social responsibility by disguising social problems as personal/psychological problems.

In my article **The Matrix Conspiracy** I claim, that a serious problem in the future, is that a new kind of pseudoscience is trying to unite New Age pseudosciences with some of the pseudosciences of reductionism (see my article **The pseudoscience of New Age and reductionism**). I call it the Illuminati aspect of the Matrix conspiracy.

Because you can see the same development in the so-called diagnosed life, where large pharmaceutical companies are speculating in creating new diagnoses, which

have to be treated with medicine: a product of a reductionistic view of human nature (biologism), where they for example have removed spiritual and philosophical claims about the meaning of suffering (see my article **Suffering as an entrance to the Source**). In the self-help industry the same is happening in form of the so-called positive psychology (where the “positive” is about material glory, money, success, personal power, sex, health, beauty) and where you have to ignore, repress, turn your back to everything you find negative (see my article **The New Thought movement and the law of attraction**). Here the concepts of suffering and negativity also have been removed. So though the psychiatrists and doctors of the pharmaceutical industry, and the coaches and psychotherapists of the self-help industry, may be in opposition to each other (as shown in the movie Cuckoo’s Nest) it is in my view a product of the same Matrix conspiracy.

It is therefore interesting to compare the characteristic traits of New Age (the self-help industry) and the pharmaceutical industry with Aldous Huxley’s novel Brave New World. This novel foresees the end of democracy in a pseudoscientific, technological fixated meritocracy. The novel is about a totalitarian state, which keeps psychological and genetic control with everybody, so that they surrender to the claimed “blessings” of the progress of the instrumental or technical reason; that is: through the reductionisms of psychologism and biologism.

Everything, also humans, and human problems, are treated instrumental or technical. Psychology and genetics are controlling people down to the smallest details, children are being born and “grewed” on bottles, brains are being trimmed, characters are being converted after the needs of the dominant state. Notice the similarities with the New Age product called NLP which are about programming your brain so that you can become a success in society; that is: so that you work in favour of Consumer Capitalism.

The people in this meritocracy are considered as being happy. If they experience some kind of negativity, they are in large quantities supplied with the drug Soma, which makes them “happy” again. All religion, philosophy, literature and art have been removed. Science is strictly political controlled. The entertainment is so-called sensitivity-entertainment. You can go to sensitivity-parties, or you can watch sensitivity-movies, etc. Everywhere the people are meeting sensitivity-influences.

Somewhere in the novel there is a discussion between the main character Johannes and the President about the lack of truth and beauty in this society. The President argues that it might very well be that there isn’t any truth and beauty, but the people are happy. Johannes objects, and says that the whole society is completely meaningless. The President continues: “Yes, but the people are happy!”

When I read this novel I remember the quote from a nonviolent communication coach, whom I had a discussion with: “Would you rather be right, than happy?” – see my article **Nonviolent Communication is an instrument of psychic terror**.

The politicians in Denmark – which is one of the most secularized, management-oriented and coaching-controlled countries in the world – have had scientists to make an investigation, that shows that the Danes are the most happy people in the world. A bit of a paradox, because other investigations also show, that they are the largest consumers of Prozac in the world. Prozac is in Danish called “lykkepiller”, which directly translated to English means Happiness-pills.

I have personally several times been attacked by NLP-coaches and psychotherapists for no other reason than being a philosopher; that is: a person who uses rationality and critical thinking (which is Old-thinking in their point of view). I have even, several times, been advised to seek NLP-psychotherapeutic treatment, in order again to be able to think new, and be flexible and willing to change (to claim that I have psychological problems, without any justification, and without being in a treatment-situation, is actually a very serious insult).

They call it self-improvement, which again is one and the same as adjustment to society, and therefore to the ruling ideology. An advice that doesn't differ much from the theories behind the re-education institutions in China. A direct Stalinistic approach, which almost all companies today is using more and more (see other kinds of insults in my article **The Sokal Hoax**).

As mentioned in the start I actually think, that there is a danger that this ideology, in its fascination of economical growth and consumerism (personal power, success, and so-called NLP induced self-imagined X factors (=I am a fantastic superhuman), might melt together with Chinese Communism, which more and more is importing Western Consumer Capitalism, is growing more and more as an economical power, but which still is a totalitarian ideology, that doesn't accept democracy and human rights.

We more and more see how Western theorists of all kinds are praising China, how they more and more talk about what we can learn from China, but without mentioning China's violation of human rights. That we in the Western world gradually will accept the violation of human rights is now seen in how we for example have subjectified and relativized the freedom of speech, so that it can be used as a means of offending other people (see my article **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**). It is also seen in the treatment of the unemployed – “defect consumers” – who are treated as a kind of criminals. Their

rights have in many cases directly been taken away from them, and they are put in re-education institutions, and work-training camps, precisely as in China.

Chan Koonchung's novel *The Fat Years*, newly translated into English, portrays a China of the very near future that can best be described as slightly off-kilter. The year is 2013 and, following a calamitous worldwide economic meltdown, China has emerged seemingly unscathed.

It basks in a "Golden Age of Prosperity and Satisfaction," as Jason Beerman writes in a review of the novel - complete with Lychee Black Dragon Latte-slinging baristas at Starbucks, which has been acquired by the Chinese conglomerate Wantwant. China is the preeminent world power thanks to its economic dominance and its soft power strategies which, among other things, have resulted in a Sino-Japanese free trade sphere.

Meanwhile, the Chinese people have achieved an accelerated course in yuppiedom thanks in large part to a rapid rise in domestic demand, which has resulted in higher living standards for newly urbanized and rural dwellers alike.

There is a catch, however, Beerman continues. The entire month of February 2011—a brutal and chaotic period immediately before the beginning of China's Golden Age—has gone missing from people's memories and no one other than the social misfits who figure at the center of the novel's plot seems to realize or care. Simply put, everyone else is too busy making money.

This sounds like the type of late night fantasy a Politburo member might have after ingesting too much baijiu at a banquet. But Beerman writes, that the premise isn't a classic dystopian one per se since the amount of control that the state exercises over the people remains somewhat of a mystery. A central plot point revolves around whether the government forced a collective amnesia upon its people by drugging the water supply or whether the people simply willed the missing period from their minds by ignoring it en masse.

The rhetorical question that lies at the center of the novel is this: "Between a good hell and a counterfeit paradise, which one would people choose?" Or in the context of the general Chinese populace portrayed in the novel, would people choose to forget or ignore an ignominious past in favor of a prosperous present and future?

The author of the novel, Chan Koonchung, grew up in Hong Kong and Taiwan but now lives in Beijing. *The Fat Years* was written in 2009 after Chan observed a major change to the Chinese mentality in 2008. Following the grandeur of the Beijing

Olympics and China's reaction to the world economic crisis, Chan felt a general domestic confidence boost vis-à-vis China's place in the world, and he wanted to write a novel that examined this phenomenon.

Indeed, Beerman writes, the China of 2013 portrayed by Chan seems to have lurched forward into a stroke of good fortune, and the country scrambles to capitalize on this as best as it can. This means that while external factors have catapulted China to sole superpower status, its intact political system — corrupt, bloated, and paranoid — is ill-equipped to handle the change.

Chan uses this framework to poke holes in the country's current political structure. Call it prosperity with Chinese characteristics.

For instance, in the novel, Chinese people have “90 percent freedom.” They're free to make money, to be sure, but they're also free to watch whatever is on TV, browse whatever books are in the bookstore, and read whatever articles appear in the newspaper or on the Internet. The catch is that all this readily available information is tightly controlled and access to non-sanctioned information remains out of reach. Furthermore, the political narrative of the Communist Party of China originally revolved around the ideals of class struggle and equality. Following the dual debacles of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, the Party conjured a new storyline of having saved China from foreign imperialism and humiliation in order to deflect attention from its own failings. In the novel, its *raison d'être* has come to include the idea that it should “accomplish big things” in order to rationalize one party rule and differentiate it from democratic systems of governance.

This type of protean leadership benefits greatly from a populace that willfully forgets. *The Fat Years* draws easy comparisons to both *1984* and *Brave New World*. Like Winston in *1984*, Chen, the protagonist of *The Fat Years*, clings to old newspaper articles whose facts have since been wiped from the official record. And like in *Brave New World*, state-produced drugs are used to stabilize the population.

Beerman thinks, that what makes *The Fat Years* even more jarring than either of these classics is that it is rooted much more closely to current events and it is, at times, eerily prescient.

Much of the novel's long epilogue section is a deconstruction of China's hypothetical reaction in the wake of its rise to sole global dominance. The immediacy of the novel's time horizon is such that the predicted trappings that would accompany China's superpower status — a freely convertible yuan, an alienated and isolated

West, the construction through Iran of a “Pan Eurasian Energy Bridge”— are really not that far-fetched.

In our brave new world, Beerman concludes, it is this plausible realism that fact makes *The Fat Years* a gripping, if not terrifying, treatise on the rise of China, present and future.

And, in the brave new world of *The Matrix Conspiracy*: if you not are behaving precisely as the ruling ideology wants you to behave, then you’ll meet the thought police of the Hermeneutics of Suspicion. From the coaches and psychotherapists of the self-help industry, you will, more or less explicit, be told that there is something wrong with you, that you not are “normal”. From the psychiatrists and doctors of the pharmaceutical industry, you could even get yourself a diagnose, which paradoxical enough gives you some rights, but which also stigmatizes you.

The approach of *The Hermeneutics of Suspicion* is to attack the character of the person with whom they are arguing rather than finding fault with his or her argument. This move is within philosophy well known as arguing *ad hominem* (Latin for “to the person”). It is a technique of Rhetoric (communicative swindle), since discrediting the Source of an argument usually leaves the argument itself intact. Shifting attention from the point in question to some aspects of the arguer’s personality or behaviour are irrelevant to the point being discussed (see my book **A Dictionary of Thought distortions**).

To try to have a normal conversation with, for example, a NLP-coach or psychotherapist, can be an odd experience. Have you ever met a person, that to everything you say, answers: “I can see, that you mean something else, than what you say” – (implicit: what the coach thinks you mean). Then you might answer: “No, I meant what I said!” Then the person answers: “When you say no, I see that you with that answer means something else, than what you say” – (implicit, what the coach thinks you mean)? Well, then you probably have met one of our days thousands of NLP coaches. In my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)** I give concrete examples. You see the same in other New Age psychotherapies – for example the so-called Giraffe language – see my article **Nonviolent Communication is an instrument of psychic terror** – But as mentioned, it could also come as a diagnose from a psychiatrist or doctor.

But how can they know this? How can they play the role as someone who know who you are better than yourself, at the same time as they totally denies and renounce what you think, and the reasons you produce; that is: your experiences, your education, your arguments, your articles, your books?

Well, the only way they then can get their knowledge from, is from their own theories (which are without psychological, scientific, and philosophical foundation – see my article **The pseudoscience of New Age and reductionism**). It is pure prejudice. Prejudice is a belief held without good reason or consideration of the evidence for or against its being true. The funny thing is that philosophy - that is: rationality and critical thinking – precisely is opposed to prejudice. We are all riddled with prejudices on a wide range of issues, but it is possible to eliminate some of them by making an effort to examine evidence and arguments on both sides of any question. Human reason is fallible, and most of us are strongly motivated to cling on to *some* beliefs even in the teeth of evidence against them (for example wishful thinking); however, even making small inroads into prejudice can transform the world for the better.

But these people do the opposite. They try to remove rationality and critical thinking through the hermeneutic of suspicion. And they have success. As already mentioned, then a whole time-tendency within school, folk high school, universities and continuing education, focus on so-called "self-improvement – self-help", which are inspired by them.

But you don't only meet the problem of the hermeneutics of suspicion within high developed theories. You also meet it within the so-called common, mediocre life (see my article **The new feminism and the philosophy of women's magazines**). For example the whole of Karen Blixen's life is a rebellion against this mediocrity of the common life, which tried to clip her wings in her childhood. It is a human insult. I will say that this is probably the biggest wall you will meet on your spiritual journey. And it is much more painful when you also meet it from friends and family, if you not are behaving "normal". Like this it is somehow something that is coming from "within".

But to stand up against these influences, and keep your philosophical integration intact, will for certain create a spirit of greatness. In some cases it is best totally to avoid these people, because they will clip your wings if they get the chance for it.

Do as Epicurus, treat people with friendliness and compassion as long as it is possible, but withdraw to your garden when they try to lure you into the world's noise and political quarrels, because they think that this is a part of being "normal". When you in peace are cultivating your garden you can also keep on cultivating your philosophical integration and the refined pleasure in this. But not without being critical! I will return to this under the concept of anger.

The removal of genuine rationality from the stage leaves open the possibility of accusations of rationalizations for ulterior motives. This form of analysis (leading us

to think of groups or individuals “what is in it for them?”), is not only corrosive of trust in society. It is bound eventually to undermine itself. Why are such views themselves being propagated? What are those spreading them going to gain?

I think it is time for rebellion against this tendency in society, and especially within leadership theories. If we shall save our democracy and welfare society it is absolutely necessary, that we in relation to democracy-parasitic ideologies become philosophical rebels like Socrates, Henry David Thoreau, Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Krishnamurti – a kind of spiritual anarchists.

## **2. What is anger?**

In that we of course have to deal with the question of anger, not only the anger, which is implicit in an ideology, but also the anger in the critique of an ideology. Because ideology should be critized, but not end up in debate, and eventually violence.

There are three kinds of anger: the philosophical anger, the painfull anger, and the mix between the two.

### *The philosophical anger*

The philosophical anger is the anger over prejudice, hypocrisy, manipulation and injustice, which philosophy is in opposition to. This anger is controlled through objective thinking, critique and argumentation.

Objective argumentation is an ethical way to convince others about your views, because it in reel sense shows what is appropriate or inappropriate about a case. Objective argumentation contains some of the following elements: summary or abstract, informations, description, reason, concrete choice of words, nuanced objective statement.

The hallmark of philosophy is exactly to use objective argumentation, and to show the untenable aspect of painful anger, subjective argumentation and inappropriate assumptions. This is the essence in using philosophical dialogue.

In the philosophical dialogue 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 only as a mean, but also as a goal*.

Many NLP-coaches and psychotherapists, as already mentioned, often misunderstand the philosopher's rationality and critical thinking as a symptom on a problem with anger – on the contrary, it consists in love to wisdom.

Jesus said that anger is a sin, yet himself got angry, for example in the temple. Is he a hypocrite, or is he a man with psychological problems which have to be solved by a NLP-coach? Of course not. The anger of Jesus is the philosophical anger.

### *The painful anger*

The painful anger is coming from the emotional painbody. A thoughtpattern can create an enlarged and energycharged reflection of itself in the form of a feeling. This means, that the whole of the thought's past also can create a reflection of itself in the body. And if this past is filled with pain, then it can show itself as a negative energyfield in the body. It can nearly be seen as an invisible, independent creature.

The painbody is the inner demon, or the devil in the heart. Some painbody's are relatively harmless, some are anxietyfilled or angry, others are directly malicious and demonical. They can be passive or active. Some are passive 90% of the time, others are active 100% of the time.

The painbody is activated in the same moment as specific challenges activate the inappropriate basic assumptions, which have been created by bad experiences in the past. And they are being maintained by the vortex of negative automatic thinking, which follows from these basic assumptions.

This anger is controlled through neutral observation, and flexible (critical) thinking (also see my article **The emotional painbody and why psychotherapy can't heal it**).

### *The mix between philosophical and painful anger*

Often this mix is coming to expression in the culture of debate (*débat*, from *débattre*, struggle, quarrel). The culture of debate is especially seen in politics, but is the common used form of communication in the whole of society.

In debate people all the time work against each other and are seeking to show each other's flaws. They often only listen to each other in order to find flaws and defend their arguments. They more and more harden their own perspectives, because they are so busy judging the positions of others. They defend their own positions as the best solutions and eliminate others' solutions. They fundamentally seem to have a closed attitude, which is due to a fixed decision to be right. They wholeheartedly invest in their own conceptions, and they therefore calculate others' positions, without being

aware of feelings or relations, yes, they even often happen to play down and offend the other person.

But is this not exactly what the philosophers' critical thinking and objective argumentation also do? No!

The debating attitude is unethical, and leads to violence and war, where the painbody suddenly also is released. Why? Because it is based on subjective argumentation. Subjective argumentation is an unethical way to convince others about your views, because it doesn't show, what in real sense is appropriate or inappropriate about a case, but manipulates with it.

Subjective argumentation contains some of the following elements: innuendoes, distortions, generalizations, over-/understatements, sarcasm, satire, irony, postulates, emotional affections, coloured choice of words, choices and exclusions, subjective style.

Each and every time you, in this way, feel anger, then remember the virtues of philosophy: objective thinking, critique and argumentation. Avoid subjective thinking, critique and argumentation, because you in that case would be a hypocrite (see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions** and use it as a manual).

If you in your anger all the time remember objectivity, you will discover, that you have to withdraw from, or avoid being involved in, many confrontations.

And a last advice. Always take a night's sleep before you give expression for your anger (read more about anger in my article **Cathartic psychotherapies**).

### **3. The paradox of the self-help industry**

As mentioned: with my concept of the Matrix Conspiracy I claim that the self-help industry today is a central part of the ideology of the society as such, which is introduced in schools, in education, on workplaces (psychotherapy and coaching), in politics (spin doctors), mass media (reality shows, talent shows, internet, etc.), in activation courses for unemployed, etc., etc.

But when the self-help industry tells people, that they through self-improvement 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 age 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 chronically 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, as a *basic* starting point, is considered as a victim, as non-authentic, and therefore as powerless.

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 lose 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**).

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.

Philosophy and spirituality are in opposition to all kinds of ideology (again: see my article **The difference between philosophical education and ideological education**). In philosophy of existence (and in true spirituality) the concept of being is 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 its 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. Trying to become something else than what you are, is therefore the same as being yourself absent in the future, and it will directly create suffering in you.

It is this aspect of the self-help industry that has made me puzzled over that this industry actually is supporting what you in traditional philosophy and spirituality

consider as the four philosophical hindrances for the opening in towards the Source. But not enough with that, it directly hates the corresponding four philosophical openings (see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**).

This leads to the third aspect of the paradox, namely The Hermeneutics of Suspicion. 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, as a *basic* starting point, considers people as non-authentic and powerless if they have not accepted their ideology and therapeutic techniques, and want to become something else), 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-forgetful openness and absorption in the world, which is a condition for love, spontaneity, joy of life and wisdom: 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.

Read more about the self-help industry's paradox in my article **Self-help and The Mythology of Authenticity**.

#### 4. Why I am an apostle of loafing

That being invisible to the culture of self-help – that being unregarded, ignored, devalued, is in a culture of self-assertion a curse. I have myself experienced that in a rather special way, namely in connection with my awakening of kundalini, which threw me out in a spiritual crisis, years of investigating this crisis, university-studies in philosophy, and the slow development of my teaching **Meditation as an Art of Life** - and then that, again and again, being unregarded, ignored, and devalued by my surroundings - made me think of my own life as being befelled by a curse. First it was the devaluation of the kundalini-experiences I have had. But after I had got my education in philosophy, it was this education in itself that was being devaluated.

Let me therefore sum this article up by describing how the whole thing has influenced my own life:

Today I travel around in the world as a Philosophical Globetrotter, Life Artist and Idler.

I campaign against the work ethic and promote liberty, autonomy and responsibility; in reality: the fine art of doing nothing. In this I take an anarchic approach to the everyday barriers that come between us and our dreams.

So, today I'm in for spiritual anarchism, civil disobedience, and the right to be an idler.

I hold a MA in philosophy (University of Southern Denmark 1996-2001) and a minor in psychology (Aalborg University 2002-2005).

I have practised yoga and meditation since 1985, and during this period I have developed the concept of **Meditation as an Art of Life**. In 2008, 2009, and 2010 I have published this teaching in three books: *Meditation as an Art of Life – a basic reader* (2008), *Dream Yoga* (2009), and *A Portrait of a Lifeartist* (2010).

The development of this teaching is connected with my experience of a spiritual crisis (see my articles **Spiritual crises as the cause of paranormal phenomena** and **The awakening of kundalini**). Therefore the teaching also has some critical things to say about certain areas of spiritual environments and theories, simply because they – due to my experiences - are misleading and dangerous, many times directly wrong. This applies especially to New Age and the self-help industry.

When I in 2005 began to promote my teaching on the internet I, to my astonishment, experienced that there ruled some kind of spiritual censorship created by self helpers and New Agers – not organized – but created by individuals who share the same ideas.

The presence of these people on the internet is enormous. And everytime someone is promoting spiritual issues (and also often scientific issues) you will have them on your comments area and on your email.

My “problem” was that I introduced the concept of *Philosophical counseling*. Philosophy is in the eyes of these people, in some weird way, banned in spirituality – it is somehow a terrible thing (probably due to the use of critical thinking – explanation follows).

And they didn't want to go into discussions about it, they didn't want to argue for their disagreement (argumentation is negative in their point of view). Instead they tried to silence me through mumbo-jumbo and condescension. So where philosophy tries to investigate, restructure and change thought distortions, these people are directly using thought distortions in order to get on in the world (see my book **A dictionary of thought distortions**).

In the start I closed down a couple of websites, blogs and forums, simply because I was unprepared for the enormous degree of attacks.

But also in the real world I began to meet these people everywhere. I discovered that their theories are introduced in schools, continuing education and on workplaces; yes that they even are on the top of EUs project on lifelong learning and education. I also discovered the connection with postmodern intellectualism and different kinds of reductionisms practised on the Universities. Furthermore I discovered the connection with consumer capitalism, advertising industry and the entertainment industry.

Though many of the theories disagree in between there is a red thread going through them all: subjectivism and relativism - the indifference to truth, and the following distortion of spirituality, philosophy and science.

I realized that what I have met is a new kind of Sophists. The relationship between the Sophists (teachers of rhetoric) and Socrates (the philosopher) is the central issue in the whole of Plato's work (see the introduction to my book **A dictionary of Thought distortions**).

In lack of a better term I have decided to call the whole of this circus the Matrix Conspiracy. And I call the agents of this conspiracy The Matrix Sophists. The Matrix Sophists are a common term for the tens of thousands of consultants, coaches, practitioners, identity-experts, therapists, sexologists, educators, teachers, social workers, spin doctors, psychotherapists and psychologists, who all share the ideas of The Matrix Conspiracy; that is: some kind of mix between postmodern intellectualism, management theory, self-help and New Age.

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 (see my article **The four philosophical hindrances and openings**). 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 Matrix Conspiracy - which claims to work in accordance with spirituality - is turning this upside down.

As already mentioned: the paradox is that while The Matrix Sophists are 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 therapist, coaches, others ideas and ideals; making them modeling and imitating so-called successful people, etc., etc.

The Matrix Conspiracy, 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 therapeutically. 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.

That means that if you don't share their ideas, and even are critical, you are considered as a non-authentic, powerless victim. That is one of the reasons why they think they don't have to argue with you but instead are trying to silence you through mumbo-jumbo and condescension. I have especially met this attitude in relation with 1) my kundalini-experiences, 2) my education, 3) when I tried to take an education as a health care assistant, 4) in my time as unemployed, and 5) from friends and family.

I will describe these points in short. With the words of my professor David Favrholt, then we here speak about a movement, which conclusions are so rabid and stark raving stupid, that I hardly can give an account of them without immediately becoming accused of having distorted them. I can only say that I haven't distorted anything, but due to the limitation of this article I can only here give a short example of the essence of the stupidity involved. If you want to get the full picture, just read my books and articles as such.

The points are:

### *1) My kundalini-experiences*

When my kundalini-experiences had the aspect of *The Dark Night of the Soul* I tried to seek help from other spiritual people. The problem is that when you try to seek spirituality, for example on the internet, you will eventually meet New Agers or Self-helpers. Not surprisingly they had no clue about what I was experiencing, but as coaches and therapists (self-proclaimed spiritual teachers), they acted as if they knew everything. The message to me was that the crisis was due to my negative thoughts, and that the crisis would disappear if I from my vocabulary removed all the negative words connected with the crisis.

### *2) My education*

I have again and again been confronted with the claim that my education in philosophy (and psychology) is outdated; that I am caught in an old way of thinking which does that I am closed-minded. And precisely because most New Agers and self-helpers not are particularly qualified in philosophy (or any other higher

education), then they claim that this is a significant condition for contributing to the development of new ways of thinking in philosophy; that is: contrary to me they are much more open-minded; or said in another way: they understand philosophy much better.

Such statements are typical in the New Age environment. Normally they are directed towards educated scientists though. In order to explain where they have got such strange ideas from I will here (just one example among many) quote John Grinder, who is one of the founders of Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) (The other founder is Richard Bandler):

*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?*

The only thing Grinder here is demonstrating is that he doesn’t understand Thomas Kuhn (precisely because he is not qualified in philosophy). 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**).

In my article **The Sokal Hoax** you can find other examples of this way of attacking science and other highly educated people. In my article **Quantum mysticism and its web of lies** I give an example of how the New Age guru Deepak Chopra is using this way of “argumentation”.

Read more about NLP in my article **Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) and Large Group Awareness Training (LGAT)**

### *3) when I tried to take an education as a health care assistant*

After I had finished my psychology studies in 2005, I tried to take an education as a health care assistant because there in this area were plenty of jobs. I had to stop it though, because a great deal of the theoretical part directly is based on the self-help industry. On the fixed curriculum were for example NLP and Nonviolent Communication; that is: in order to take the education you are forced to work with these theories, and you are being examined in them. Moreover I experienced to be bullied in the classes when I asked critical questions; that is: mumbo-jumbo and condescension.

### *4) in my time as unemployed*

When you are unemployed in Denmark you have to attend so-called activation-courses (note: you are forced to, or else you loose your money). Most of them are runned by the self-help industry. I have attended quite a few. I will just mention one of them. It was a so-called job-seeking course. Most of the participants were under 30. Some of them were newly educated graduates, a couple of engineers, and a graphic designer. Others had simply lost their jobs.

The slogan of the course was that “From scratch we build up human beings as a wholeness.” Notice here the obvious view of the participants as scratch; that is: they were considered as non-authentic, powerless victims (also the participants who had had jobs for years).

The course had five parts:

a) A test of personality. Besides that the test in my case was completely wrong, then let me just mention the central issue: the attractive personality. In order to explain what the attractive personality is the consultant kept on using the same example, which she thought was quite obvious: namely that people with boyfriends/girlfriends had attractive personalities, while people without boyfriends/girlfriends had unattractive personalities (one of the participants found this a bit strange since she had just lost a boyfriend who had got killed in a car accident) – read more about personality typing in my article **Personality typing is a refined system of prejudice**.

b) How to give a handshake

c) How to smile

d) How to use a telephone. Here we learned how to ring up, say hello and goodbye

e) How to use the internet. Here we learned how to switch on the computer, go on the internet, search on google, and as the most advanced part: how to open an email account on google (Gmail).

The course lasted one month, so you can figure out how many days were spend on each of these parts. In the start of the course we learned how to shout in chorus: “waaauw!”. This we did several times each day. We had to do it each time one of the consultants had made an “obvious” conclusion.

### *5) from friends and family*

In my first three books you can see my starting critique of all this. But since the main issue of the books is my spiritual teaching, the critique is rather sporadic and unsystematic. As you can see in the descriptions of the books, I had actually also decided that this critique should be the final critique. But after 2010 I experienced how The Matrix Conspiracy increasingly was creeping into all aspects of my life.

Especially because I also began to meet it in friends and family, I decided to write two books on The Matrix Conspiracy (The Matrix Conspiracy - part 1 and 2), which are dedicated the revelation of what I seriously see as the most dangerous ideology on Earth. But it is also connected with the re-introduction of philosophical counseling and my teaching.

My book *A Dictionary of Thought Distortions* is a follow-up book to the first three books on my teaching. It is also a reference book to the two books on the Matrix Conspiracy. In this way it is a kind of bridge between my teaching and the two Matrix Conspiracy books.

As I have said before then it was actually my education in philosophy that taught me how to think clearly, and which was a main reason for, that I at all got out of my spiritual crisis. And that is also the reason why I again and again emphasize the importance of philosophy in a spiritual practice.

As far as I can see, then anyone, who is going to start a spiritual practice, ought to take some academical classes in philosophy. Though the spiritual practice not is intellectual when it is going beyond all concepts and ideas, then it must begin with the training of critical thinking, and here an intellectual and academical study in philosophy is crucial. And besides, this is not something new in spirituality. The monks, in, for instance Tibetan Buddhism, are going through up to ten years of studies in philosophy. The same is the case in the philosophical schools of India.

And, by the way, many of my philosophy-teachers on the university are actually some of the most spiritual humans I have ever met, and who have been the inspiring sources behind most of what I write in my books.

But the experiences with, again and again, being devaluated, without fully knowing what was going on, caused that I went into periods with periodical alcohol-abuse which I found justification for in the works of the Beatwriters, who also were the first kinds of dropouts I felt inspired by. I could also suddenly explode in extreme anger, where I insulted a lot of people, often in my nearest family. All this of course didn't made my situation better, and just confirmed people in the belief, that I was totally helpless, and in need of treatment.

I had to go into what was going on. It was necessary for me to investigate this enormous market alongside with the development of an art of life, or a teaching about how to live in this society. And today, where I have entered into my critical "Matrix Conspiracy Phase" I'm beginning to laugh of the implicated stupidity of this ideology, and I'm glad to report, that a lot of comedians also have discovered the comical side of all this.

Anyway, to understand and be free from self-assertion, and to do something, which you really love to do – regardless what it is, how small or how little remarkable it is – awakens a spirit of greatness, which never is seeking others' approval or reward, and which do a thing for its own sake, and therefore possesses strength and ability not to lie under for mediocre influences.

Here is that being invisible to the culture directly a blessing – that being unregarded, ignored, and devalued, can be an impetus to take another route: the quiet way, the gentle, steady, behind-the-scenes path. This is the invisible way of empowerment, the slow path of alchemy. Soul work takes time. This meant I intentionally had to make time, especially in our increasingly hyperactive, extroverted secular culture.

My own discovery of this was what finally turned my crisis into a healing and transformative spiritual practice. Instead of seeing my life as befelled by a curse, I began, deeply inspired by Karen Blixen, to realize that this might be God's plan with me. I could begin to see the dreamtracks and songlines in the artwork of my life (see my article **The philosophy of Karen Blixen**).

The question I had to ask, involved as I was in exploring extraordinary phenomena devalued by mainstream consciousness, was whether the burden of being disregarded by noninitiates is truly greater than the burden of trying to convince them that I had an experience that, at least by implication, made me somehow "special". I began to adopt an Epicurean way of life.

Epicurus (341-270 b.c.) was a Greek philosopher and Life Artist, who contrary to most other Hellenistic philosophers, was Athenian citizen. His place of birth was however on the island Samos by the seaside of Asia Minor, and on this, and on the other, cultural seen, rich islands in the eastern Aegean Sea, Epicurus came in contact with Philosophical traditions, that hardly was alive in Athens; especially the thoughts of the great philosopher of nature, Democritus.

Epicurus left Samos after having stepped his philosophical child-shoes on the island, and established as philosopher on the island Lesbos. However he was banished from the island because of his viewpoints. In 307 he travelled to Athens with the mental ballast, that he was Athenian citizen; this meant that he, contrary to the other philosophical schools, had the right to own land in Athens itself.

Epicurus established one of two central schools in Athens. It was in constant sharp opposition to the Stoics. I will not go deeper into the philosophical opposites, just mention, that philosophy of nature was central in Epicurus, whilst the Stoics had a concept of a god, which in them was the central. But both are common in the view of philosophy as an art of life.

The school of Epicurus was called The Garden, and since then the concept "to cultivate your garden" has in European way of thinking been synonymous with living a life retired from the world's ups and downs, to give up all ambitions about social status. This is a completely central aspect in my own way of life.

Epicurus had a real garden, a kitchen garden with vegetables, and to that he retired, and lived of own productions. It was an attempt to avoid the bindings of the world, just like the Stoics, but in quite another way. The Stoics were radically extroverted, and went into Athen's central buildings, where they, among the cloisters, forced themselves speech access to the citizens, whereas Epicurus retired, and avoided all kind of – also political – debate. As he said: "Live in secret!"

Note, that avoiding debate doesn't mean not to lead a critical dialogue in philosophical sense. Epicurus wrote critical texts, and his way of life is in itself a deeply critical attitude. I have already investigated the difference between debate and critical dialogue.

In his garden he realized his own life-ideal: together with friends and pupils to live a life in silent peace and joy, in peace to cultivate his garden and his needs, afar from the world's noise and political quarrel. It was a kind of philosophical commune, which stood open for all sections of population and for both sexes, and where the master with his friends practised, what they taught. The teaching of Epicurus is in

other words a way of life, a teaching, which puts undisturbed happiness and refined pleasure up as the supreme good.

This Epicurean attitude became a central inspiration for my own life, my teaching, my kind of philosophical counseling and cafés.

It is a passive way of meditation, a non-acting, receptive receiving, relaxed, enjoying, easy laid-back holyday-like kind of awareness, as when you listen to the birds or the breeze in the trees.

So today I live like a kind of philosophical mendicant friar, in poverty, chastity and obedience to some philosophical principles. I began to ask people the question: What philosophy of life would you choose if money was no object?

As the man who quit money, Daniel Suelo, says: “Wild Nature, outside commercial civilization, runs on gift economy: ‘freely give, freely receive.’ Thus it is balanced. Commercial civilization runs on consciousness of credit and debt; thus it is imbalanced. What nation can even balance its own budget or environment? Gift Economy is Faith, Grace, Love - the core message of every religion. The proof is inside you: Wild Nature is your True Nature, crucified by commercial civilization.”

Following this philosophy of gift economy (freely give, freely receive) all my services (including philosophical counseling and cafés) are free of charge. All my articles and books are available in free PDF Versions. Links can be found on my blog: [www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com](http://www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com)

Both the three basic books on my teaching, the follow-up book *A Dictionary of Thought Distortions*, and the two books on The Matrix Conspiracy, can in this way be seen as a kind of free internet library for people, who want to go into a deeper study of my teaching. The philosophy behind my teaching is namely the central foundation for my critique of The Matrix Conspiracy.

So, I earn my living from what people give me (the “freely give, freely receive,” philosophy) and what the society can offer in form of social security benefit (which I see in the light of a kind of “Robin Hood-philosophy”). This is sometimes not very popular, but as I have mentioned, sometimes you have to be a kind of spiritual anarchist, a philosophical rebel, if you want to live in accordance with your calling in life. And not so different from how monks and nuns, or artists, always have lived.

Krishnamurti said, that it would be wise to retire in the age of 40 or 45, or even younger. Not in order to enjoy the fruits of what the world can offer, or what you have gathered of wordly things, but retire in order to find yourself, to think and feel

deeply, to meditate and discover reality; because then you would actually be able to help the world in quite another way, because you not are identified with it. An insider in society is namely an outsider in relation to life itself, while an outsider in relation to society, is an insider in life itself (see my article **The philosophy of Krishnamurti**).

So now I have retired from the world's noise and political quarrels – especially the work ethic. In the period 1985-1989 I worked as a gentlemen's outfitter in Harrods in London. It was here the spiritual process began. Thereafter I went through the spiritual crisis, and have taken an education in philosophy.

Now it is time to go deep into the teaching I have developed during this period. People might get angry, and call me an idler. And they are correct. With the words of the great life-philosopher and idler, Lin Yutang, I call myself an apostle of loafing. But people have to remember, that I am not anymore contributing to the world's noise and political quarrels, and therefore not to conflict, violence and war. On the contrary I try to help people to get out of this confusion. I do this by offering free philosophical counseling and cafés. Mostly this happens in Rold Forest, Denmark, which is the place I have retired to. But it also happens when I'm traveling.

I also offer free philosophical counseling and cafés in the virtual world Second Life (read my article **Me and my Avatar**). Besides this I'm writing two blogs on what I call **The Peter Pan Project** - an experiment connected with all of the above-mentioned (see my blog [www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com](http://www.MortenTolboll.blogspot.com)).

So, as an apostle of the philosophy of loafing, I am actually working quite hard. My art of living is an idle philosophy born of an idle life. And if my life raises the suspicion of lolling, then look at my actions. I am trying to help people, and 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.

And look at what the wisdom of the art of loafing has given us. Chinese literary tradition is rife with the jottings of non-achievers – the cultured vagabond, the scholar recluse, the Taoist wanderer. Already in 500BC, the sage Lao Tzu recommended that one should “never be the first in the world”. Only he who is not wanted by the public can be a carefree individual, runs the Taoist adage. The importance of living is peopled with educated dropouts – for instance poets such as Su Tungpo and Tao Yüanming; Su, who sang about “the clear breeze over the river and the clear moon over the mountains”, and Tao, who sang about “the hen, which rested in the top of a mulberry tree”.

So after having followed the Beatwriters' way of living, then the Chinese kinds of dropouts have become the new great source of inspiration in my life.

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 and the growth fanaticism of the self-help industry) - 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 for 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.

Look at nature! All nature loafers, while Man alone works for a living!

No, I have retired to Rold Forest, where I participate in the joys of conversation on a moonlit night; to be in the middle of a joyful gathering of happy friends, like in Wang Hsichih's immortal little essay *The Orchid Pavilion*.

Only in such an art of life the magic of philosophical counseling and cafés can begin.

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

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