An Alternative Foundation for Enlightenment Morality or Values:
A Phenomenological Ethic

A critical retrieval of humanistic values: a precarious undertaking.

Many people have highlighted the crisis of our times: the growing sense of ultimate meaninglessness, the emptiness of life, the loss of human values, the increasing violence and destruction, the blindness of world leaders, the impotence and complicity of global organizations. Many secretly keep hoping that there will be an answer to the crisis of our civilization. But the decline and disintegration continues on with millions of people huddling in refugee camps and millions more going hungry. On the oceans there is only the kilometer's long bubbling of deadly methane gases, rising from the deep. Plastic micro beads are increasingly competing with the fish populations. Is this what the future holds? The heavens are silent and there are few answers. Humanity seems unable to free itself from the destructive influence of corporate and political ideology and terrorism.

It is in this context of doubt, survival, terror, denial and inhumanity that we want to critically retrieve the common human values that were liberated from the power of tradition, the landed gentry and the Church during the Enlightenment. Such a reclamation project may seem like a precarious undertaking. Many would not consider it worthwhile to recapture the Enlightenment values at all. They would deny there is any normativity to life and that all 'grand stories' and all 'universal values' have been found wanting. Many post-modernism writers tend to hold this view; a view which borders on nihilism. When one view and set of values is considered as good or as bad as any other, there is no reason to follow any particular guidelines. After the 'deconstruction' of all basic ethical perspectives, there is nowhere left to go. That is the theory, in practice those holding such views tend to shy away from the crucial issues of our time and end up supporting the status quo. At the same time alternative groups and protest movements struggle to find a new structural foundation for their actions. Many are oriented to the here and now and have little confidence in a new overarching or foundational perspective. To the extent that they see little value in a unifying vision and direction, their actions remain piecemeal and limited.

The critical retrieval of Enlightenment values does give rise to a number of challenging questions. What, for example, could an alternative foundation for humanistic values be based on? If there is such a foundation how could it not lead to another external authority; an 'ought' that would once again jeopardize human freedom? How can any new morality be harmonized with the 'free flourishing of the human subject'? In the face of many conflicting viewpoints who determines what are 'common human values'? These are some of the core questions that need answering.

The development of a different vision and praxis can be aided by the articulation of a different *foundation.* Over against modern rationalism, pragmatism, scientism, power structures and the immorality of the market, we will present a radically different *philosophy of life*, a different *view of human existence*, of *social interaction*, of *human knowledge*, of *human history*, and of *the earth, the ecologically embeddedness of all of life*. Put in academic terms, we need a different 'critical social philosophy', 'epistemology, 'anthropology', 'cosmology', and 'moral philosophy' to bring about a *structural* change. Many landless groups, small-scale farmers, local fishers, forest peoples, indigenous

1

people, First Nations and many others are *living* a radical different praxis within whatever political and environmental they face. In their social forums and declarations they have intuitively formulated the structural changes that are needed to develop a new global society. Our task is to aid that process by our critical reflections and foundational insights. At this point in history, a phenomenological ethics can be no more than a tentative description of various signposts. They can only point to a direction, like a roadsign, it is up to us to follow the signs. Describing an ethics, even a phenomenological ethics, which is about right and wrong, is always a precarious undertaking. At the same time we know from experience which is the right direction to go. *A phenomenological ethics can only articulate what we already know from experience,* for a time and a place. In that way a humanistic ethic can undergird and support our actions.

The modern distortion of human nature and humanistic values.

The neoliberal view of people as rational, narrowly self-interested, labour-aversive individuals is a central part of their ideology. Even when dressed up as the ideal person and the ideal society in the novels of Ayn Rand, it remains an ideology that is out of touch with the wide range of needs and interests that really motivate people. It is often presented as prizing the individual, as freedom of choice, control over one's own life, self-determination, pride in one's own accomplishments, no dependency on a 'nanny' society. To counter the pervasive influence of this reductionistic and individualistic ideology we need to pose a radical counter vision. It is from out of this alternative life direction that we seek to fulfil our lives, whether it is with regard to our physical needs or any other need out of the whole range of concerns. Throughout we have presented a view of human existence that honours all the dimensions of life and that is in harmony with all other creatures. It is a view of the ecological embeddedness of all of life, including humans, in which all creatures are given their due and have their rightful place.

Selfishness versus altruism

Throughout history people have sought their meaning and security in one dimension of life after another. As a result, the multidimensional coherence of life is violated and lost. Such absolutization deeply affects what motivates us in life. In that context we have encountered two views of human motivation: human selfishness versus altruism. If we are committed to the capitalist absolutization of economic life, then, ultimately, all of life is for sale; then everything becomes an economic object, including all aspects of human life. Then we become like our idol, *Homo economicus*, in the sense of what basically moves and motivates us in life. Then our bodies and our desires become objects for manipulation and profit; then a forest is no longer a forest but a resource to be exploited. This one-dimensional view of human motivation is often contrasted to *Homo reciprocans,* which emphasizes that humans are primarily motivated to reciprocate, to be cooperative, to seek the well-being of others, and to improve their environment. In keeping with this emphasis, many studies have appeared showing that human beings are equally motivated by altruism, empathy, care, selflessness, service, reciprocity and responsibility.

Rather than this contrast between selfishness and altruism, it would seem to be more helpful to recognize that people seek to satisfy the whole range of human needs, whether biological needs, needs

2

for security, belonging, meaning, creativity, relationships, recreation, or fulfilment. Human motivation is multi-dimensional; there are as many motivations for human behavior as there are dimensions to life. Nor do these motivations necessarily follow Maslow's hierarchical order with biological and physical needs at the bottom and self-actualization at the top. Concerns about food, water, shelter, safety and belonging may vary with the level of prosperity. The more precarious a person's existence the more concern there may be with just surviving. However, even in desperate situations many people have shown remarkable care and selflessness.

This kind of hierarchy of needs may be quite ethnocentric, that is, more geared to Western individualistic societies. In other, more community orientated societies, acceptance by the group and the well-being of the entire community may supersede individual needs. Present-day interests in a more elaborate *index of well-being* may come closer to a multi-dimensional view of what motivates people and what gives them satisfaction. Certainly the GDP of a country is a very inadequate, one-dimensional indication of a people's quality of life and what they value. If people have a basis for their existence, they can also allow themselves to be altruistic, instead of self-centered. Given half a chance people like to care, share, be helpful, be of service, and risk their lives, even in the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. When threatened and out of touch with themselves or in the grip of a destructive ideology, people can do the most unspeakable cruel, selfish, heartless and evil things. But given some basic security, people respond with care and solidarity.

An alternative way of life seeks to do justice to all the interrelated dimensions of human life. It is a way that beckons and invites us to let go of our ultimate anxiety and believe that life can be trusted. A *multidimensional unified approach to every part of life is another way of describing* a *structural change*; a change from *a one-dimensional emphasis to an integral, many-sided emphasis that seeks to do justice to all aspects of life.* The multidimensional unity of life and the many touchstones serves as a *criterion* for evaluating any alternative approach. Does a specific life direction follow healing directives for ultimate meaning, commitment, justice, fairness, equality, integrity, respect, tolerance, community, provisioning, expressiveness, creativity, and emotional, physical, sexual well-being for all or not?

Morality and ethics

When we look at modern ethical theories for clarification and support, we soon become disappointed. . Ethicists are often called upon when a society faces difficult or controversial issue. Unfortunately ethics is a nebulous area and ethicists are usually moral philosophers or theologians. What qualifies these academics to make ethical pronouncements about difficult situations? As an academic discipline ethics presents has its own problems, since it has no particular field of investigation. Except as a subdivision of philosophy (moral philosophy) there is no general discipline called ethics. In practice, ethics deals with the "moral" or normative nature of specific human activities. As a result, we only have specific kinds of ethics, like environmental ethics, military ethics, social ethics, business ethics, medical ethics, the ethics of technology, etc. Historically this has resulted in a strange split between "facts and values", between one's 'factual' daily actions and the 'morality' of one's actions. In view of the history of this "split" it is not surprising that a philosopher or a theologian is asked to reflect on the 'morality' of certain medical

practices, for example, or the 'morality' of a technological innovation, and so on. We can wonder how a theologian-ethicist who is not trained in medicine and is not a practicing doctor can comment and provide guidelines for medical procedures and research? Or how a philosopher-ethicist who is not an engineer can provide insight, for example, into the implications of new developments in nano technology?

On a personal level this split between one's actions and its morality tends to give rise to such statements as "I am just a soldier, I just follow orders", "I am just an engineer, I have no control over what people do with my invention", "I just work here, I don't set the policies of this company", and so on. On a practical level, usually nothing is done about a problem until something goes wrong, and then the ethicists are called in and a commission is set up to provide new guidelines. But the problem starts much earlier. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, social workers, journalists, etc. are not sufficiently trained in the broad, 'moral' aspects of their daily work. Or, if they have that awareness, there is often little room to act upon their insights and experience, especially if the bottom line is profits or the fear of legal ramifications. It is not easy to disturb the status quo or to be a whistle blower.

As a subdivision of philosophy, ethics is usually considered an autonomous discipline that focuses on the analysis and the testing of moral value arguments. Ethics presupposes morality, that is, people's moral behaviour, their sense of right and wrong, and what they ought or ought not to do. From that perspective ethics is an autonomous, objective discipline that analyses the reasons people give for their moral behaviour and that challenges inconsistencies in their arguments. Practiced in this way, it tends to be an abstract undertaking that is quite far removed from daily practice, even though they may touch on some very foundational questions. Those ethicists that are closely associated with a particular institute, like a medical school or a research lab, face the opposite problem. With the pressure to come up with practical and workable answers, they may lose the foundational perspective and become more pragmatic.

This dualistic approach to value questions hides the fact that each human activity and each dimension of life related to that activity carries its own normativity. There are no neutral, value free, objective activities and enterprises. It is in our very actions that the normativity of life reveals itself. Morality is not something that we can consider separate from our actual counseling practice, or our medical care, or our technical procedures, or our urban development, or our educational approach, or our fishing practices, or our business dealings, or our peace keeping, or our mining operations, or our academic writing, or any other human activity. Morality is not something we can consider after the fact, or as second thoughts. In every action the guidelines and direction we follow becomes apparent. In our present context moral philosophy and ethics are of little help.

A phenomenological foundation for our common human values.

Returning to some of the challenging questions posed earlier, the first and most important answer is that a *phenomenological ethic is not founded in an external authority*. Rather the 'value' is *inherent to any subject*, including humans. All creatures carry an inherent, integral subjectivity that ought not to be

4

violated. From the simplest organisms to the most complex, each creature carries its own unique subjectivity in interaction with all others. As we indicated before in the section on knowledge and science, trees and forests tell us how they exist as integral subjects. By their very nature they tell us what is 'a good forest'; how they function and flourish holistically. The intricate and complex interactions of a forest community tell us how we might harvest (select) trees in an ecologically sustainable way. Clearcutting is not one of those ways. When an enslaved 14 year old boy on a cocoa plantation says, 'tell your people that if they eat this chocolate they are eating my flesh', as he turns and shows the scars on his back. Others show the deep cuts in their feet and hands from handling their machetes. When we look in their eyes we know that their very being is being violated. They have been reduced to mere disposable economic objects. In countless ways millions of 'free flourishing human subjects', are being violated to a greater or lesser degree. Their inherent subjectivity tells us what is 'right and wrong' about their situation and way of living.

These experiences are like *touchstones or criteria* by which actions are evaluates in terms of what is right or wrong. They tell us what is a genuine or authentic response to the other. Another image is that of a *roadsign or signpost* that tell us which way to go. In terms of our fellow-humans, words like egalitarian, participatory, inclusive, equality, care, etc. are like so many touchstones that indicate how to honor the other person's unique subjectivity. Observing how a forest community functions serves as a roadsign in dealing with forests, 'go this way if you want to maintain this forest', or 'that is the wrong direction'. These fundamental touchstones or signposts only manifest themselves in our actual experience. It is only when we are actively engaged in fishing, farming, building, exchanging, organizing, counseling, making music, writing a play, relating, or any other activity that these touchstones become apparent to us. It is only through intense involvement and openness that we develop a sense of the nature and value of everything that is and the things we do and how we relate. To discern these touchstones, we do need eyes to see the other. We can also close ourselves off from the fullness of their subjectivity and their inter-relatedness. When we do people suffer and forests disappear. Together these touchstones or signposts in their interrelatedness can be seen as a *phenomenological ethics.* In short, a phenomenological ethics is inherent in the phenomena. Up to us to follow the signs.

A phenomenological ethics is not static but keeps unfolding, because life keeps changing as we give form to it. It is not given us to live a perfect life for we are human. Rather it is the overall direction that counts, step by step, and our willingness to retrace our steps and change course when needed. On a macro level it is as simple as when our agricultural practices lead to ecological disintegration and climate change, we need to retrace our steps and make a radical change in agricultural practices. If our mining practices and the burning of fossil fuels lead to global warming, social injustice and crimes against humanity, we need to stop and come to our senses. If our oceans are acidifying and our fish stocks are depleting, we need a turn-about and make a new beginning. The same is true on a micro-level. If local people don't have a voice in what happens to their community, or if they can't provide for themselves, or are dispossessed, or can't use the food from their forests, or are deprived of clean water, we can know that something is drastically wrong and that there needs to be a structural change. When a village cooperative becomes dictatorial and does not share equally, we know some fundamental directive for

egalitarian relations has been violated. That does not mean that some situations can't be complex and difficult to resolve, but the key directions are usually very clear. It is up to us to implement these guidelines by trial and error. A phenomenological ethics is not hard to discern, it is near all of us to do. *It is both an invitation to living well and an ought if we want things to work out.*

These built-in touchstones cannot be possessed or controlled, because we can only come to know them in this culture and in this time in history. They are always relative to the situation. They cannot be formulated in fixed laws; if we tried they would only be meaningful to our time in history and our culture, and relative to the limits of our experience. We cannot find our security in the rule of law and regulations, which soon become inadequate, outdated or distorted. They become rigid, formal rules that violate human freedom, response-ability and creativity. We cannot objectify the touchstones. There do seem to be basic guidelines that govern each dimensions of life and all subjects. But these touchstones are of a very different nature than universal laws or moral precepts. We might even describe these touchstones with words like *justice, equality, solidarity, care, respect, clarity, ecological sustainability, physical well-being, sensitive openness, communal living space, meaning,* and so on. However, these words are no more than cognitive descriptions of the directives. Roadsigns or signposts need to be followed, implemented and actualized. Human actions and relationships are always *existential encounters*, for we are always encountering the other. As we described earlier, even logical distinguishing is an existential encounter, for cognition is about discerning the truth about the other.

A touchstone for doing justice

Doing justice is one example of a tentative description of a phenomenological ethic, It describes the basic direction for all governing and for establishing overarching rules. To do justice means to give everything its rightful place under the sun so that every creature can flourish. That means that true justice is based on eco justice and opened up to social justice. True justice is restorative, allowing all creatures to flourish, including all humans. In terms of establishing justice (governing), it means that it ought to be participatory, communal, inclusive, doing justice to every person and every group. To do otherwise would mean to be unjust and to violate the very being of the other. True justice ought to involve self-governing, establishing communal rules in which everybody has a voice. These descriptions are no more than a signpost that needs to be followed and *given form in every different and new situation*. At times we may not know what is truly fair or how to do justice to all the complexities of a particular situation. Then it would be tempting to hide behind a rule or a formality, 'the law is the law, if we start to make an exception there is no end to it'. Sometimes we do not know what is a fair way of doing things. The Law cannot give us ultimate security and safeguard our existence. Only by our active participation can we communally establish justice and deal fairly with different situations and all people.

As we see over and over again, the 'rule of law' is no guarantee that justice will be done. Only if we are open to these basic regularities or touchstones of life can we find harmony, safety and peace. As some of the examples of local farming and fishing communities show, developing new ways of self-governing need to come from a 'bottom-up' approach in a truly egalitarian way. New rules need to be established by communal participation and assent. Such new organizational structures and communal agreements will differ from place to place, depending on cultural traditions and local situations. All we know is that

they need to be fair to everyone and involve the total community. There are many instructive examples from various local villages and cooperatives.

This guideline too serves as a criterion for evaluating all alternative approaches: *governing ourselves rightly in a way that does justice to all.* At the same time this touchstone serves as a radical condemnation of all domination, empire, power, dictatorship, oligarchy, the few lording it over the rest, enriching themselves and exploiting all others, all miscarriage of justice and all misuse of power, especially the use of police and army to protect vested interests. In this respect the Canadian government may endorse the 'rule of law' but in many aspects of life and in many instances it does not administer justice for all. It has and still does repeatedly violate this guideline for doing justice by its commitment to neoliberal capitalist ideology. (For examples of descriptions of a number of touchstone or guidelines see De Graaff, 2016. The Gods in Who They Trusted, chapters 6h and 10.)

The nature of things

One last point that is worth considering are the different attempts to explain the normativity of life. Where does this normativity come from? For many this built-in normativity embedded in our experience involves a mystery. For others it is something that just is*,* the nature of things.

There have been many attempts to explain the normativity inherent in life. Within an evolutionistic framework they are seen as the adaptations that help the human species survive and adapt to new situations. Within the sociological tradition morality is seen as social constructions that maintain positions of power and privilege and protect the in-group. There is no doubt that this normativity has survival value or helps to maintain the established order. There are many other explanations, probably as many as there are worldviews and they each have some validity. The question is whether such explanations, usually limited to one or more aspects of life, can do justice to the complexity, richness, interrelatedness and normativity of life.

Within Christianity there is a tradition that believes that beside the special revelation contained in the Bible, there is also a 'general revelation', that God reveals himself in nature and history. God as Creator ordered and actively maintains the creation. His creation ordinances uphold the whole world and guide the unfolding of history. In this tradition these ordinances are seen as eternal, universal laws that hold for all of creation and all times. However, this view of eternal laws have been found wanting and misused.

During the Enlightenment leading scholars not only started to oppose the political, economic, social and moral power of the Church and tradition, but, even more fundamentally, they rejected the *foundation* of the Church's authority. The great achievement of the Enlightenment project was that it made a radical break with a supernatural source of Revelation as the ultimate authority, power and norm for all of life. Even though many maintained a belief in God as the originator of the world that set things in motion, they held that it is up to humankind to discover the laws that govern life.

Generally Enlightenment thinkers based their view on human freedom and ability to reason, or, to put it more down to earth, the freedom to observe, explore, investigate, categorize, and experiment, both experientially and scientifically. Likewise with regard to the many innovative technological and artistic

7

developments and discoveries during the Middle Ages, (cf. BBC lecture series) they could now be liberated from the constraints of the Church and tradition. Although there were earlier liberating forces during the Renaissance and Reformation, the Enlightenment heralded a more radical shift from the 'age of Myth' to the 'age of Reason'. By 'Myth' in this context we mean relying on a supra-natural Authority that comes to us from outside this world.

The distinction between the physical and the meta-physical, between transcendence and immanence, between the sacred and the secular, has plagued and limited scholarship and practice for countless centuries. This age-old dualism or split, even in its secularized forms between body and mind, the natural sciences and the humanities, between our practices and the ethics of our actions, or today, between ecological concerns and economic growth, and so on, has thwarted insight into the interconnectedness, unity and morality of life. By placing the free flourishing human subject and the liberation of society central, the Enlightenment potentially broke through these dualisms.

However, the rejection of the authority of the Church and divine revelation presented a new problem. It created a vacuum. Many basic common human values could now be re-articulated and liberated from the constraints, interpretations and distortions of the Church. The internal contradictions within the Enlightenment vision soon led to new distortions and limited the impact of the newly articulated human values. In the end these ethical, political, legal, social, economic and scientific principles and individual freedoms lacked a deeper foundation

There are other views of 'myth', the 'sacred', 'transcendence', and the 'built-in normativity' of life and its open-endedness, that do not appeal to an external authority. One such view comes from the many indigenous peoples and the other from philosophical reflections, which are in opposition to a reductionistic and mechanistic view. They call for the re-enchantment of life, emphasizing its open-endedness and mystery.

For many other indigenous people it is the Creator that is behind the sacredness of all creatures, as well as the earth, water, and the forests. The Creator that is separate from and above all creatures and at the same time in all creatures. Within this integral perspective, their worldview plays a crucial role. Their beliefs validate and reinforce their practice and, vice versa, their practice informs and adjusts their beliefs to new situations. Experience is not restricted or distorted by their beliefs; rather they confirm and reinforce their practice. Their knowledge, practice, and worldview form a unified whole. People are part of the total community of beings; they have a kinship with all creatures. They belong to the land and seek to live in peaceful coexistence with all other beings. Traditional ecological knowledge contains an ethical and belief component, and in their worldview nature pulsates with life and spirit. As a result of this belief, the core of their environmental and social ethic is based on respect, humility, reciprocity, and communal care and obligation. Humans are part of the *community of beings*. There is a sacred, personal relationship between humans and all other beings. It is a living environment that is both 'supernatural and natural'.

Their *vision* of life is deeply rooted in and gives expression to their *way* of life; they mutually reinforce each other. The two (vision and way of life) together can be described as an 'ecological ethics' or a 'sacred ecology'. It is a view of the ecosystem that pulsates with life and spirit and incorporates all

creatures including the people who belong to the land. Such integral views can be represented by myths and stories and danced or sung. It is the way traditional knowledge is celebrated and passed on to the next generation. The wisdom of this kind of worldview gives expression to universal themes.

The so-called 'animism' contained in many of their myths do not begin to explain the complexity and a depth of meaning that these words do not convey. Western reductionistic scientific concepts do not begin to explain this multi-dimensional coherence and depth of life.

It is too simplistic to see such visions of life as remnants of nature religions or an animistic, pantheistic, mythical worldview. The words 'a transcendental-immanence' already comes a little closer to describe the 'mystery' of life, that is, the 'sacredness' of every creature. There is a depth of meaning to everything and all actions and relations that continues to reveal itself. Life cannot be captured in evolutionistic, biological or physical concepts. Such reductionistic views have led to the violation of life. Whether one shares these traditional worldviews is irrelevant at this point. The important thing is that they tried to capture something of the integral unity, complexity and on-going disclosure of all creatures and their inter-relationships. All subjects display a richness and a fullness that continues to unfold and reveal itself.

Philosophers like van Peursen and Zuidervaart Have highlighted the open-enedness of all phenomena, that nothing is closed off in itself, that all dimensions relate integrally to all other aspects, that nothing can be reduced to its analytical or lingual dimension and that all of life presents an ethical demand. In his last book van Peursen, 1994. *Na Het Postmodernisme; Van metafysica tot filosfisch surrealisme*, describes a third alternative between metaphysical philosophy and post-modern philosophy. He looked for an alternative between an empiricistic and positivistic view of reality and a supra-temporal metaphysical view. He described it as a deepening of the "naked facts", a plus, or an intensifying of reality, which explains the term "surrealism" in the title. Elsewhere he called it transcendence in immanence. In short we could say we need a perspective that honors the richness and fullness of each human subject and that of all other creatures.

After post-modernism with its rejection of universals and the big stories, how can we still do philosophy which abstracts and generalizes? Van Peursen's answer is that philosophy must focus more closely on reality as it presents itself and challenges us. The other two traditions assume a static view of reality. For him, reality is dynamic, provocative, disclosing, always in process, and so is our theorizing. *Things are their meaning, they reveal* and as such they are inseparably connected and open to our experience. Our ordinary daily experiences, challenge us and evoke a response. In this encounter with reality, things and events disclose their real meaning. There is an ethical appeal that comes to us from the events and the world around us.

In his book about the *Strategy of Culture* van Peursen ends with a discussion of an "ethics of interaction". For him ethics is a total strategy that pulls the impersonal powers in nature and society within the sphere of human decision making. All know-how, all technology, all operational procedures, ultimately leads to the question of whether something is good or bad. Our entire existence is of an ethical nature and wants to give direction to our actions. The strategy of a culture ought to lead to

9

human liberation. Such an ethic can only become apparent in concrete situations and decisions. It is an ethics of interaction that comes about in the interaction between our ethical sensitivity and the concrete problems. This is not some utopia that is blind to human powerlessness and moral failure. Rather, the goal of struggling together for alternative solutions is to alleviate suffering, to deal with guilt and to work through resistance. Conflicts and aggression may be rooted in our biological make-up. We cannot ignore them, but perhaps we can channel them through our moral awareness. Normativity is the true counter force of humankind. Immanence is opened up by transcendence. If the open dimension (the transcendent) of ethical decision making becomes visible in a culture, then humans regain their true appearance or stature.

This emphasis on normativity is about the unity and integrality of life, that there is no sacred realm in distinction to the profane. The 'profaneness' of life is utterly 'sacred'. Such a view requires a "referring" or "pointing to" ontology like van Peursen's deictic ontology ("verwijzend" in Dutch), a view beyond rationalism and classical ontology. In that context van Peursen quoted Dooyeweerd's phrase that 'meaning is the way things exist' ("zin is de zijnswijze van all het geschapene"). In the interacting process between people and reality everything discloses meaning, meaning that makes an appeal, an appeal to foster life-enhancing ways. We could call it a total existential way of being that continually calls for choice, such is the nature of reality. This is a liberating and joyful way of being, because in spite of failures, life keeps calling us back and there can be restoration and reconciliation when we fail.

(His most well-known book that has been translated in many languages is his "cultural philosophy", *The Strategy of Culture* (1974). The Dutch version was last revised and updated in 1992, *Cultuur in Stroomversnelling* (1999, 10th edition). C.A. van Peursen, 1992. Verhaal en Werkelijkheid. Een deiktische ontology, Kampen: Kok Agora; C.A. van Peursen, 1994. Na Het Postmodernisme; Van metafysica tot filosfisch surrealisme, Kampen: Kok Agora.)

Van Peursen uses phrases like "the ethical appeal that comes to us from the situations we encounter each day and that call for decision" to describe the normativity of life. By comparison Zuidervaart uses words like "fidelity to societal principles" to indicate a similar state of affairs. These societal principles are embedded in a particular culture and are always already historically given. People hold these principles and are held by them in society. They are not eternal creational ordinances; instead they emerge during the course of human history. As he puts it: "By 'societal principles' I mean historically developed, continually contested, and widely shared expectations about how social institutions should be organized, how cultural practices should be carried out, and how interpersonal relations should be configured. Justice, truth and solidarity would be examples of such principles in contemporary Western societies."

In keeping with this perspective, truth also becomes a very dynamic concept, something that comes close to "doing the truth". (55) Truth, in whatever area, is what discloses life-enhancing activities and principles. As such, truth is multidimensional, it cannot be reduced to just propositional truth, even though that has its (limited) place as well. Truth occurs when people are being true in the various dimensions of their life. "It can be seen as a dynamic, multifaceted, and fragile calling in which everyone always has a stake and to which no one can avoid making a reply." (56) Since there is always more to

discover about what is life-enhancing and life-fulfilling for everyone, no one can possess the truth. There is no absolute, time-less truth, rather it is a dynamic on-going process of disclosure that requires the experience and insights of many people. At the same time, truth in the different areas of life is also something that impinges upon us, that evokes and provokes, that holds us in its grip and calls for a response.

Zuidervaart goes a step beyond van Peursen by giving more content to the "sense of values", "ethical sensitivity" and "normativity". By giving a few examples, like justice, solidarity, and resourcefulness, he provides us with a number of "general values". However, he wants to make sure that these "principles" are not seen as absolutes and as unchanging and universal principles. Rather, by calling them "societal principles" he wants to emphasize *both* their compelling nature and validity *and* their historical and cultural embeddedness. As he puts it: "The principles already mentioned are not timeless absolutes but rather historical horizons. They are historically learned, achieved, contested, reformulated, and ignored, and their pursuit occurs amid social struggle." (58) Or, as he puts it elsewhere: "Rather it (the articulation of societal principles) will emerge from the struggles of many groups and traditions to fashion and enact a 'global ethic'." (59) To summarize his view: "A social philosophy after Adorno requires the articulation of normative 'universals' that are not abstract – societal principles such as justice, resourcefulness and solidarity whose meaning neither floats in a modern heaven nor sinks into a postmodern morass but emerges historically 'through clashes between societies and within them'." (60)

He could have mentioned other principles that have to do with physical well-being and wholeness, or sensitive openness and expressiveness, or ecological balance and sustainability, or individual and communal life-space, or commitment and mutual acceptance, or, from his own area, imaginative cogency and disclosure of what is life-enhancing, etc. To avoid misunderstanding, he limited himself to those areas with which he is familiar, has been personally engaged in and has struggled with others to make a meaningful contribution. It emphasizes that these principles can only be known and realized in the actual societal struggles with many others and in the midst of conflicting opinions.

(Lambert Zuidervaart, 2004. Artistic Truth; Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure, Cambridge: University Press; 2007. Social Philosophy After Adorno, Cambridge: University Press; 2008. After Dooyeweerd: Truth in Reformational Philophy, Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies.)