

Philosophy, Truth, and the Wisdom of Love

By Lambert Zuidervart

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The love of wisdom needs the wisdom of love. Let me say what this means and why it matters. I begin with a poem by Miriam Pederson titled “Hold Your Horses.”¹

Lasso truth
like a run-away steer
and you will find its veins
running cold.

Approach it like a lover
with a ribbon for her hair
and truth, in time,
will lean in your direction.

Or, as I have put it more prosaically, the love of wisdom needs the wisdom of love.

Since ancient times, philosophy in the West has described itself as pursuing the truth out of love for wisdom. In its origins, Western philosophy is not simply an academic discipline or professional occupation. It is, in the words of Pierre Hadot, a way of life or a spiritual exercise, and it offers a path to truth that challenges other ways in which people love wisdom and pursue truth.² This puts philosophy in tension with robust wisdom traditions attached to the world’s religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam,

Do we live in a “post-truth” era? Are appeals to emotion really replacing factual truth? Has truth become irrelevant? Tracing Western conceptions of truth to their pre-Socratic origins in a godlike search for what is uncreated and indestructible, this article seeks to show why standard philosophical notions of factual truth cannot do justice to the broader meaning of truth in the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Truth in this broader sense must be lived out, not simply asserted, and it requires us to seek the good, to resist evil, and to live in hope. At its heart, to live the truth is to love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves. Adapted from the “exaugural address” given in May 2017 after the author retired from being a professor of philosophy at the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) and the University of Toronto, this essay displays the biblical background to his ongoing work on a new theory of factual truth, within a broader conception of living truth. **Lambert Zuidervart** is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at ICS, Emeritus Member of the Graduate Centre for Theological Studies at the Toronto School of Theology, and a Visiting Scholar in the Department of Philosophy, Calvin College.

and the religions of indigenous peoples.³

Christianity, too, includes a wisdom tradition, one that flows from Judaism and does not easily combine with Greco-Roman philosophy.⁴ Hence the strong contrast in I Corinthians between Greek wisdom and Christ as “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:18-25), a theme echoed in the letter to the Colossians, which finds “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” hidden in Christ (Col. 2:2-3).⁵ In the early days of Christianity, it was not readily apparent how the wisdom of the Greeks and the wisdom of Christ should relate, no more than it is obvious today how one can honor the Christian wisdom tradition while philosophically pursuing the truth. The very words in which Western philosophy has described its vocation—truth, love, wisdom—are spiritually loaded terms; in the Jewish and Christian scriptures, these terms do not mean what many philosophers have taken them to mean. So Christian philosophers must reconceive the meaning of these terms in line with our religious wisdom tradition and with the scriptures that provide its decisive touchstone.

I want to explore what this might require in our understanding of truth. After commenting on some biblical passages, I shall suggest that a philosophy in line with the Jewish and Christian scriptures should understand truth as a way of life

¹Miriam Pederson, “Hold Your Horses,” one of three poems, accompanied by images of three sculptures by Ron Pederson, in a collaboration titled “Conversations,” in *Seeking Stillness or The Sound of Wings: Works on Art, Truth, and Society in Honour of Lambert Zuidervaart*, eds. Peter Enneson, Michael DeMoor, and Matthew J. Klaassen, forthcoming, ms. p. 5.

²See Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); and *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002). Robert Sweetman uses Hadot’s notion to help make sense of various traditions of Christian scholarship in *Tracing the Lines: Spiritual Exercise and the Gesture of Christian Scholarship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016).

³For a survey of these traditions, see Huston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), a completely revised and updated edition of Smith’s path-breaking *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958). Smith emphasizes the notion of “wisdom traditions” in the 1991 version, which presupposes *Forgotten Truth: The Primordial Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), his attempt to see what the world’s religions hold in common and what the modern West is in danger of forgetting. See also Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), where he tries to address the “spiritual crisis” that has arisen, he claims, from the West’s writing “a blank check for science’s claims concerning what constitutes knowledge and justified belief” (4). I would argue that the deposit on which this scientific check is drawn stems from a Greek philosophical wisdom tradition at odds with many religious wisdom traditions.

⁴The historical record is more complicated than this suggests, of course. In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, for example, Hadot argues both that the Patristics Christianized philosophical spiritual exercises inherited from Greek and Hellenistic philosophy and that medieval Scholasticism, in distinguishing theology from philosophy and privileging theology, “emptied [philosophy] of its spiritual exercises” (107), thereby setting the stage for a predominantly theoretical and systematic emphasis in modern philosophy.

⁵Unless noted otherwise, all Bible translations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

rather than simply a set of assertions, as something enacted rather than merely claimed.⁶ Then I shall discuss three endeavors through which we can live (the) truth: by seeking the good, by resisting evil, and by living in hope. I shall conclude by connecting all three endeavors with the call to love.

Wisdom, Truth, and Love

In a remarkable confluence of central biblical concepts, Psalm 85 links truth with love, justice, and peace. Translations often hide these links, for it is hard to render ancient Hebrew in contemporary English. Yet Psalm 85 prominently employs the term “*emeth*,” the central concept of truth in the Jewish scriptures, and it portrays truth as meeting up with steadfast love (*chesed*) in the messianic condition. When God promises peace to God’s people (v. 8), and when God’s glory (*kabod*) comes to dwell on Earth (v. 9), then, says Psalm 85, love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss (v. 10). The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. This means much more than concord or an absence of conflict. *Shalom* is a condition of complete fulfillment where all creatures flourish—a condition I call “interconnected flourishing.” Psalm 85 envisions a glorious day when justice and *shalom* embrace, when steadfast love and truth converse. In that day truth will spring up from the earth, and justice will shine from the sky (v. 11).

Now, if you have a standard Western philosophical concept of truth, you might well wonder what truth could possibly have to do with love, justice, and *shalom*. The standard Western concept ties truth to factual accuracy and to the correctness of assertions. On one common construal, a statement is said to be true when it corresponds to the facts. But if that is all truth comes to, then it would seem bizarre to envision a day when love meets truth.

In the Jewish scriptures, however, the primary meaning of truth (*emeth*) is not accuracy or correctness. Instead, *emeth* means faithfulness, and it pertains both to God and to human beings. To be true, in the first instance, is not simply to be correct but to be faithful in relationship to others. God is true in faithfully carrying out God’s Word of promise for creation, and human beings are true when their dealings are faithful to the conditions of God’s promise. That is why Calvin Seerveld says truth in the scriptures means “God’s blessing presence is in

⁶For an exploration on the relation between the truth of assertions and the truth of actions in the history of Western thought, see Richard Campbell, *Truth and Historicity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). Campbell subsequently argues in *The Concept of Truth* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) that truth is primarily an attribute of actions rather than of linguistic items; that assertions are primarily actions; and that assertions, like other actions, are true as achievements. Other than reformational scholars such as Hendrik Hart and Calvin Seerveld, Campbell is one of the few contemporary philosophers who highlight the Hebrew concept of truth as relational faithfulness (*emeth*) and consider it a better clue to the nature and value of truth than a Greek concept of truth as unchanging correctness (*aletheia*). See, for example, Campbell, *Truth and Historicity*, 434-439, and the chapter titled “Acting Truly” in Campbell, *The Concept of Truth*, 100-124.

evidence" in human life.⁷

When Psalm 85 imagines truth and love sitting down together, for a *koffiekleets*, so to speak, it points to a society where people, in their everyday dealings, are so faithful to God's Word of promise that God's lovingkindness completely envelops them, like gentle mist on the very soil from which their faithfulness springs.⁸ In principle, there is no tension between love and truth, nor, as Nicholas Wolterstorff has shown, between love and justice.⁹ Without traces of such truth and love, such faithfulness and lovingkindness, there would be neither justice nor *shalom*; with truth and love present in their fullness, justice and peace do embrace. In other words, when people are true in response to God's lovingkindness, they live in justice with one another, and the world they inhabit flourishes. Then, as Psalm 85 says, God "will indeed give what is good," and Earth "will yield its harvest" (Ps. 85:12, NIV).

To live in this way is to listen to the voice of wisdom, "she who danced when earth was new," in the words of Ruth Duck's hymn text "Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom." To live in the truth is to "follow closely what [Wisdom] teaches, for her words are right and true. Wisdom clears the path to justice, showing us what love must do."¹⁰ Here, in one succinct stanza, Dr. Duck crystallizes what the Jewish wisdom tradition¹¹ has to say about truth and love and wisdom, the central themes in Western philosophy's self-description. Her hymn text resonates with Proverbs 3, where, as in Psalm 85, love and truth meet. In Proverbs 3, Lady Wis-

⁷Calvin Seerveld, "A Concept of Artistic Truth Prompted by Biblical Wisdom Literature," in *Truth Matters: Knowledge, Politics, Ethics, Religion*, eds. Lambert Zuidervaart et al. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013), 296.

⁸Here I barely hint at a response to Clarence Joldersma's eloquent call, in "Earth's Lament: A Friendly Supplement to Zuidervaart's Societal Principles in an Era of Climate Change," to let Earth's lament be heard in its own nonhuman voice, such that the gift of Earth's "primordial call to responsibility, from a time immemorial," receives normative weight (ms. p. 15). I find Psalm 85:11 intriguing in this connection—"truth will spring up from the earth"—but right now I do not know quite how to incorporate these matters into a conception of truth. Still, I recognize the need to do so, and thereby to give credence to the strong sense I have had for years that nonhuman creatures have their own integrity out of which they address us and through which God speaks. Janet Wesselius captures this sense in her moving meditation "The Patient Hope of Rosa: Reflections on *Dog-Kissed Tears*," for example: "Animals ... show us a different way of being in the world ... Given our linguistic and rational abilities, ... we sometimes need animals for God to break into our awareness and for us to listen to God's voice" (ms. p. 9). See also Sue Sinclair's "Adorno Poems," where, despite societal evil, beauty on Earth is not simply "false consolation" but a promise that "even loneliness" is "no longer truly lonely" (ms. p. 3). All three contributions are in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming.

⁹Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Love in Justice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

¹⁰Ruth Duck, "Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom" (©1993), in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, the hymnal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), # 174, v. 1.

¹¹Strictly speaking, one should refer to Jewish wisdom *traditions*. Even among the wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible known as "Writings"—Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs—one can detect different emphases, historical settings, and literary forms. See Carole R. Fontaine, "Wisdom Traditions in the Hebrew Bible," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 33.1 (2000): 101-117.

dom urges her child to keep lasting love (*chesed*) and truth (*emeth*) close, to bind them around its neck and inscribe them on its heart (v. 3). And the promise that accompanies such wise instruction points again to justice and *shalom*: “you will find favor” with God and others (v. 4), follow the right paths (v. 6), and receive bodily refreshment (v. 8).

The brilliant second stanza to Duck’s hymn rightly connects all of this with the prologue to the Gospel of John (John 1:1-18). There Jesus, as God’s Word of promise “made flesh among us,” embodies a Wisdom “full of glory, truth, and grace.”¹² The word “glory” (*doxa*) in John’s gospel recalls the glory (*kabod*) of God come to dwell on Earth in Psalm 85. Moreover, as Hendrik Hart observes, John’s description of Jesus as “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14) is “almost certainly a direct ‘quote’ of the Old Testament pair ‘chesed and emeth’”—Psalm 85’s “love and truth”—which together “proclaim God as full of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, faithfulness.”¹³ Jesus, then, is the very incarnation of God’s blessing in whom love and truth meet, even as Jesus embodies the wisdom that teaches us how to find God’s blessing.

John’s prologue illuminates Jesus’ response to Thomas in John 14. After Jesus tells his disciples he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father’s house, and they know the way there, Thomas exclaims: “We do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” (v. 5) According to John, Jesus replies: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6). Heard in the echo chamber of the Jewish scriptures and the prologue to John, this reply proclaims Jesus himself as the very incarnation both of God’s blessing and of the wisdom that shows how to find this blessing. To find their way to God’s house of blessing, to God’s glory on earth, to the promised messianic condition, the disciples will need to walk in Jesus’s way. They must follow his teachings. They are to live as he lived. What this way comes to is the life of love: the life of loving God above all and our neighbors as ourselves, in response to a God who creates everything out of love—*creatio ex amore*, to quote James Olthuis.¹⁴

In Jesus, then, the decisive themes of Western philosophy—truth, love, and wisdom—intersect. In intersecting there, however, they fundamentally redirect

¹²Duck, “Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom,” v. 2.

¹³Hendrik Hart, “Filled with All God’s Fullness,” in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming, ms. p. 3. Hart’s hunch is borne out by Lester J. Kuyper, “Grace and Truth: An Old Testament Description of God, and Its Use in the Johannine Gospel,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 18.1 (1964): 3-19. Kuyper argues in lexicographical detail that “full of grace and truth” in John 1:14 translates a Greek rendering of central Old Testament language for God as, for example, “abounding in steadfast love [*chesed*] and faithfulness [*emeth*]” (Exod. 34:6).

¹⁴James H. Olthuis, “Creatio Ex Amore,” in *Transforming Philosophy and Religion: Love’s Wisdom*, eds. Norman Wirzba and Bruce Ellis Benson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 155-170. Olthuis shows how a theology that begins with “God as love” is, and must be, dramatically different from one that begins with God as (a) Being—what one could call the pervasive Parmenidean legacy in Western theology. This difference also affects how one thinks about truth, as I hope to show.

philosophy.¹⁵ For in Jesus, as in the Jewish scriptures, truth is not primarily propositional, and the love of wisdom is not simply an intellectual pursuit. Instead, truth is a way of life to which wisdom points everyone. Our challenge now is to decipher what such redirection means for how philosophers understand the idea of truth.

Seeking the Good

Parmenides, a pre-Socratic poet-philosopher, carved out the channels where the mainstreams of Western truth theory have flowed.¹⁶ Parmenides aligns truth with being that does not change. For Parmenides, to be wise is to know what does not change. Philosophy, as the love of wisdom, is a godlike search for what is “uncreated and indestructible,” what is “complete, immovable, and without end.”¹⁷ Most people, however, do not seek unchanging truth: Parmenides regards them as swept up in what comes and goes, what lacks immutable being, what, strictly speaking, amounts to nothing. They do not love wisdom but folly; they have opinions without knowledge; they embrace falsehood and the lie. Between these two paths—between a godlike search for immutable being and truth, and all-too-human ignorance amid changing appearances—Parmenides sees no bridge or middle way.¹⁸ Moreover, only the philosopher can follow the esoteric path of unchanging truth.

The Jewish and Christian wisdom traditions turn such an esoteric conception of truth upside down. Affirming that God created everything good, and recognizing temporal change and interconnections as intrinsic to created goodness,¹⁹ they

¹⁵Not only philosophy, however, but also such fields as art, science, politics, and education. See, for example, Doug Blomberg’s attempt to work out the implications of such a “wisdom perspective” for schooling in *Wisdom and Curriculum: Christian Schooling after Postmodernity* (Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2007).

¹⁶On the importance of Parmenides for the entire Western alethic tradition, see chapter 3 (“Truth as Divine Norm”) in Campbell, *Truth and Historicity*, 18-39. Campbell summarizes the Parmenidean concept of truth as “faithful adherence to the Real” (32) and says it set Western philosophy firmly on the path to both depersonalizing and de-historicizing truth.

¹⁷Parmenides, *Poem of Parmenides*, fragment 8, in John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th ed. (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1930), 174.

¹⁸Joshua Lee Harris, “Parmenides’ Challenge and Zuidervaart’s Stereotheticism: A Project both Ancient and Original,” in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming, illuminates this problem of an absent “in-between” (μεταξύ) as a perennial challenge posed by Parmenides and addressed by holistic alethic pluralism in the reformational tradition. Among the author’s writings that Harris discusses are *Artistic Truth: Aesthetics, Discourse, and Imaginative Disclosure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); “Unfinished Business: Toward a Reformational Conception of Truth,” in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Religion, Truth, and Social Transformation: Essays in Reformational Philosophy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2016), 277-297; and “Holistic Alethic Pluralism: A Reformational Research Program,” *Philosophia Reformata* 81.2 (2016): 156-178.

¹⁹Such recognition of temporality and relationality are built into Franz Rosenzweig’s concept of revelation, it seems to me. See Karin Nisenbaum, “Zuidervaart in Conversation with Rosenzweig: Artistic Truth, Life-Giving Disclosure, and Revelation,” in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming, ms. pp. 10-13.

do not align truth with unchanging and self-sufficient being. Nor do they connect wisdom with knowing immutable truth. Instead, Judeo-Christian “truth” has to do with blessed faithfulness *within* relationships and *amid* change, and “wisdom” pertains to instruction for faithful living, for lives of loving God and neighbor. *All* human beings, including philosophers, are called to live in and live out the truth.

This implies in turn that truth and goodness intersect.²⁰ To live the truth is to try to do what truth requires—to do what contributes to blessed faithfulness. And to do what truth requires is to embrace and promote that which is good. To live the truth, then, we must seek the good.

To resist the truth, by contrast, is to ignore or refuse what truth requires—to block blessed faithfulness. Such ignorance or refusal goes hand in hand with an embrace of that which is evil. Indeed, persistent and deep-seated falsehood feeds into what Seerveld calls “the Lie.”²¹ The Lie is much more than a simple fib, much more than intentionally saying something inaccurate or incorrect in order to deceive.²² The Lie completely and deliberately twists all that is good in order to promote evil.²³

In 2016 the Oxford Dictionaries chose the term “post-truth” as the International Word of the Year, noting that “use of the word *post-truth* ... increased by approximately 2,000% over its usage in 2015.” The adjective “post-truth” refers to “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” It suggests the concept of truth “has become unimportant or irrelevant.”²⁴

The Oxford Dictionaries announced their choice just one week after the surprise election of Donald Trump to be president of the United States. Politically, it does seem we are in a time when factual “truth” has become insignificant: a time when Kellyanne Conway, Trump’s Counselor, can characterize obvious falsehoods as “alternative facts”; when Scott Pruitt, a climate change denier, can be appointed head of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; and when the President himself regularly tweets blatant lies, seemingly without serious repercussions. Truth in the standard Western sense of factual accuracy and correct assertions seems to have become politically passé. Anyone who knows what authoritarian and totalitarian

²⁰See Lambert Zuidervaart, “Truth and Goodness Intersect,” *ICS Perspective* 4.2 (September 2014): 8-9. For a more elaborate account, in response to twentieth-century German philosophy, see chapter 8 (“Conclusion: Truth and Goodness Intersect”) in Lambert Zuidervaart, *Truth in Husserl, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt School: Critical Retrieval* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 175-185.

²¹Seerveld, “A Concept of Artistic Truth Prompted by Biblical Wisdom Literature,” 297.

²²Not all fibs are simple, of course, and the question of what counts as a lie is not always easy to settle. See in this connection the illuminating essay by Martin Jay, “Can Photographs Lie? Reflections on a Perennial Anxiety,” in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming.

²³The Lie is very closely connected to what I call “societal evil.” See, for example, “Earth’s Lament: Suffering, Hope, and Wisdom,” in Zuidervaart, *Religion, Truth, and Social Transformation*, 319-321. I take up this connection in the next section.

²⁴“Post-Truth,” <https://www.oxforddictionaries.com/press/news/2016/12/11/WOTY-16;> accessed April 19, 2017.

regimes are like will find this trend worrisome.

Even more worrisome, however, would be tendencies toward a world that is beyond truth in the scriptural sense of blessed faithfulness. In such a scripturally "post-truth" world, it would not matter whether we seek to live the truth and whether our cultural practices and social institutions enable us to embrace what is good. It would not matter whether we promote justice or pursue oppression, whether we show solidarity toward others or practice hatred, whether we respect or rape the Earth. In fact, the very distinction between good and evil would fade away. This is the larger worry of an allegedly post-truth world, namely, that in dismissing the importance of correctness and accuracy, people will simultaneously lose their desire to seek the good, thereby tolerating societal evil and embracing the Lie. The term "post-truth" signals more than a political quandary. It points to a deeply spiritual crisis in society.

Resisting Societal Evil

Within this crisis, those who want to live the truth by seeking the good must also challenge falsehood by resisting evil. In the first instance, to challenge falsehood in an allegedly post-truth world means not only refusing to give up a distinction between factual truth and factual untruth but also holding everyone accountable to standards of accuracy and correctness. We certainly should not allow politicians, business leaders, or academic administrators get away with regularly dishing out what American philosopher Harry Frankfurt calls bullshit.²⁵ Rather, we should dispute their duplicity, even as we call out those who ignore the evidence, distort the facts, and deliberately lie; these are egregious offenses, and they unravel the fabric of a democratic society.

In addition to challenging factual untruth, however, to live the truth requires us to resist evil in all of its other manifestations. Here I would distinguish evil for which each of us is individually responsible from evil for which we have collective responsibility. I am especially concerned about collective evil that has become so entrenched in our cultural practices and social institutions that we find it hard both to take responsibility for it and to resist it. I call such entrenched collective malevolence "societal evil." A society's ongoing destruction of the Earth, oppression of the poor, and hostility toward so-called aliens are prime examples

²⁵Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), which distinguishes "bullshit" from actual lies. Unlike the liar, who knows a factual truth and tries to deceive someone about it, bullshitters do not care whether what they say is factually true or false: "It is just this lack of ... concern with [factual] truth ... that I regard as of the essence of bullshit" (33-34). Or, as Frankfurt puts it a little later, "the essence of bullshit is not that it is [factually] false but that it is phony" (47). Unlike liars, then, bullshitters try to hide their own lack of concern about factual truth. Because of this, says Frankfurt, "bullshit is a greater enemy of the [factual] truth than lies are" (61). One sees this, I think, in the notion of a "post-truth" world. Harry G. Frankfurt's sequel *On Truth* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006) says why, despite the bullshitters, all of us should care about factual truth.

of societal evil.²⁶

The call to live the truth as blessed faithfulness requires us to resist societal evil. But it also requires us to recognize the limits to our own resistance, limits in a double sense: first, individual and organized efforts to resist societal evil can do only so much²⁷ and, second, viable resistance must embody the spirit of truth, the spirit of blessed faithfulness. This second limitation is crucial. Deeply entrenched societal evil has a pervasive spiritual direction: the direction of the Lie, the direction of what completely and deliberately twists the good. Only in the spirit of blessed faithfulness can the spirit of societal evil be truly resisted,²⁸ for only as we cling to the good can we stand up to the Lie.

I am not suggesting we should be naïve about the violence we face. Yet, as Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn recognizes, to be true, our resistance must not embody the spirit of what we resist, such that we become “grim travellers”:

Bitter little girls and boys from the Red Army Underground
They'd blow away Karl Marx if he had the nerve to come around
They're just grim travellers in dawn skies
See the beauty—makes them cry inside
Makes them angry and they don't know why
They're grim travellers in dawn skies²⁹

If we put on the opaque mask of grimness, we will not see the dawn sky. We will not see the good that calls us to resist. We do not need grimness. Instead we need an articulate sense of the good we seek, as well as a spirited critique of the evil we resist.

That is where true philosophy, as a hopeful love of comprehensive wisdom,³⁰

²⁶Arnold De Graaff, in *The Gods in Whom They Trusted—The Disintegrative Effects of Capitalism: A Foundation for Transitioning to a New Social World* (Norwich, UK: Heathwood Press, 2016), argues that, at root, contemporary environmental degradation and societal violence stem from a global economic system and the “neoliberal ideology” that directs it. He shows in great detail how an alternative, holistic understanding of economic life and human knowledge, directed by the vision of love and truth in the Hebrew scriptures, can support a radically different way of living and thereby a transformed society.

²⁷Acknowledging limits to our resistance should not encourage passivity. Instead it should spark both focused creativity and long-range vision in our resistance. See in this connection Allyson Carr’s discussion of One Billion Rising’s public choreographed piece “Break the Chain” as a truthful way to challenge sexual violence and gendered oppression, in “Social Philosophy after Trauma: Art for Dialogue in the Public Square,” in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming, ms. pp. 11-18.

²⁸To borrow words from the letter to the Ephesians, those who resist societal evil do not simply struggle “against enemies of blood and flesh” but against “cosmic powers of this present darkness” and against “the spiritual forces of evil” (Eph. 6:12). Famously this letter then urges its readers to strap on “the belt of truth,” “the breastplate of righteousness,” and the sandals of the “gospel of peace” (Eph. 6:14-15)—recalling the confluence of truth, justice, and *shalom* in Psalm 85 and elsewhere.

²⁹Bruce Cockburn, “Grim Travellers,” from the album *Humans* (True North Records, 1980).

³⁰See “Earth’s Lament,” where I call for a philosophy that embodies “patient hope for a new

can help. On the one hand, philosophy can help us sort out the diverse goods in our lives and spell out those that matter most for society as a whole. Here I have in mind shared societal principles such as justice, resourcefulness, and solidarity that can guide not only the lives of individuals and communities but also the cultural practices and social institutions in which all of us participate. In a contemporary setting, such principles are what call for human faithfulness; when honored, they carry a Word of promise.

On the other hand, philosophy can also help us take the measure of societal evil by providing a critique of society as a whole, what, following Abraham Kuyper, one can call an architectonic critique.³¹ Such a critique is enormously difficult and, to a large extent, it has fallen out of philosophical fashion. Yet it is essential for wise resistance. We need to understand how the current organization of society both blocks and permits blessed faithfulness. We also need to detect the sore spots where suffering gathers and where social transformation can begin. Philosophy that pursues comprehensive wisdom about the contemporary world can help in both respects.

Living in Hope

Earlier I said Psalm 85 portrays truth and love as meeting up “in the messianic condition.” I also suggested that, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus’s disciples would need to walk in his way in order to find a path to “God’s house of blessing.” Such phrases introduce a theme of hope for the future quite foreign to the mainstems of Western truth theory.³² Scriptural truth talk contains an ongoing interplay between the current call to blessed faithfulness and the eschatological promise of a faith-fulfilling blessedness still to come—the promise of a new heaven and a new Earth (Rev. 21:1-4) where justice and peace embrace (Ps. 85: 10), where the wolf lies down with the lamb (Isa. 11:6), where God, in love and truth, is “all in all” (Eph. 1:23).³³ This promise means that God, first and foremost, is a God of love, and Jesus is the very embodiment of God’s love. For those who would follow Jesus, to live the truth is to walk along the pathways of love, love for God

Earth, and comprehensive wisdom about the shape of the old” (318).

³¹See “Macrostructures and Societal Principles: An Architectonic Critique,” in Zuidervaart, *Religion, Truth, and Social Transformation*, 252-276.

³²I follow Terry Eagleton, *Hope without Optimism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), in sharply distinguishing genuine hope from “the banality of optimism.” Correctly noting that there is “surprisingly little philosophical reflection on what hope consists in” (38), Eagleton devotes an entire chapter to Ernst Bloch, whom he calls “the philosopher of hope” (90). Bloch’s too-often neglected three-volume magnum opus on the topic was published in German in the 1950s and did not appear in English translation until 1985. See Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985). On the importance of a partially Bloch-inspired theme of hope in Theodor W. Adorno’s negative dialectical conception of truth, see Lambert Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 48-76.

and neighbor, in hope for God's future, despite our own fragility and failure, and amid the societal evil that surrounds us. To live in such hope, we must remain ever open to the Spirit of truth, which can take us in surprising new directions.

Hope for a future where love and truth meet has ripple effects in the present, both in our seeking the good and in our resisting evil. Living in such hope, we can neither regard our current dealings and practices and institutions as fully "in the truth" nor despair over the depth and power of societal evil. This implies, in turn, that contemporary philosophy needs to be more than a love of comprehensive wisdom that helps us sort out societal principles and articulates an architectonic critique. For philosophy's love must be a *hopeful* love: it must remain open to a promised future whose surprises surpass philosophical comprehension.

That is why, in my own attempt to reconceive the idea of truth, I would insist on the eschatological openness of both societal principles and what I call the "life-giving disclosure of society." Human beings are called to be faithful to societal principles such as justice and solidarity, and these principles are embedded in human history. Yet societal principles also remain open to a future where, right now, we can scarcely imagine what justice and solidarity will mean and require. So too, human beings, in their fidelity to societal principles, are called to promote a society where "human beings and other creatures come to flourish in their interconnections."³⁴ Yet we need to relativize our efforts, recognizing how the society we hope for lies beyond our striving, and how our fidelity to societal principles does not suffice to bring it about.

Hence I would describe truth as a *dynamic* correlation between human fidelity to societal principles and a life-giving disclosure of society.³⁵ In light of the Jewish and Christian wisdom traditions, I would also insist that there is more to truth—more to blessed faithfulness—than our current fidelity and disclosure can achieve. And this "more" challenges the prevailing Western concept of truth as a static correspondence between assertions and facts. For there is always more to truth, more even to factual truth, than a static correspondence can capture. Hope for the future must be part of a biblically attuned conception of truth, including factual truth. Although this seriously complicates any attempt to provide a theory of factual truth, such complications deserve philosophical attention.³⁶

³³See Hart, "Filled with All God's Fullness," which comments on Ephesians 1-3 and explores the importance of openness to spiritual reorientation for both the practice and the theory of truth.

³⁴"Unfinished Business: Toward a Reformational Conception of Truth," in Zuidervaart, *Religion, Truth, and Social Transformation*, 284.

³⁵Given this description of truth, I think recent attempts to derive an ethics from the appeal to personal authenticity in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* are bound to fail: they cannot do justice to the interrelational character of truth as involving both societal principles and societal disclosure. In this connection, see the illuminating essay by Lauren Bialystok, "Authenticity, Ethics and Truth: Zuidervaart and Heidegger in Reverse," in *Seeking Stillness*, forthcoming.

³⁶I discuss some of these complications in the essay "History and Transcendence in Adorno's Idea of Truth," in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, edited by Axel Honneth,

I have not tried to provide a theory of factual truth in this essay. Instead I have explored biblical underpinnings for the broader conception of truth within which I intend to offer a theory of factual truth.³⁷ On this broader conception, truth is to be lived rather than merely asserted, and our assertions of truth need to belong to our living (the) truth.³⁸ To live the truth is to be faithful in relation to God and others. Such faithfulness is summarized in the call to love God above all and our neighbors as ourselves.³⁹

In contemporary society, the contours of this call to love show up in historically embedded and eschatologically open societal principles such as justice and solidarity. When we are faithful to such principles, we experience the blessing of a loving God. This blessing occurs via a life-giving disclosure of society. In contemporary society, then, truth amounts to a dynamic correlation between human fidelity to societal principles and a life-giving disclosure of society, with both the fidelity and the disclosure sustained by hope for God's future. In the end, there is no such truth without love, for love and truth must meet.

To live (the) truth is to seek the good: solidarity, justice, interconnected flourishing; to resist evil, especially what alienates and oppresses and kills the Earth's creatures; and to live in hope for a future where justice and peace embrace. There is no place for the Lie in God's future. But there *is* a place for everyone who walks along the pathways of love, following God's Word of promise "made flesh among

Espen Hammer, and Peter Gordon (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

³⁷As is apparent from earlier references, the primary inspiration for reconceiving factual truth within a broader, reformational conception of truth stems from my graduate studies and subsequent teaching at the Institute for Christian Studies in Toronto. I am especially indebted to the pioneering work of Hendrik Hart, who has argued for years that truth and knowledge are "totality concepts" to which narrow conceptions of fact/assertion correspondence and justified true belief cannot do justice. See in particular Chapters VII ("Knowledge") and VIII ("Theory of Analysis, Thinking and Theory") in his *Draft for Proposed ICS Syllabus for Systematic Philosophy* (Toronto: Institute for Christian Studies, 1979), 357-612; "The Articulation of Belief: A Link between Commitment and Rationality," in *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, eds. Hendrik Hart, Johan van der Hoeven, and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983), 209-248; and the brief subsection on "Knowledge and Truth" in Hendrik Hart, *Understanding Our World: An Integral Ontology* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), 355-357.

³⁸Although my broader conception is at odds with the standard Western philosophical concept of truth, it is not incompatible with alternatives to this standard concept in the Western tradition. I discuss some of these alternatives in *Truth in Husserl, Heidegger, and the Frankfurt School*. One can find a similar emphasis on living the truth in Catholic moral theology. See, for example, Josef Pieper, *Living the Truth: The Truth of All Things and Reality and the Good* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), and Klaus Demmer, *Living the Truth: A Theory of Action*, trans. Brian McNeil (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2010).

³⁹I discuss what this emphasis on the call to love implies for a philosopher's vocation in "Spirituality, Religion, and the Call to Love: On Being a Christian Philosopher," in Lambert Zuidervaar, *Art, Education, and Cultural Renewal: Essays in Reformational Philosophy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 180-196.

us," the way and the truth and the life.

God's future calls to everyone, in the voice of Wisdom incarnate, inviting them to a feast of love and joy. And, in the sixteenth-century words of George Herbert, truthful responses to Wisdom's call will sing back their own invitation:

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joys in love.⁴⁰

⁴⁰"The Call," by the metaphysical poet George Herbert (1593-1633), as set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams in *Five Mystical Songs* (London: Stainer & Bell, 1911), 21-22.

