

## Uncertainty (part 2)

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**I**n my team, last week's column on uncertainty sparked a lot of discussion about its ambiguity. **Uncertainty is both an important drive to pursue control and mastery, with all the potentially catastrophic global consequences that entails, as well as the drive to communicate our humanity in connection and compassion. Uncertainty is both vehemently denied by a ruthless industry/economy, and recognized as the basis of our need for grace, solidarity and humanity, because of our fundamental human limitation.**

Hate – the ultimate hatred, I learned long ago from philosophy professor Cees Struyker Boudier (1937-2015) – is in fact ignoring something, pretending it is not there, as we do in our culture with uncertainty. On the other hand, acknowledging uncertainty - making it part of our being - brings just the opposite, a foundation for connection, understanding, forgiveness and love. We hate uncertainty and we love it. Denial of uncertainty, for example in science and industry versus recognition in religion and art, reflected in views based on (scientific, large systems) reduction, as opposed to beliefs based on wonder, freedom and responsibility. In this regard, we can probably learn a lot from indigenous cultures, who often live much more in harmony with nature than we do... Also this week, this mechanism – uncertainty negation versus acknowledgment – became painfully clear. In the event of an incident of inappropriate behaviour, such as the issues surrounding The Voice of Holland (a coach allegedly coerced a candidate into sex), an immediate call is made at every meeting to review our code of conduct protocols. Of course, there is a need to encourage victims to speak out in cases of sexual harassment and bullying.

Last week I wrote that it can take years before a good lecture is really understood. Right now I am reminded of the lectures I attended in the 1980s with Prof. Struyker Boudier, in which he explained that individual freedom and responsibility are threatened by both scientific reductionism and the large systems world. I certainly found his elective course fascinating, but as a science student I only understood existentialist philosophy poorly. But given the major problems – climate, reduction of diversity in many areas, etc. – we can no longer ignore the fact that every scientist – alpha, gamma or beta – must take responsibility and also be a philosopher/ethicist, just like the many centuries before the 20th century! In politics, uncertainty (coincidence) is labelled as undesirable and then used populistically to score with the public. Members of parliament tend to make their point to voters with incidents, calling for policy and regulation. However, covering risks with legislation and regulations, driven by incidents that sharpen the boundaries, does not lead to more certainty. This is also visible in swinging between centralization versus decentralization. As soon as civil servants at the municipal level, for example, are given the freedom to make their own decisions, it's just too bad: discrimination compared to other municipalities. COVID in particular teaches us that we must take chance and uncertainty into account worldwide.

Individually we know the limits of the permissible, although these may change over time and between (sub)cultures. Student associations, motorcycle clubs, but also subcultures of, for example, refugees from a war zone sometimes appear to use very different standards than the generally applicable standards. What was considered normal in the flower power climate of the 1960s and 1970s would now cause a stir, beyond the current scandals. Let me be completely clear, I completely disapprove of forced/involuntary sex, there is no uncertainty about that. But should every flirtation – perhaps arising out of mutual insecurity and gauging interest – be replaced by rules of contact?

I'm not so sure! Controlling violations of such rules on social media is certainly increasingly feasible with AI, or for example to use the street cameras to capture unwanted whistling people. This brings one certainty: totalitarian technological control. Closer to 1984. We stand there and watch it happen. I believe in individual freedom, responsibility and humanity. Uncertainty is the price we have to pay for living rather than just functioning!