



BOEK

LEVEN-
BESCHOUWING

EVOLUTIE

Three Windows on Eternity

Exploring evolution and human destiny

2013, uitgeverij Watkins Publishing

Illustratie: Rosa Vitalie



Information about the book

The human race has produced much to enhance its well-being and, unlike all other creatures in the history of evolution, its individuals are endowed with self-reflective consciousness. But human beings have also initiated developments that have disrupted the evolutionary process. *Three Windows on Eternity* offers unprecedented insight into the cosmic laws, creative discontinuities and eternal mysteries within evolution and the role human individuals play or ought to play today. Allerd Stikker argues that we are the cause of present-day social, economic and ecological incoherences, but that we may be able to steer the current phase into more stable waters in the next 25 years.

Uitgever: Watkins Publishing Limited, U.S.A. and UK
ISBN: 978-1-78028-596-2

Nederlandse titel: En de mens speelt met de tijd, drie vensters op de eeuwigheid

Vormgeving en illustraties: Rosa Vitalie

Grafische impressies: Allerd Stikker and Rosa Vitalie

Background

What is the essence of life and of the world around us? What is our role as human beings and how did we get here? Anyone who ever wonders at the magic, the variety as well as the harshness and complexity of life will encounter these questions from time to time. Some people find the answers in religion or spirituality while others find them in philosophy or science. And still others feel their heads spinning and prefer to go back to their daily rituals.

During my many travels through life, I kept running into a riddle that has occupied so many people in the history of our existence: the riddle of creation. Ever since my days as a student at Delft University of Technology, which began in 1946, I have been utterly amazed by the wonders of creation, by its forms, its colours, its sounds and its moods. The chemical engineering programme at Delft did not pay any attention to such things.

An incident

A seemingly trivial event made me realise the difference between what I was learning in Delft and what happens in creation. It was during a project lasting many weeks in the organic chemistry laboratory, where I had to make a complex organic dye from a number of chemical ingredients. This was achieved through chemical reactions, often under high temperature and pressure, using various separation techniques. It was all done on the basis of carefully derived chemical formulae and equations. As I was plodding my way through this task, I arrived home one evening and noticed that a beautifully coloured flower had started growing that day in a flowerpot in my room. It had appeared just like that - from earth and water, air and light, at room temperature and atmospheric pressure, without a manual and without any equipment - as a pure, complex, organic dye. It then became clear to me that the technological world and the natural world are not one and the same. I became aware of an invisible coherence in creation. In search of that coherence while still in my early twenties, I did not get much further than the discovery that there were contradictions between the measurability, computability, predictability and controllability of the material world revolving around technology and science, on the one hand, and the mysteries and wonders of nature, on the other. I discovered that the concept of natural science is actually a contradiction in terms. Later, in my thirties - with a profession, a career, a family and social involvement - the same dualistic experience resurfaced when, in 1963, I read *Le Pheomène Humain (The Phenomenon of Man)* by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The book addresses the relationship between material and nonmaterial phenomena in the evolution of the cosmos.

I was surprised and dazzled by the magnificent cosmological process of evolution described in detail by Teilhard de Chardin, which is still going on today. He dubbed it cosmogenesis, a demonstrable process

“To individual human beings, the evolution in creation manifests itself through four worlds they experience.”

“I believe in creation in eternity rather than in a Creator in time.”

by which matter evolves to ever more complex forms and ever-higher degrees of consciousness. I became curious about the nature and progress of this evolutionary process and the relationship between the rational and non-rational aspects of my environment.

Journey of discovery

I then started looking for a fulfilling view of the world and a better understanding of my role and the role of human society in the evolution in creation. By creation I mean everything within me, around me, before me, after me, without me - the whole universe and beyond. And by evolution I mean the whole process, starting with the emergence of the universe 13.5 billion years ago all the way up to the present day. The majestic story of creation and of evolution is not always a happy tale. It is not only about creativity and continuity but also about decline and discontinuity, with the ups and downs familiar in our own lives.

Based on what we now know about the 13.5-billion-year history of evolution in creation, I have become aware of the magnificent edifice, which in the course of time has grown from a mix of emergence and development, chance and choice, as well as mystery and mutation.

I have also come to realise that the evolution in creation is filled with mysteries, which are invariably accompanied by radical discontinuities. Science is unable to explain these mysteries. The discontinuities in the evolutionary process can apparently not be predicted nor explained. At best, they can be demonstrated but not until after the event. Here, science has arrived at the boundary of what is measurable. The three major mysteries in the evolution within creation - the emergence of the universe, the emergence of life and the emergence of self-reflective consciousness - confront us with wonder, surprise, consistent patterns and unexpected innovations. Studying the course of these three mysteries has made me see that creation is linked to eternity and evolution is linked to time. My awareness of a link between creation and evolution - between eternity and time - gives me peace in creation and inspiration in evolution. To individual human beings, the evolution in creation manifests itself through four worlds they experience. These are the worlds in and through which we live and exist, but which are not generally experienced as a single interconnected whole. They are the macro world of the stars and planets from which we originate, the micro world of the molecules from which we are made, the meso world of our busy daily lives, and the meta world of reflection and spirituality. A coherent worldview requires that we experience these worlds as an integral whole. If we exclude or ignore one of these worlds, that worldview will be distorted. An integral experience of the four worlds was originally the role of religion, and this role is still very important. But the world today - where new generations think differently and ancient texts are far removed from their present environment - also requires a new and coherent story. This story should be in harmony with new lifestyles and current

scientific knowledge. It should provide inspiration for a meaningful and practical outlook on life both today and tomorrow. In my own case, the new tale should include the notion that everything in the evolution in creation originated from within and not from without. I believe in creation in eternity rather than a Creator in time. To me, creation is a magnificent condition, without beginning and without end and without the need for a Creator.

The human role

I firmly believe that we human individuals, as creative and conscious participants in the current phase of the evolutionary process, can help restore and maintain coherence in a world, which now seems to be degenerating into decay and division. Our contribution depends on whether, within the world where we live and within ourselves, we can restore the balance between the opposite sides inherent in dualisms, whose unjustified radicalisation in our minds is the reason why the situation has clearly got out of hand in our world today. We often think in terms of radical dualisms because we have lost sight of their inner coherence. It is time we do something about the root cause of the confusion, a confusion which stems from compartmental thinking, with strong partitions between compartments, and black-and-white thinking, leading to a loss of integrity and coherence in society and within ourselves. I believe that one reason why our functioning on earth has lost its coherence is that our worldview has relied too much and too long on material and measurable external phenomena in creation and too little on non-material and non-measurable internal aspects. What is required is no less than a renewed coherence between economy and ecology, female and male, culture and nature, religion and science, between the inside and outside. It is an enormous task, which might require a substantial change in our values. But it would allow us to prevent a situation - within the next 25 years in my estimation - where without any policy change our children and grandchildren might discover that they are living on an uninhabitable planet. I suspect that before we have restored our sense of connectedness, a new radical discontinuity will occur. In making this statement, I am not being pessimistic but realistic. And I'm being optimistic in thinking that, if we seize the opportunities available to restore coherence and equilibrium, then we will be able to turn the tide notwithstanding that we have little time to waste.

Three Windows on Eternity is an account of my findings during a lifelong search to discover the initial intrinsic coherence in the evolutionary process within creation and thus to find a source of inspiration which will restore the coherence in how we experience our existence on earth. I hope that this account will inspire or focus the readers who wonder about their own place and role in this wonderful life on earth.

The story is the result of my own study of secondary sources, the material available in the literature, and my own reflections and opinions. I am not a scientist

or philosopher, and I do not pretend to be. But I do try to understand what science has discovered about evolution. In doing so, I have been helped by my educational background as a chemical engineer. As most of us lead busy lives, I have avoided a lengthy script and opted for compact reasoning often leaving out the finer points of the argument. For readers who are interested in the sources - besides my own reflection - from which I have drawn inspiration, knowledge and arguments, I have included a bibliography listing some books published recently as well as some classics.