



# THE CONCATENATOR

A JOURNEY THROUGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

CARLO VAN VLIET

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ARMCHAIR ADVENTURE  
BODEGRAVEN, THE NETHERLANDS

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The Concatenator / Carlo van Vliet. - Bodegraven : Armchair Adventure, 2016.  
- 172 p. : ill. ; 23 cm. - (Armchair Adventure Publication ; 8).

English translation by N. H. van der Ham.

Cover: John William Waterhouse: The Crystal Ball, 1902.

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ISBN 978-90-825194-7-1

Keywords: culture studies, universal history, philosophy, psychology

First edition, 2016

Available online via [lulu.com](http://lulu.com)

[www.armchair-adventure.com](http://www.armchair-adventure.com)

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PART I

ETERNITY

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## Introduction

To introduce the subject of this book, we will start by briefly indicating what the term 'concatenate' means. A quick look into a random dictionary results in one of the following descriptions: 'to connect to each other', 'to link together in a series or chain', 'subjects that are dependent upon each other'. These descriptions give a general idea of what the Concatenator entails.

Apart from its definition, the Concatenator is a way to look at the world around us, and to study the ways in which we behave in this world. By using an analytical approach, we will attempt to find out which processes influence the world in which we live. This analysis does not have the intention of stressing or ignoring certain political, religious, social or cultural systems or viewpoints. Nor does it try to wilfully arrange everything into one explanatory system, to, as it were, sketch an all encompassing theory. On the contrary, this analysis rather provides the possibility to go beyond the established '-isms' and provides a way to explain the origin of these systems in particular, and history in general.

By providing an objective and analytical description of the underlying processes of these systems, it will also become clear that the whole structure of the Concatenator is universally applicable. Therefore, the Concatenator doesn't provide an opinion about a certain subject, as it would then lose its relevance. It is much more interesting to get to an objective description of the processes and forces that influence them. Besides, it is evident that these processes in reality have no interest in human opinion. These processes are described at a general level. Readers who would like to gain more in-depth information may make use of the references at the back of this book, or visit the website of the Concatenator.

We will analyse these processes in three parts. First, we will be dealing with the building blocks, the basic principles of the Concatenator. In part two we will focus on man and his relationship with the world from a historical point of view to attempt to explain the ways man has acted in social, political, and religious contexts. And finally we will describe the core of human existence, as dealt with in part one, but then in more detail and from a different point of view.

# 1 The One Self

Man is an inquisitive being. During our lifetime we walk the earth's surface and, from time to time, we may ask ourselves how the world around us came into being. The question disquiets us. We cannot sit back idly and simply let this matter pass by. We want to study and to discover, in order to increase our knowledge and understanding about life and the world in which we live. To cite the German philosopher Schopenhauer: 'We take no pleasure in existence except when we are striving after something.'<sup>1</sup> And when we wish to develop ourselves as humans, we will want to strive for maturity in different areas, as the Roman philosopher Cicero stated it: 'Not to know what happened before you were born is to be a child forever.'<sup>2</sup> Besides gaining knowledge, every living organism must respond to its environment in order to survive. In doing so, the organism also discovers new things to take advantage of. For many centuries, man has been busy gathering enough information to shape his world, and this has not always been an easy task. This discovery voyage will now be continued by linking together as much of this information as possible, in other words, by concatenating it.

## 1.1 Everything has a source

Looking at the world around us, sooner or later we will ask ourselves: what is the origin of everything we see? We can do this right now. Perhaps there's a coffee cup or a book, a landscape or another person nearby. What is their origin? We can, of course, give the obvious answers. The coffee cup and the book are man-made. The landscape is formed by the earth. And the other person is the offspring of his or her parents. But these answers can become unsatisfying, at least in the long run. We can of course further specify the answers. The coffee cup and the book are the products of different industrial processes which were developed by man over time. The landscape was shaped by various geophysical processes, which took millions of years to evolve. And the other person is the result of a biological process, in which

two opposite sexes of human being mate, resulting in the birth of a new person. These descriptions are more precise, but still not quite sufficient. How did the industrial processes develop? Which knowledge was necessary for it? Can we optimise these processes in the future? Which forces have led to the formation of the landscape? Can we also measure these geophysical processes? Can these measurements provide us with enough information, so that we can map future developments, such as earthquakes? And why do people look the way they do? How do people function? Why does a baby look like his parents, and yet is not an exact likeness?

We could go on endlessly asking questions in this way. There is, however, one important aspect that keeps returning in this process. By asking a new question after every given answer, we become more specific, we go into further details. This will be apparent when we take up the example of the coffee cup once more. Previously, we asked ourselves how the coffee cup was made; the answer was: by man. Then we asked the same question again. This time the more specific answer was: the coffee cup was produced by different industrial processes, that were in time developed by man. Now the next question could be: what kinds of characteristics does the material have? Is it soft or hard? What is the maximum temperature that the cup can handle before it bursts? Is it waterproof? We can continue asking questions in this way until they become very specific, for instance: how are the atoms arranged in the cup? The process with which we can map the world in ever more detail has been going on for centuries, and it has especially been accelerated by the scientific revolution. As the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras said: 'There exists no minimal part of the small; there is always something smaller; and there is always something larger than the large.'<sup>3</sup> The only thing needed is a microscope to map the smallest building blocks, the atoms, or a telescope to chart the map of the immeasurable starry universe, with its giant planets. But for now, we begin close to home, no space travels just yet.

As soon as we examine our own origin intently, we actually also look at the origin of our parents, and their parents etc. In fact, we are looking at the genealogical tree of humanity. Eventually we could end up with a religious creation, or descend every rung of the evolutionary ladder, or maybe we might end up with a combination of the two, or something completely different. For the moment we will put this decision, this belief or gained insight to rest. What we are actually, objectively, interested in, is the core of our being which lies at the base of every human being. What could be the source of it?





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PART II

WORLD

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## Introduction

In part one we looked at the building blocks of human motivation and the world in which we live. In part two the most important processes of social, political and religious developments and that of the individual are outlined against the backdrop of our general history. When we look at the specific characteristics of these processes, we can categorise the way in which man shapes his environment into three phases. These are in succession: the natural, social and communicative phase. In broad outlines, and allowing for local variations, these phases continuously manifest themselves in the social development of all cultures around the globe. The phases define the way a community functions, which political system is applied, whether the people practice a religion and the social consequences of this practice for the people and for the individual as part of that community. The definition of these phases and the boundaries in between are somewhat subjective, but this division into three phases is recognised by various authors.<sup>1-3</sup>

Through study at the end of the 19th century, anthropologists gained the idea that when they engaged into advanced contact with another culture the development of that culture would proceed according to a number of fixed stages.

Early anthropologists had also been affected by the colonial experience: on several occasions attempts were made to educate colonised populations, the aim being to convert them to the 'obviously' superior European cultural practices. The fact that these attempts had all failed persuaded at least some anthropologists that there had to be 'a fixed sequence of stages through which all cultures develop'. And it followed from this that one could not, artificially, boost one culture from an earlier stage to a later one.<sup>4</sup>

Although the transitional boundaries of the different phases are subject to discussion, the transitions are often marked by a revolution. The leaders are thereby forced to give up their power, which is the control they have on the

political situation and the community. For the civilians who are part of this community a period of great uncertainty and fear of its consequences begins. This fear is fed by the ignorance of what the future developments might be when abandoning the habitual way of life. Eventually this uncertain situation will transform into a new, stable situation, which gives certainty, but for a limited time. The German philosopher Hegel described this process as a dialectic system, which Fukuyama concisely summarised:

History proceeds through a continual process of conflict, wherein systems of thought as well as political systems collide and fall apart from their own internal contradictions. They are then replaced by less contradictory and therefore higher ones, which give rise to new and different contradictions.<sup>5</sup>

The Concatenator is based on and developed by taking an analytical approach towards the world in which we live, in order to describe and explain the development of human behaviour. It is important to note here that we are concerned with describing the processes that are taking place. The description of these processes is essential. It has the advantage of being as objective as possible, thus avoiding a certain subjective colouring of events or concepts. In the last chapter of this part cross connections will be made of all the preceding chapters. Parallels will be struck with the first, second and third phases of the four subjects discussed, which will be projected on a more pragmatic and everyday point of view.



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# PART III

MAN

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## Introduction

In part one we discussed The One Self, The Antagonists, Nothing is Lost and Singularity as the basic building blocks of the Concatenator. We already saw that the core aspect of The One Self is self-preservation: it will do all it can to survive by using power to gain control over the current situation and by limiting as much as possible the loss of that control, which would otherwise lead to fear.

In part three we will focus further on power and fear, the two antagonists influencing The One Self. We will see that The One Self has different methods at its disposal to cope with the hard realities of daily life. Man tries to gain control over specific circumstances and generally over his own life, by visualising himself in the role of a hero who rises above reality. The individual maintains this ideal to turn away from his greatest fear, that of death, because it threatens the core aspect of his existence, his self-preservation. By attaching value to the world around him and by gaining acknowledgement and reward for his deeds, the individual tries to create a world valid to himself. Once again, at the end of this part we will make cross connections between all preceding chapters by using examples from daily practice.

# 1 Conscience

Let's say you're walking along the beach, hand-in-hand with your girlfriend, a light breeze is blowing from the sea caressing your face. In the distance the silhouette of a ship draws up against the sun setting along the horizon. All around you hear the cry of seagulls.

Suddenly, the thought comes to mind that at a given moment you will no longer experience this event, you realise that it is short-lived. Inevitably you will die at a certain moment, and then all this will be over. So at the end of this beautiful summer's day you are suddenly confronted with your own mortality.

The reason for this sudden contemplation of our own situation, is that we have a conscience. We are aware of our current situation, but also of our past thoughts and deeds, and our future plans and wishes. How best to describe conscience, and where it can be found in our body, has for centuries been food for thought for philosophers, psychologists, and man in general.<sup>1,2</sup> It's not the objective here to provide an all-encompassing description of conscience, but it at least contains aspects such as observing the surroundings and the power to respond to it, memorising experiences and being able to resort to them according to the situation, and a certain ability of coordination to be in command of the organism. In any case, the most important thing for the organism is to strive for the continued existence of The One Self by responding to what is happening in the immediate surroundings. For then, the organism becomes aware of the necessity for self-preservation. When defining conscience in this way, it follows that animals and plants have a conscience. They respond to their environment, they adapt themselves when there is less food, they possess an attack or defence mechanism to protect their organism, they build territories and procreate. This of course applies differently for every organism, and possibly isn't as complex as we find in humans. But, perhaps other animals and plants have different forms of conscience, yet unknown to us.<sup>3</sup>

As far as humans are concerned, we can at least say that, we are aware of our surroundings via our senses, and that these surroundings present themselves



to us as matters of fact all the time. For instance, when someone stands on our foot, we feel it (by nerve impulses in our foot) and we experience it as something painful (by registering these nerve impulses in our brains, linking them with our conscience), because it is our own foot (the reality of our own body), not someone else's (no imagined emotion), we're not dreaming (we don't awaken with a fright) and we can remember it later (by memorising it, for example, as an emotion).

As beings on this earth, we are part of nature, we originate from it; we are animals with insight. Because of this insight we are not just a typical animal solely acting on impulses. This insight contains all kinds of elements: being able to self-reflect, making plans for the future, or looking back on the past to deeds done of which we now feel sorrow or remorse, reflecting on moral issues or on life after death. This gives us the possibility to communicate in detail, to pass on information to a next generation even after we've gone. By our own conscience, we are fully aware of our own mortality. This confrontation with hard facts also gives us a special place in the universe.

By being aware of himself as distinct from nature and other people, by being aware -even very dimly-of death, sickness, ageing, he necessarily feels his insignificance and smallness in comparison with the universe and all others who are not "he".<sup>4</sup>

Death is our greatest fear, and so self-preservation, the control of ourselves and avoiding fear are our most important goals, as we have seen in part one. Or, as Becker articulates the human situation and his final destiny:

What does it mean to be a *self-conscious animal*? The idea is ludicrous, if it is not monstrous. It means to know that one is food for worms. This is the terror: to have emerged from nothing, to have a name, consciousness of self, deep inner feelings, an excruciating inner yearning for life and self-expression and with all this yet to die.<sup>5</sup>

The confrontation with death can arise at any given moment, which is a life threatening situation, as this concerns the very end of the individual. We all know that death is an absolute certainty of life. By our own conscience we experience this horrifying thought as a real confrontation. Following, we will want to protect ourselves against this inevitable fact.

