

Introduction

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For many years, M. Jean d'Ormesson has been doing me the honor of asking me to write for *Diogenes*. More recently, he suggested that I should coordinate an issue of this review that would be devoted to my extended discipline, History, but history in the way in which I understand it. It was certainly not for lack of interest that I did not reply to the first request but, no doubt, because of the sense of a chronic lack of time – almost a pleonasm – from which I, like everyone else, suffer. It was not because I was cured that I accepted the second invitation but probably because I allowed myself, with full knowledge of the facts, to entertain the idea that editing an issue would take up less time than simply contributing. . . . In fact, as everyone knows, the opposite is true, especially when the occasional editor also volunteers to be one of the contributors. This issue is now completed and I sincerely thank M. Jean d'Ormesson for having wished to entrust me with this task that I have enjoyed very much.

I would like to thank the contributors to this issue, who were certainly as busy as I was. Each one, in his own way and his own style, responded magnificently to my request, each one submitting an original manuscript worthy of *Diogenes*, its readers, and its editorial board.

The subject dealt with, in broad – sometimes extremely broad – terms, is the reconstruction of the past. At the end of the present millenium, we are in a position to know something of the last fifteen billion years. That is the age it would have according to fossil traces (photons) of the big bang (the name of which was given by an American who called it that one day in order to ridicule it). Beyond that, the reading is unclear. Were there other worlds? Does such a question make sense? Hubert Reeves, a Canadian astrophysicist, takes us to the – present – limits of knowledge. As the history of the universe obviously encompasses the history of the earth, Celâl Şengör, a Turkish geologist, tells us about it after having dealt with the formation of galaxies, stars (including the sun),

and the planets (including our own). Jacques Reisse, a Belgian chemist, shows how matter gave birth to life, the history of which is part of our planet and, by the same token, of that of the universe. Heinz Tobien, a German palaeontologist, talks in great detail about the part of history that is called evolution because the forms that life takes are not static; when the environments change, they change themselves in order to adapt. That mankind is no more than a recent episode is dealt with by the present author, a French palaeoanthropologist. Edgar Morin, French sociologist, concludes the voyage with a brilliant analysis of that curious product of matter, reflection."

It seemed amusing to me, in a poetical shortcut, to call the issue "From the Stars to Thought." One of the aims of this collection of articles is to show links. The human adventure belongs within the history of the universe. Today, our reflexive consciousness represents the most complicated state of matter after fifteen billion years of expansion and growing organization.