

Jean d'Ormesson and the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Studies

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Over many long years, whenever a modest and not quite disinterested emissary of a member Association of the International Council of Philosophy and the Humanistic Studies came to visit Jean d'Ormesson at his headquarters in the rue Miollis, patiently clearing his path through mountains of dossiers and brochures, he did not, unlike the title of this paper, associate Jean d'Ormesson with the CIPSH – he simply identified the man before him with the CIPSH itself. An equation born of an admiration barely suppressed under a veneer of polite restraint, an identification perhaps suggested to them by the president or secretary of their home association. Nevertheless a quite unfair one for anyone able to perceive with a greater deal of clarity (the office was very dark in overcast weather) what the 'Secretary-General' was, as well and much more, outside of the rue Miollis: the writer, the chronicler of his time, soon to become the assiduously active Academician, or even, dare I suggest, the blue-eyed charmer who graced debates on television. But this summary judgement could readily be forgiven, for the host of the premises had the good taste, when welcoming one to CIPSH, to assume only his mantle as Secretary-General. Besides, for the delegates of member Associations – and it was in this capacity that I first met Jean d'Ormesson before becoming his collaborator on the executive Bureau of CIPSH, and then briefly his successor – he appeared as the effective intermediary with that far-off but richly resourced galaxy called UNESCO. He was the man of warmth and charm who could be relied on to safeguard the subsidies that helped support our conferences and fund our voluminous compilations, which were vital tools for our research.

As a consultative non-governmental organization under the aegis of UNESCO, CIPSH fulfilled many other functions than simply that of the ultimate recourse of financial assistance for cash-strapped scholars, and it took all of Jean d'Ormesson's prestige to ensure that the Council preserved the attentive reception it had always enjoyed with UNESCO since the beginning, and this despite the effects of time and the evolution undergone by that great institution based in Paris.

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It is not easy to transport oneself back to the feverish era when UNESCO, and subsequently under its umbrella CIPSH, came into existence. All the less so given that, in direct counter to the radiant dreams born in San Francisco in the aftermath of the world upheaval, humanity is today passing through a period of moral regression under the pressure of fundamentalisms of all colours along with their own insidiously moral, intellectual or brutally murderous terrorism. That early period was a time of renewed happiness when we could put off our *battle-dress* and go back to our students and our research, a time when the idea grew strong that if access to education and science, aided by an organization conceived on a global scale, could be extended generally to men and women throughout the world, this would create a universal brotherhood by which dignity and security would be established for all.

As early as 1947, UNESCO was encouraging the formation of an independent institution which, within the fields of philosophy and the humanities, would federate all existing or currently forming international associations which hitherto had been working disconnectedly. In 1948, it invited five major organizations, one of which was the International Academic Union, to form such an organization with its help. The idea was doubly important. Firstly, because the humanities had emerged in bad shape from a war which had been won by leading-edge engineering and natural sciences, whereas neither philosophy nor the humanities had been able to turn the world away from war and from the assertion of hegemonic rights, nor could they impede the development of theories that would be taken to extremes beyond the monstrous. Secondly, the project included a radically new aspect, the desire to see the different branches of the humanities come together regularly, to work together even, so as to better appreciate their common roots and the instruction that could be derived from that (an idea which is a commonplace today). This was to become, and it still remains, one of the dynamic principles driving CIPSH, and more particularly, as we shall see, of the journal which would be published under its auspices. Matters moved swiftly. In January 1949, in Brussels, the constitution of CIPSH was drawn up at its first general assembly, and the first members were soon joined by other international federations. Prompted by UNESCO, Roger Caillois went on to propose to CIPSH the establishment of a transdisciplinary periodical dedicated to shared information, in which different viewpoints would intersect and which would bring together critical responses to issues in a single forum instead of shutting them away within the closed environments of the specialities.

Jean d'Ormesson was soon to be associated with this latter enterprise. He would subsequently come to direct it, as he would CIPSH itself, assuring for them both, he along with his team, a continuity both of motivation and of action. His principal meritorious achievement is to have successfully maintained the original charted direction for both Council and *Diogenes*, within a climate at UNESCO where everything was changing, in particular the power relationships between the Director-General's Office, the administration and the political pressure exerted by member-states. Created along with two or three large NGOs to assist UNESCO in the choice of its orientations, CIPSH ran the risk, in the face of this competition, of being no more than a common meeting ground for associations that were assisted rather than paid heed to, and assisted at that with diminishing enthusiasm. Through the privileged contacts that, thanks to his personality, he was able to maintain with the

successive Directors-General of UNESCO, Jean d'Ormesson was able to demonstrate the significant value of the intellectual network represented by the member associations and so justify the financial assistance that he was seeking on their behalf. Similarly, by reason of the standing in which he was held at UNESCO, he was successful in consolidating the role of *Diogenes* as a voice close to UNESCO's own, and as a witness for the way in which humanism, if it is developed with rigour and independence, contributes to realizing the essential goals of UNESCO – and even beyond that, to bringing to fruition those of the United Nations itself. This same ambition to provide a double service both to UNESCO and CIPSH's member associations provoked vigorous debate at the colloquia held alongside our assemblies and at the meetings of our international committee. I recall the astonishing session at our meeting in Caracas devoted to liberty, where we came to realize that the participants from Europe and South America were talking of two different things, the former drawing on Kant, Heidegger or Sartre, while the latter harked back to Bolívar. I no longer remember who had the job of drawing up the synthesis of the discussion for the report back to UNESCO.

It just remains to describe the role of Jean d'Ormesson within CIPSH and as director of *Diogenes*. The journal that he so long carried forward, working very much hands-on with a small team of collaborators, has gone through considerable change. The bringing together of diverse perspectives on a single fundamental issue as envisaged by Caillois has given way to more flexible schemas and a wider variety of content. Whether grouped around a theme or without any particular common theme, objective and original presentations would be taken up by the most authoritative voices of particular fields, but with the intention that they should be read by practitioners of other disciplines within the humanities or simply by readers who were alert to any new development in the realm of knowledge. Under his direction, a wide-ranging editorial prospection over many varied fields was undertaken, something possible only because of the depth of his intellectual training and the breadth of his experience, which accounts for the profusion of articles in near to 200 tables of contents and the eminence of the signatures that a half-century of *Diogenes* has garnered. Indelibly marked by his presence, the tradition of the journal has been maintained since his departure.

For CIPSH, what might one say about the gracious shepherd of mercurial personality, under whose wise guidance its committee or its general assemblies were taken on excursion to the four corners of the world in recompense for the work that he organized so majestically behind the scenes, so freeing the Council president from any concern? A work in which all dossiers were presented and all conclusions elaborated for us with a precision of thought and an elegance of expression, and sometimes with a touch of irony or a smidgen of sophistry, which enraptured us.

When all is said and done, the naïve and marginally self-seeking delegate sent as a scout by his impecunious association was not altogether wrong in thinking that the CIPSH constituted a fair chunk of what it was to be Jean d'Ormesson.

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Translated from the French by Colin Anderson