“...when all the stars were ready to be placed in the sky the First Woman said: I will use these to write the laws that are given to mankind for all time. They cannot be written on the water as it is always changing its form, nor can they be written in the sand as the wind would soon erase them, but if they are written in the stars, they can be read and remembered forever.”
Navajo creation story, from G. Johnson, *Fire in the Mind*

In Arthur Koestler’s *The Sleepwalkers* (1959), we discover an account of the history of science as it is reflected in the evolution of ideas about the Universe. The journey begins with the heroic age of the Ionian Greeks, with a dark interlude in the Middle Ages and resuming its track in the sixteen century with Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and finally Newton. The metaphor that pervades the entire chronicle is the image of a pendulum: once removed from its equilibrium state, it doesn’t return to its original position, but instead it is propelled in the opposite direction. Koestler’s life trajectory follows a similar path: once he disengages from his explicit sympathy towards communism through the famous book *Darkness at Noon*, he focuses on science and philosophy (*The Trail of the Dinosaur*-1955, *The Ghost in the Machine*-1967), only to orient himself towards the end of his life to spirituality and mysticism (*The Roots of Coincidence*-1972).

His account is neither detached, nor neutral: he focuses on the human factor and on the psychological process of discovery, uncovering both the revelations and the moments of blindness to obvious truths that undermine the image of the scientist as a rational, equilibrated, almost non-human creature. In his words: “the history of cosmic theories can be called, without exaggeration, a history of collective obsessions and controlled schizophrenias, and the manner in which some discoveries have been made resemble the conduct of a sleepwalker, rather than the performance of an electronic brain.”

Another theme of the book is the insidious divorce between faith and reason, between the mystic and the savant, both driven in life by the need to be protected and freed at the same time, but estranged with the passage of time: “the space-spirit hierarchy has gradually been replaced by the space-time continuum.” He anticipates the Decade of the Brain, and as an expression of his position against a strict Darwinian evolutionism, his final remark in this book is bittersweet: “If a puppet manipulated by God is a tragic figure, a puppet tied to its own chromosomes is grotesque”.

One peculiarity of this well-documented, memorable journey through the history of ideas about the Cosmos is the fact that the author escapes the tendency to see or impose regularities, patterns of evolution, which is an inherent temptation of any global vision upon the history of science - as George Johnson stated in *Fire in the Mind*: “Just as nature abhors a vacuum, the human mind abhors randomness”. The only constant approach that can be noticed is the importance
assigned to human factors and to the surrounding context that provides some of their driving forces: from this perspective, the universe that Koestler created in his book *The Sleepwalkers* can be considered anthropocentric. And even if one does not embrace all the details and the hypothesis offered by this account, the fact remains that the book is a remarkable picture of human nature facing the mysteries of the Universe.