

# Prelude

One of the most popular pieces of the world's art is the "Music for the Royal Fireworks," which German-born British musician George Friedrich Händel composed in 1749. The work provided a background for the Royal Fireworks, staged to celebrate the end of the War of the Austrian Succession and the signing of a peace treaty. The music was performed on April 21, 1749 in the presence of King George II of Great Britain and over twelve thousand people assisted at the première.

Another work of music, "Mysterium" by Russian composer Alexander Scriabin, may be viewed as a counterpoint to Händel's work. Scriabin started working on the composition in 1903, but it was incomplete at the time of his death in 1915. It took 28 years of another composer, Alexander Nemtin, to finalize the sketches of Scriabin and make out of them a 3-h-long work known under the name "Universe". Scriabin's dream was to perform the "Mysterium" in the foothills of the Himalayas. The spectacle should have lasted for 7 days. Thousands of participants, clad in white robes, would intone the artist's songs, accompanied with a majestic orchestra. He planned that the work would be an orgy of senses, the senses of smell and touch complementing vision and hearing. The ecstatic performance would culminate in closing the extant world. In Scriabin's fancy, human egos would dematerialize and the human race eventually replaced by "noble beings."<sup>1</sup>

At the outset of the third millennium, mankind has entered the ultimate phase of its evolution as a biological species. In view of biochemist Christian de Duve, life appears to be a "cosmic imperative," taking place at any spot of the universe where appropriate environmental conditions permit it (De Duve 1995). We may conceive evolution as fumbling in a maze with myriad of blind alleys, gradually laying new hierarchical levels over the original groundwork. Humans emerged as a unique biological species with the capacity to experience emotions consciously as feelings, and subject to emotional, cultural, and techno-scientific evolutions that complement

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<sup>1</sup>Information on the musical works of Händel, Scriabin and Nemtin is easily accessible on the Internet. A comprehensive analysis of Scriabin and his mysticism was made by Boris De Schloezer (1987).

the biological evolution. The entire evolution from its start has exhibited hyperbolic dynamics, with doubling times becoming ever shorter. The dynamics of culture, economy, and technology produce complexity that exceeds the human capacity to understand and control and is the main cause of the twilight of humanity (to refer to another musician, Richard Wagner, as a pun on the title of his opera, “Twilight of the Gods”). On the other hand, vibrant and brilliant exuberance of human feats that illuminate the twilight may be metaphorically likened to the fireworks.

A novel role of humanists—scientists turned intellectuals—is to analyze the consequences of the astounding dynamics and, by attaching values to accumulating pieces of knowledge, make the ultimate phase sublime and passable with minimum political and social tensions. To achieve this, some fundamental tenets of the Western thought, on which science has been grounded, should be reconsidered. Species extinction should be taken as the fact of evolution. Insurmountable barriers to human comprehension of the world should be highlighted and faith in unlimited power of human reason and illusions about eternity and immortality abandoned. Temporariness, which bestows upon human life its value and meaning, should become the foundation stone of a new supreme and optimistic humanism. However, short the ultimate phase may be, the perennial dream of achieving universal human happiness needs rethinking and revaluation.

Accordingly, scientists at a par with artists should participate in creating a “music for the fireworks.” Humans cannot rule the world dynamics and to perceptibly affect its direction. But intellectuals by their opinions can modulate behaviors of individuals and consequently collective actions: the vision of a moderate closing the life path of humanity, if amply disseminated and predominating over other alternatives, may facilitate living in the ultimate phase. This book may be seen as an incipient part of this endeavor. It is no science fiction, but a scientific reflection on the present and future of humanity.

## References

- De Duve C (1995) *Vital dust: life as cosmic imperative*. Basic Books, New York  
De Schloezer B (1987) *Scriabin: artist and mystic*. University of California Press, Oakland CA

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