



Life and Stagnation

Alexander V. Suvorov

For several years, A.V. Suvorov has been doing mailing lists for like-minded colleagues and friends. Each of the letters is a scientific and journalistic text on philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, and life topics. A.V. Suvorov signed his letters “Hedgehog” — that’s how he called himself, meaning not only prickly, but also the desire to isolate himself for a while, shrink, withdraw into himself from the world, so that he could then turn to him with something important. We bring to your attention his latest essay, or rather, the last revision of the text that he wrote almost a quarter of a century ago. The author reflects on how to overcome universal, collective and individual, personal nonsense as a way of existence. In his opinion, didactics is intended to provide a means of understanding existence.

Keywords: nonsense, meaning, existence, crop production, creation, didactics.

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Жизнь и прозябание

А.В. Суворов

На протяжении нескольких лет А.В. Суворов делал почтовую рассылку для коллег-единомышленников и друзей. Каждое из писем представляет собой научно-публицистический текст на философские, психологические, педагогические, жизненные темы. Свои письма А.В. Суворов подписывал «Ёжик» — так он называл себя сам, имея в виду не только колючесть, но и стремление на время отгородиться, сжаться, уйти в себя от мира, чтобы затем обратиться к нему с чем-то важным. Предлагаем вашему вниманию его последнее эссе, точнее, последнюю редакцию текста, который он написал почти четверть века назад. Автор размышляет о том, как преодолеть всеобщую, коллективную

и индивидуальную, личную бессмыслицу в качестве способа существования. Средства осмысления существования, по его мнению, призвана дать дидактика.

Ключевые слова: бессмыслица, смысл, существование, прозябание, созидание, дидактика.

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There is an increased demand for "heroes" — where there is a shortage of ordinary integrity. "Heroes" are either normal responsible people in an abnormal society, where such members are a tragic minority; or dilettantes, who have to compensate for their low professionalism by overtime; or inhumane types for whom the highest value is not human life, even if it is their own, but "science," "art," or simply an order from their superiors — not a human being, but a "scientific problem," "a creative idea," or "the fulfillment of an order." The cult of the "hero" is militaristic, authoritarian and, strange as it may seem at first glance, anarchist (anarchy as a reaction to coercion, to nonfreedom).

There is too much nonsense, outright chaos in the surrounding reality, especially in Russia. And in the life of individual beings who, by some misunderstanding, claim to be called human beings. There is no life in post-Soviet Russia, it is only survival at all levels, from the homeless to the "oligarch". There is nothing but meaningless pottering in an effort to survive (the term "struggle for survival" sounds, perhaps, too serious).

And in this pottering, in this bottomless quagmire float, long ago torn away from any firmament, islands of truly human — that is, humane! — life. Wonderful, touching in their defenselessness, exceptions to a vile rule. Islands of meaning, doomed, it seems, to soon be swallowed up by the meaningless abyss.

There is enough nonsense in my own life. And then, in church, right after communion, I bore into the light of God strange lines:

*I'm not here. In the shining expanse,
Kneeling on my knees, I'm hanging.
Beneath me there's no support,
But I'm not dragging myself down.
I repent in silence. With a frown of regret
I catch the echoes of vanity.
I watch my neighbors potter about.
I love them mournfully, aloofly.*

Yes, I love them — pottering and fussing, but I love them almost without hope that this swarming and fussing will someday stop, and a meaningful, meaningful life will begin. And I myself, of course, am forced to potter and fuss together with everyone else. That is why my repentant (and squeamishly rejecting pottering and fussing) "Higher Self" was brought to some "shining expanse". I should not fall on my knees in the mud, should I? But there is nowhere else. It remains, as it turns out, to pretend kneeling in the state of weightlessness, hanging between the sky and the swamp. Either my "Higher

Self" kneels down, or simply squeezes my lower limbs in a squeamish manner, even though in my vision the surface of the swamp is a good fifty meters away.... Thanks for it not hanging upside down at least.

I'm tired, comrade gentlemen, it's obvious. It is also obvious that there are very good objective reasons for tired pessimism. Even weighty ones — either crushing skulls, or (obviously, in my case, among others) shaking brains so much that the cortex and subcortex change places. There was and is something to be tired of — all of us. There was and is something to make our brains go out of whack — in all of us.

Justifying the relevance of the psychological problem of the meaning of life, V.E. Chudnovsky stated that after the collapse of the USSR, the population in the post-Soviet space, simply put, went crazy. However, I allow myself to "simply say", because I decided in this text, for the sake of sincerity, to exaggerate to the limit. V.E. Chudnovsky formulated with academic impassivity that there is a change of value orientations. In Soviet times, the "heroic" orientation prevailed; young people were encouraged to have such exaggerated ambitions, which blatantly contradicted more than modest equipment (i.e. real capabilities). They propagandized feats — military, labor, "life" ("all of life is a feat": for example, about Nikolai Ostrovsky, about Olga Skorokhodova)...

Therefore," reflects V.E. Chudnovsky, "maybe now the ancient wisdom/prayer is more appropriate than ever: "My Creator, do not raise me too high, so that it does not hurt too much to fall!" In other words, for the sake of preserving mental health, is it not better to limit ambitions to the simplest and most obvious creative meaning of existence: to plant a tree, to build a house, to raise offspring...

For example, the Strugatsky brothers' works can be considered a reaction to the Soviet "featomania". Almost from the very first works (such as "The Road to Amalthea", "Noon, XXII century") the Strugatsky brothers instill in the reader a simple idea in general: the heroes, as a rule, correct someone's incompetence. If there were less sloppiness, shoddiness, irresponsibility — there would be less need to sacrifice lives in emergency situations, because fewer such situations would arise. There is an increased demand for "heroes" where there is a shortage of ordinary integrity. "Heroes" are either normal responsible people in an abnormal society, where such members are a tragic minority; or dilettantes, who have to compensate for their low professionalism by overtime; or inhumane types, for whom the highest value is not human life, even if it is their own, but "science", "art" or simply an order from their

superiors — not a person, but a "scientific problem", "creative idea" or "fulfillment of an order". The cult of the "hero" is militaristic, authoritarian and, strange as it may seem at first glance, anarchist (anarchy as a reaction to coercion, to nonfreedom).

I strongly agree with Vilen Emmanuilovich: planting a tree, building a house, raising offspring — these are basic *creative* values, they are indisputable. But we have to admit that there are not so many people who are satisfied with these values. There are too many people in the world who want to feel themselves as significant persons on a much larger scale than just family, friends and neighbors. This applies even to the most decrepit old ladies who are convinced that God cares more about them than about their own children and grandchildren. That is the whole meaning of life — to feel needed by somebody... Since, to put it mildly, there are reasons to doubt our need in our relatives and friends, we can only hope that we are needed at least by the Almighty.

After all, a need to God is the scale of one's own significance, neither more nor less. All of us are God's creatures, the smallest of which is not superfluous in God's Vertograd. What else can the "little ones" count on? Thus, the limit of "smallness" coincides with the limit of "significance" (if not "greatness").

Claiming their own significance on a larger scale than their home and its surroundings, I would subdivide them into the following categories. (I hasten to stipulate that I do not take any classifications seriously; it is generally easy to compose classifications; a classification — as a rule, if not any — is not the fact itself, but only a more/less adequate reflection of the fact in the head of a theorist, and (again as a rule) not a first-class one. However, even myself, not pretending to have first-class theoretical thinking and great discoveries, sometimes dabble in classifications, partly as a joke, partly for the sake of clarity).

1. Cynical "Supermen", who recognized the meaninglessness of existence and contemptuously rejected the search for any meaning in anything. Cynicism and a superman's disregard for everyone and everything around them is the basis of all forms of crime and "ordinary" irresponsibility (in ecology, economy, politics...).

2. Self-appointed "gods" who claim the reasonable organization of the surrounding chaos and, consequently, their own reasonableness. But the self-appointed "gods" are convinced of their reasonableness to such an absolute degree that, because of their arrogance, they do not so much organize as exacerbate the chaos. In fact, though, there is probably more true reasonableness the less there is arrogance, called hubris in the Bible....

3. God worshippers who are ready to beg for personal favors from anyone — from Joseph Stalin to Jesus Christ. For them, not much has changed with the collapse of the Soviet system — they just changed an awl for soap, from religion inside out with the stigma of "Scientific Atheism" to one of the long-standing world religions, esoterism, theosophy, etc.

Reasonableness can be broadly defined as the ability to resist nonsense, chaos. It is probably the same ability as Hegel's famous "ability to bear the tension of con-

tradiction". Probably, both materialists and idealists, at least objective ones, will agree in this understanding of rationality. Only for the former, reasonableness is the result of the self-organization of chaos, and man or similar being is the only subject of reasonableness, the one who realizes it. And from the point of view of objective idealism, the subject of reasonableness opposes chaos and comprehends, harmonizes, transforms it into something meaningful — from age. Man (as A.V. Men explains) is similar to the Creator not by his external appearance at all, but by his reasonableness, by his ability to be God's co-author in comprehending and transforming chaos. And by madness — the ability to aggravate chaos — and inordinate pride man is similar to the adversary of God (Satan).

Instead of blowing up a bubble, claiming significance on an impossible scale, it is better, indeed,

to confront nonsense, chaos where we have the greatest opportunity to do so. The basic creative values clearly define this sphere and boil down to the banal recommendation: "Start with yourself".

Yes, start with yourself. Before claiming to clean the Augean stables of the surrounding world, try to clean your own. Of course, it will be more difficult. Comprehend (i.e. *transform*) your misery to the quality of a full-fledged human life.

Comprehend (i.e. educate and nurture) yourself. Minimize the senselessness in one's own existence. To become free from any external predetermining factors — according to V. Frankl, it is the external environment, urges and even heredity — and only by opposing one's will to these factors, to be realized as a human being.

The Nikitins, learning a healthy lifestyle from their children, came, after all, to the conclusion: "what is harmful to children is not useful for adults either." Children can not smoke, so why can adults? Children can not drink alcohol, so why can adults? The Nikitins are surprised: no one out of curiosity will infect themselves with plague or cholera, grab the bare contacts of a high voltage electrical panel, in short, no one will voluntarily cause themselves obvious harm, except for suicide ... — but you can't drag one away from slow-acting poison. Nonsense! It is with the prevention or getting rid of this kind of nonsense, if it is already there, that we must begin to realize our own existence.

And it is not without reason that teenagers, already smoking themselves, grumbled at me when I happened to smoke in front of them: it is okay for us, but it doesn't suit you. When we ourselves are already dirty, we want the most respected person to be cleaner — more sensible! — than we are. We can afford to swear, but do not want to hear anything like that from the most respected person...

Children's cleanliness is compulsory. It would be voluntary if adults were clean. And so, they start dreaming: when I grow up, I'll be able to do everything. Everything meaningless... Dreams of meaninglessness.

And adults, having given up on themselves, also begin to dream that children grow up better — cleaner, more meaningful! — than they are. But why should they?

In the bottomless swamp of nonsense — personal and

universal — there can be no "Acme", i.e. no developmental peaks. Because there is no development. There cannot be any peaks on the path of life where there is no life, but there is stagnation in slavery to nonsense. It is pointless to talk about Acme (as well as about a full human life) if there is no sense — a creative goal, a task. Not knowing where to go, we are meaninglessly treading on the ground. Meaning appears together with the purpose of movement, which, realized by the purpose and the route, turns into a path. And on this path, there can be both peaks and failures.

Adults make sense of children's existence — if they make sense of it at all — sometimes more than their own. Adults care about children's health, for example — if at all — sometimes more than their own. But the most important thing, of course, is to teach children to make sense of their own existence. To help them find a purpose, a route and a path, and thus a life. (In this text, as the reader has probably already noticed, I am contrasting the concept of life not with death, which can have its own meaning, but with the concept of stagnation, which has no meaning by definition).

Didactics can be — and must become — a means of making sense of children's existence (in other words, a means of turning existence into life). In one way or another, by building the educational process, we actively influence the child's orientation in the world around him or her, and the child's search for his or her place in the world. A child can become a winner from childhood, capable of setting bold goals and achieving them, thus reaching the level of Acme. But a child can also become a loser, mired in chaos, or in a criminal case, an avenger for his failures, adding to the chaos. And for every scenario, one didactic or another is responsible. It is not without reason that they sometimes say that no didactics are better than traditional school didactics... And Boris Mikhailovich Bim-Bad is deeply right when he insists that murderers are also educated by someone or something.

Both theorists and didactic practitioners and curriculum developers are involved in the search for a didactic system that would help to make sense of children's existence, to turn it into life, and thus to focus children's life on Acme. It is a question of restructuring curricula in such a way that the content of the educational process is not the chaotic "assimilation of knowledge", but the awareness of the surrounding world and one's place in it. Russian (or German, English, etc.) language becomes the main educational subject, which is used for orientation in the surrounding social, planetary and cosmic reality. First — a conversation on this or that circle of problems (school, home, family, city, country, planet, seasons, solar system...) with the support of the relevant texts, and only in passing — the analysis of various grammatical structures. This approach turns Russian into a basic academic subject, from which all other academic subjects seem to branch off. The relationship between teacher and student is built on the principle of jointly shared dosed activity and cooperation.

The natural ideology of such didactics seems to me Ilyenkov's theory of the formation of a comprehensive,

harmonious personality. This theory is based on the distinction between universal (general) and professional (special) abilities. The main vice of traditional didactics, no matter how it is reformed, is teaching, under the guise of "basics of sciences", countless professional details, in which students are hopelessly drowned. Hence the decline in learning motivation and other things that we all complain about. That is, immersion in meaningless stagnation in response to a meaningless "learning process". Didactics, oriented to the Ilyenkovian understanding of the all-roundness and harmony of the individual, tries to overcome this very vice. And in the end, Ilyenkov's didactics should come to the restructuring of curricula according to the principle: everything special and professional — into electives, and the first place should go to the implementation of the Ilyenkov's famous call "To teach thinking!", as well as — to teach beauty, to teach kindness and to teach the culture of maintaining physical health. Realizing Ilyenkov's philosophy of education, didactics will contribute to the acquisition by children of the meaning of life (the meaning will be to be and remain a human being, i.e. a Reasonable Being), and the focus of life on Acme, on reaching the peak of personal development.

The prevailing nonsense — our personal and of our so-called society as a whole — turns any project of the harmonization (comprehension) of chaos into a beautiful fairy tale. This is how I have to qualify what I myself have been striving for all my professional life. I do not believe that the fairy tale will become reality. I do not believe that ideal sense will triumph over real nonsense. I believe only in the *necessity* of the triumph of fairy tale and meaning. Not in the inevitability, but in the necessity — in the fact that meaning is better than nonsense and one should contribute to its realization as much as possible, no matter how unpromising — or not at all unpromising — it may seem. It is not a matter (for me) of whose side one will take, but whose side I am on, on which side of the front line. Unwilling to reconcile myself to nonsense, deeply disgusted by it, I can only be on the side of sense.

Ilyenkovian didactics implies the removal of the artificial polarity of training and education. In fact, there is one process — nurturing learning, educating upbringing. In the curriculum, much space should be devoted to the problems of human relationships — within society and between society and nature. By improving the curriculum on the basis of the practical experience of its implementation, we can try to practically put and outline ways of solving such a huge problem as the nurturing of humanity and spirituality. This will not be possible without a clear theoretical answer to the question of what humanity and spirituality are — we simply will not know what exactly we are going to nurture.

There is the Children's Movement of Mercy — a movement of healthy and sick children to communicate with each other, for mutual understanding and mutual help. It would be great if didactics, oriented on Ilyenkov's philosophy of education, could somehow be included in the context of this children's movement for humanity, for sense against nonsense.

Let nonsense is spread as widely as you like, but it is impossible to put up with it, — that's why what remains to reduce nonsense in and around oneself with all one's might, making the most sense of, harmonizing first of all one's own activity, one's own life. One can be tired, one can fall into despair, but it is impossible

to come to terms with nonsense, — and what remains is to do everything to make it at least less around you and in you.

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