

## **THE PAST, THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE IN THE RUSSIAN INTELLIGENTSIA'S MEANINGS OF LIFE**

The future cannot exist just by itself. It is a value when it is based on the experience of the past and feeds on the blood and flesh of the present. This refers to all processes taking place in the world and in each society without exception. This also refers to such a phenomenon as culture, personifying the degree and level of the humankind's interactions not only with nature but also between people themselves.

If we analyze the contents of all, especially outstanding creative works of global and domestic culture, it's possible to come to the conclusion that they reflect deep processes taking place in the consciousness, value orientations, in principles-purposes of life. And these essential elements of culture, its concentrated contents, in our opinion, are reflected in such a real phenomenon that can be called the meaning of life. Exactly the meaning of life embodies everything that elevates an individual, shows the degree of his mastering the achievements of the humankind, allows to manifest and to demonstrate the world and the environment inclusion and readiness of people to solve the problems that worry them.

The meaning of life as a special form of value orientations, being the manifestation of various kinds of culture, has become urgent in connection with solution of pressing socioeconomic, social-political and social-cultural problems. The demand for it became especially urgent in connection with deep shifts taking place in the social-cultural life of the world and each society. But it's possible to understand its significance and role only by comprehension of the organic unity of the past, the present and the future in vital activities and especially of that stratum of the society, which we call intelligentsia. We can understand the future of culture and its carrier – the intelligentsia – only in case if we review their future in the context of achievements of the past and looking for ways to solve problem now.

In this case we analyze the meanings of life of Russian intelligentsia, and that means revealing both fundamental and specific features, characterizing only this social stratum, taking into account special features of various groups from it.

First of all, let's pay attention to the special approach to analysis of the meanings of life characteristic of intelligentsia. Let's underline that *the theoretical and methodological basis of their analysis is time modes – the past, the present, the future*. We'll review the meanings of life of various groups/communities of intelligentsia exactly from this perspective, and specify at the same time that when we speak about the *past*, we mean the *significance* when *memory* plays a very important role. When analyzing the *present*, the meanings of life reflect *values, value orientations*, when people operate with *judgments*. When reviewing the *future*, it's important to see *goals (public and personal)*, which intelligentsia is governed by, resorting to such a prognostic thinking tool as *imagination*.

It's possible to offer the following classification of today's Russian intelligentsia exactly if we combine various meanings related to *the past, the present and the future*. Let's mention that we put aside judgments about the difference between the notions of “intelligentsia” and “intellectuals”, thinking that in real life people still use the notion of “intelligentsia”, referring individuals with higher education and/or engaged in mostly intellectual work to it. However, there is an opinion according to which the key role in changes that took place in the 1980s and the 1990s was played by the stratum of the society that should be called semi-intelligentsia. Its main features were and still are *the imitation of intelligentsia's culture, intellectual inactivity and passivity, conformism, “complete inability to think independently about social issues”* (italics by the author – Yu.O.) [Oleshchuk, 2002, # 10: 27-28].

What really happens in intelligentsia circles? Does it bring the future nearer? What positions does it take in the field of culture? Does it differ in the worldview from the general public around it? What meanings does it adhere to, what allows to assess its life-world on the whole but not by separate indicators?

### ***Realists-rationalizers***

***This group***, according to sociological research, is predominant in numbers but not the most influential in determining the fates of the modern Russian society. *This group's meaning of life consists of its making personal plans and plans for the society, basing on positive assessments of the past, acknowledgement of the necessity to use its achievements, rejecting attempts not to take into account traditions, assessments of the past established earlier, viewing the present and forecasting the future from the positions of the past.* When assessing the past, they consider the history of Russia and the Soviet period to be progressive development stages, though not without losses, defeats and failures. The actions of the well-known politicians of Russia, with whom the main events of the history of Russia are connected, are important and determining positive events for them, these names are Prince Vladimir, Baptizer of Russia, Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great, Alexander I, Lenin, Stalin. At the same time, they are critical, and impartially analyze many activities and actions of the said people. As to the today's present, they evaluate positive shifts in exercising such rights as freedom of movement and expression of one's opinion, they compare them with the preceding stage and not in favour of the existing reality. They regret disintegration of the USSR as 60-65% of the population, though they understand that there will be no turning back. But they can't shut their eyes to the fact that during more than one quarter of a century, from the beginning of the 1990s, Russia not only failed to move forward but it did not achieve what the RSFSR had in 1990 in many indicators. They are especially concerned and can't be reconciled with giant social inequality, frozen social lifts, damaging changes in educational sphere, public health and culture. At the same time, their sentiments are mostly positive, they see the way out and promote various forms of Russia's modernization, though their ideas about the variants of its bringing into life differ greatly. Their focusing on shifts and principal changes is based of taking achievements of the past into account as well as acceptable methods of achievement and realization of new requirements of the time. However,

no matter that their strata are significant, in most cases they are passive marking time in expectation, they hope that common sense will prevail and provide a progressive evolutionary change of the society [See in detail: Life-world... 2015; Lukov, 2007; Shevchenko, 2002].

As for the future, according to the all-Russian survey “How do you live, intelligentsia?” (1,350 people, 2016, Russian State University of the Humanities), only one third or realists-rationalizers (36.5%) is focused on “return of the great power status to Russia” (with 47.2% of the general public being of this opinion), which allows to state that intelligentsia understands clearer and assesses more precisely its position in the world today. Because of that orientation to observance of “justice, equal rights for all” in the state (61.5%), provision of “stability in the society without wars and revolutions” (48.8%) is predominant in this group of intelligentsia. To put it differently, *this community of intelligentsia is to a bigger extent focused on solution of internal problems of the country, on the necessity to pay attention first of all to social problems*. At the same time, these groups of people are clearly and positively inclined to use the experience of other states’ and nations’ development but closely tied with national special features.

When characterizing this group, we should emphasize its special feature: when criticizing some or the other states of the contemporary society, rejecting a number of official acts and carried out changes, its representatives do not restrict their discussions and actions by just their negation: they offer constructive solutions, they worry about the way of making these changes, they are aimed at permanent improvement and advancement of the established state of affairs. All that allows to come to the conclusion that creative and constructive aspirations of this part of intelligentsia are considerable but not always used by decision-makers.

### ***Social groups inclined to Narcissism***

These groups are mostly represented by liberals, neo- and radical liberals. Their main characteristics are peculiar features of life arrangement that poorly

correlate with the reality or don't correlate at all. A kind of locked, artificially constructed world turns out in their case.

*They do not want to know the past, they ignore its experience and lessons.* They are clearly negative in their attitude to the Soviet period, and they are if not rejecting then evidently skeptical in relation to all historical past.

As for the Soviet Russia, all its actions – industrialization, collectivization, reforms of the 1960-1980s – are unambiguously negatively assessed as senseless, faulty and perverse. Exactly this group of intelligentsia in the years of the Gorbachev's Perestroika (restructuring) initiated criticism of Stalin from Lenin's point of view, then criticism of Lenin from Marx's point of view, then of everything referred to Marxism and Socialism (Communism) for final and irreversible declaration of liberal values and directives [See in detail: Khinshteyn, 2018]. The following fact is also demonstrative. Yegor Gaidar was recommended to invite the well-known sociologist M. Castells, whose works projected the future, for consultations. When the issue of the urgent reforms was discussed as well as what should be necessarily taken into account, Castells recommended to combine the Soviet experience in the form of the State Planning Committee (Gosplan of the USSR) and the State Provision Committee (Gossnab of the USSR) with gradual introduction of market relations at the first stages. Gaidar answered that everything should be broken irrevocably and to the end, without putting anything aside and not making advances to the past that discredited itself.

Recently, liberals' attacks on the past were especially vividly manifested in the discussion of the Stalin's role and his legacy. Their assessment of him is unambiguous: he is devil incarnate [See, e.g.: Baymukhametov 2018, 5 March]. They are indignant because a considerable number of people still positively assess his activities, at the same time acknowledging his crimes, especially in the years of repressions. In order to evaluate this state of affairs, I'd like to offer the following words: "All people, notwithstanding the former horror and disgust because of his crimes, now acknowledge his power, the title he gave himself, and his ideal of

greatness and glory that seems something wonderful and sensible to everyone”. That was written by L.N. Tolstoy about Napoleon, when his nephew ruled in France and Bonapartism was presented as something sacred. Today, the tomb of Napoleon in Les Invalides is just one of the uncountable sites of Paris. Napoleon was not “taken out of the Mausoleum” there as well as Mao Zedong was not moved from the Tiananmen square. Just the times changed, and they became a part of the past. But such an approach does not suit liberals. According to their opinion, our predecessors in the past history acted as bad students with only the lowest grades in their record, understood nothing, knew nothing, made mistakes all the time and acted without understanding anything or intentionally distorting everything.

*As for the present, they see the sense only in going on with the attempts to realize what ripened only in their ideas about what should be done.* But these ideas and actions did not reflect objective social requirements in any way, they did not answer the history’s call. And they do not want to acknowledge what happened to their “brilliant plans”. There is a lot written about that. I’ll give just one assessment: “When Gaidar launched reforms, he forecasted a short decline in output, small increase of prices – from 70 to 200 percent and after that quick improvement of the state of affairs followed by economic progress. And what happened? Horrendous failure in everything, in which it was only possible to fail. Priced skyrocketed thousands of times instead of the indicated figures! Production collapsed. Appalling unemployment, neither World War I, nor World War II threw Russia into such a crisis as these reforms!” [Oleshchuk, 2002:32].

Currently, these newly appeared Narcissuses offer a certain modification of the same things, the disastrousness and depravity of which became evident for the majority of the population of Russia. They reject all attempts to criticize the ideas of monetarism, and their aspirations to force upon the others their vision of processes taking place in the world and in our country serves that.

*As for the future, liberals see only themselves, their ideas and their vision of the state of affairs and development of the country in it.* The activities of the Institute for Strategic Initiatives (with A. Kudrin at the head) are demonstrative in this respect. Without analyzing all theoretical postulates of this Institute (they can be an asset and a subject of discussion at scholarly events), let's pay attention to their practical embodiment. According to their forecasts, the economy of Russia will grow 1.7% annually till 2030. What does it mean if according to the World Bank's forecast, all world economy will grow 3.5-4% per year? What place will Russia take by that year? May be, a principally different concept should be focused at. There are examples in the history of Russia when decisions were taken, cardinally changing the state policy. Lenin's decision, proclaiming the new economic policy, replacing the outdated and having no prospects policy of War Communism, was such a cardinal turn. But in order to do that, it's necessary to have and demonstrate political will to irrevocably turn the development of the whole country.

In this environment, today's Narcissuses, rejecting the past, dreaming in the present and not caring about the future, prefer to look for recipes for solution of all without exception problems in the experience of foreign countries. In their opinion, exactly there it's known about the right ways of Russia's development, and in the first half of the 1990s giant numbers of foreign advisors and consultants came to Russia and filled all main centers of government in the country.

Though this stratum represents a relative minority among all intelligentsia – approximately 18-20% [Life-world... 2016:357], its representatives in contrast to passive realists-rationalizers' behaviour, are an active, ambitious group, being several various groups – from categorical supporters of the “free” market, preferably without any limitations, to those focused on compromising with the state. But all of them personify mobile, offensive and rather often aggressive communities, insistently promoting their understanding of the meaning of life,

striving to force their convictions upon the practice of various bodies of authority and realize them.

### ***Ethnonationalists***

This group tends for increasing and sees the course of its activities in maximum relying *on the historical experience of Russia, with absolutization of the achieved and tested methods of the past*, and not collection of recipes (even positive) of other successful countries. But this group in its turn consists of several subgroups, which differ a lot from one another.

One of these subgroups consists of monarchists that are really certain that only a reigning person, given the vision to make history “from heaven”, can unite the Russians. Because of that they see the past and the desired present and future in the light of status quo, actually not recognizing any principal changes in rapidly flowing time. Their numbers are not big (according to opinion polls, their share does not exceed 1%), but they are mobile, obstinate and insistent in their striving to prove the competence of their convictions. And this assuredness is characteristic of not only marginal groups. These ideas are supported and shared by such respected individuals as film director N. Mikhalkov, who at first supported monarchy and then presented “The Manifest of Enlightened Conservatism”, supported by the management of the United Russia political party [Mikhalkov, 2010]. Another of these subgroups is successors of the Slavophiles to a certain extent, they are focused on proving the superiority, uniqueness and special character of Russian development. Various groups of nationalists are swarming under this banner, from wild supporters of the idea of “Russia for the Russians” (according to sociological data, their numbers do not exceed 3-5%) to various kinds of followers of the Russian nation’s superiority in comparison with other nations [Ivanov. 2007. # 7: 92]. The third subgroup is represented by uncompromising followers of the Communist idea carried to the point of absurdity, it is sooner a tool for its discrediting than promotion and convincing in its humanistic value. This is especially visible in people’s attitude to M. Suraikin, the leader of the Communists



of Russia political party, a candidate to the post of the President of Russia, who voices the position of its extremely conservative representatives (it is supported by just fractions of a percent of voters) [See, e.g., Kapitonov, 2016, 18 April].

The uniting aspect of all those various groups is speculating on the ideas of patriotism – *sanctum sanctorum* – for many Russians, which allows to mislead a part of the population and deform its consciousness and behaviour, making it focus on achievement of goals that are known to be detrimental.

### ***Temporizers and hypocrites***

In our opinion, *the group of intelligentsia that can be for the purpose of discussion called temporizers and hypocrites is of special interest.* This group strived to become members of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in the Soviet period not because they believed in Socialist and Communist ideas but because that gave a lot of opportunities to climb the career ladder, get an executive position, be a member of some nomenklatura (Soviet system of appointments to specified positions for the Soviet elite, their relatives and minions) – district, regional or all-Union. Exactly this group that, in the opinion of its members, did not achieve the “tops” that could satisfy them, easily rushed into the lines of “Perestroika foremen” and that really brought a part of them positions, revenues and even publicity (“glory”). In our opinion, exactly this group played not a small part in the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Russia’s switching to capitalist development. Exactly this group, depending on the situation in the environment of post-Soviet Russia, strived to get into the power elite or at least be near it. Overthrow of the previous ideals and goals allowed such people as Chubais to make their “dream” come true (it was him who in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade wrote in his diary that he would definitely work in the Kremlin). But there were many actors, members of the former CPSU, who reached the tops at that period and then successfully transferred to Ye. Gaidar’s “The Democratic Choice of Russia”, then to V. Chernomyrdin’s “Russia Is Our House”, then to Yu. Luzhkov’s “Motherland” and finally they landed in the United Russia political party.

However, some diverted their attention to intermediary borders such as the Agrarian Party, Social Democratic Party, Labour Party, etc. while they had claims and had some chances to be a political force to be reckoned with on the political horizon. In our opinion, such zigzags of no small numbers of the “leading” intelligentsia could not fail to be noticed by the public consciousness, and that was reflected in the fairly low evaluation of the intelligentsia’s role and its impact on the life of the Russian society.

It’s evident that *the past, the present and the future look for this group of intelligentsia as some Centaurian set of assessments, opinions, relations*, that to a large extent has no logic except one – to be in power, which gives an opportunity to have capital and preferably public recognition or at least regular appearances on TV [see in detail: Toshchenko, 2015]. This part of intelligentsia tries to present this rubbish as real voicing of the social development requirements, and they are very much surprised that their understanding of the reality is not supported by the general public. To put it differently, we are witnessing the state of affairs that happened in the course of history not once, when those allowed to power are surprised: we care for the well-being of the people, and they are ungrateful and do not understand that. And consequently they start accusing people calling them “irresponsible”, “narrow-minded”, “backward”, “herd” and even “cattle”.

Such individuals as Dorenko and Nevzorov side with this group, they can justifiably be referred to “information killers”, whose meaning of life comes down to their “zigzags” and “searches” to be well-paid, independent of the source, and for them at the same time to provide their popularity. Thus, A. Nevzorov’s ambivalence brilliantly characterizes his social position. He started from his famous “600 Seconds” TV program, he became famous and after that he travelled along the most unbelievable trajectories: confidant of the democratic authorities, friend of Riga OMON police (special purpose mobile unit), B. Berezovsky’s favourite, deputy to the State Duma, protector of freedom and democracy and then their persecutor, monarchist, KGB protector. And now the desire to demonstrate

the paradox (or pseudo-paradox) of his behaviour has ignited. What will happen tomorrow? Or is it an inescapable wish to be in the limelight, enjoy oneself if not in the rays of glory but at least general attention? Is this a representative of intelligentsia and is this the meaning of his life? [Toroshchina, 2018].

But all these subgroups are united by one feature – inescapable wish to regularly rewrite the score of one’s life.

### ***Several words about the meanings of life of other groups of intelligentsia***

The groups of *xenophobes* in ethnical and confessional guise have a considerable impact on the social, political and cultural life. They occupy extreme reactionary positions as they are focused not only on ignoring but also humiliation, persecution of people from other nations and ethnic groups, those practicing other forms and kinds of religion. This is to a big extent due to the Soviet Union’s leaving the international scene, when ethnonational intelligentsia, to be more exact its most ambitious representatives were armed with some historical facts, certain phenomena of national culture to substantiate the acquired independence and justify their claims to the state power, and opposed them to other nations and their culture, mostly Russian, which was reflected in the author’s monograph *Ethnocracy: History and Modern Times* (2003). Religious ambitions of some strata of national intelligentsia turned out no less dangerous, they created giant areas of tension not only between world religions – Christianity and Islam – in many regions of the country and the world but also inside those religions – between Sunni and Shiite Muslims, between Catholics and Russian Orthodox and even inside the Orthodox Church, about which the author wrote in his monograph *Theocracy: Myth or Reality* (2007).

When analyzing intelligentsia, such a group as collaborators and traitors, defectors, “moles” is sometimes mentioned. It’s questionable if these people can be referred to intelligentsia as the way of treachery and betrayal chosen by these people, does not allow to correlate them with the fundamental, original hypostasis

of intelligentsia – to be patriots of their Motherland. Richard Nixon said very expressively after his meeting with the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Kozyrev, perplexed because of his subservience, that when he was the Vice-President and then the President, he wanted everyone to know that he was an “American son of a bitch” and he would do his best fighting for American interests [quoted by: Primakov, 2002: 10]. There is nothing to say about national interests in case of this group: they preferred to be “sons of a bitch” of another country.

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In the end I’d like to say that this contradiction and even opposition of the Russian intelligentsia’s meanings of life led to impossibility for us to speak about its changed role and its evaluation in today’s Russia both by the general public and intelligentsia itself, and that is the reflection of loss and/or deformation of the meanings of life of its many representatives (see Table 1).

Table 1

Distribution of answers to the question: *How do you treat the intelligentsia’s role in today’s Russia? (% of the number of respondents)*

	General public (2014)	Intelligentsia (self-assessment) (2016)
The intelligentsia’s role is important	9.7	15.1
It has an average impact on the life of the society	21.9	25.2
It plays an unimportant role	23.7	26.7
It plays practically no role	19.7	16.1
Undecided	25.0	16.9

*Source:* Life-world of the Russians: 25 Years Later. Moscow, 2016:367; The data of the all-Russian survey “How do you live, intelligentsia?” (Russian State University of the Humanities, 2016. 1,350 respondents).

It's evident that assessments of the intelligentsia's role and its impact on the society are very skeptical, and it's undetermined for every fourth Russian (25%). Negative or restrained assessments are predominant though intelligentsia is inclined to consider itself a more influential group in comparison with what the general public thinks about it. It is especially revealed in cases of the opinions about the importance of the intelligentsia's role. Only every tenth Russian (9.7%) agreed with the optimistic evaluation of the intelligentsia's role, though intelligentsia thinks much higher of itself – every sixth or sevenths respondent thinks like that (15.1%). But in the end positive assessments are very few, unimportant as they disprove the opinion that intelligentsia can considerably influence the affairs of the society and the state in something.

Thus, Russian intelligentsia is a “patchwork” in relation to the past, the present and the future of its various groups and strata, the meanings of life of which are impossible to imagine as one whole that was to a certain extent characteristic of Russian and Soviet intelligentsia.

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