



## A Sociocultural Contradiction or a Mental Illness? (An Explanation of the Fate of Nikolai Gogol, the Great Russian Writer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century)

**Vadim Markovich Rozin\***

*Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Vadim Markovich Rozin, Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia.

**DOI:** 10.31080/ASMS.2026.10.2288

**Received:** August 03, 2026

**Published:** September 30, 2026

© All rights are reserved by **Vadim Markovich Rozin**.

### Abstract

The article examines two fundamentally different approaches to explaining the tragedy of N.V. Gogol: the socio-cultural one (in A. Davydov's book) and the psychiatric one (in V.F. Chizh's work). Davydov sees the cause of the writer's death in his inability to overcome an internal schism between archaic and modern values, which he views as a projection of a fundamental contradiction inherent in all of Russian culture. Chizh, conversely, insists on the primacy of mental illness (paranoia, depressive neurosis), which, developing over time, led to a creative crisis, religious quests, and, ultimately, death. The author of this article, criticizing both approaches for reducing the living personality to abstract schemes (whether sociological or clinical), offers his own version. In his view, Gogol's tragedy lies not in a passive collision of "cultural poles" nor in a fatal disease, but in an active yet failed project of self-construction. Being a brilliant artist but not an integral personality (unlike Swedenborg, Augustine, or Florensky), Gogol could not bear the discrepancy between his own intentions and the public's perception. Fleeing from this, he began to construct a new reality for himself — first as a piece of fiction, and then as an actual fact of life, which aggravated his illness and led to the tragic finale.

**Keywords:** Disease; Society; Contradiction; Life; Personality; Mediation

Paraphrasing Martin Heidegger, who repeated that "we still do not think," one could say that we still poorly understand Gogol. I was once again convinced of this while reading the excellent book by Davydov, published for the anniversary of the great Russian writer, and comparing it with another book, «Gogol's Illness,» by the renowned Russian psychiatrist and writer V.F. Chizh, which appeared at the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alexei Davydov attempts to understand Gogol through a sociocultural explanation, while Vladimir Chizh does so on the basis of psychiatry. The book «The Soul of Gogol» seems to be directly aimed against the psychiatric understanding of our great writer's tragedy.

Davydov does not deny Gogol's mental illness but considers it secondary, derivative of another, deeper cause of a purely social, or more precisely, sociocultural nature. This cause is sociocultural contradictions (a sociocultural schism) that the writer could not overcome within himself.

«According to the testimony of many diagnosticians,» writes Davydov, «Gogol's illness is depressive neurosis. But the cause of this mental disorder, I am sure, is one – the inability to resolve the sociocultural contradiction within oneself». «Writer or preacher? The schism in Gogol's soul is the central problem in analyzing his work». «Gogol rushed between the divine and the human, and

it was this wavering that destroyed him". «Between Gogol the archaist and Gogol the innovator, there is no dialogue. His soul, his entire essence, is split, torn between these poles". "Gogol failed to overcome the schism in his soul between patriarchal values and the meaning of the individual" [1]. But what does Davydov understand by sociocultural contradiction and schism?

Here he relies on the research of Russian sociologists and social philosophers studying Russia – N. Berdyaev, G. Fedotov, A. Akhiezer, I. Yakovenko, A. Pelipenko, I. Kondakov, and others – and outlines the following scheme. Russian culture and society are originally contradictory and divided. The content of these contradictions and the schism lies in the clash and incompatibility of communal-autocratic traditions and democratic reforms, the understanding of God as the Father and as Christ, traditional society and civil society, the archaic commune and the individual. "In the era of modernization, in the 18th–19th–20th–21st centuries, the logic of the schism remains the same – it is the contradiction between the traditional static, communally-autocratic, authoritarian-sobornost culture and the dynamic, creative, self-critical personality striving for change" [2]. Contradictions and schism do not remain only in the abstract sphere of ideas; they are realized and live in literature and in the personality of individuals. As a result, the personality itself splits, fractures, and rushes between contradictions (Davydov calls this «inversion»). "Unable to think innovatively, the inversionary subject rushes between poles, ignoring intermediate meanings" [3].

The final link in the explanation and reconstruction is mediation, the search for a middle ground as an antidote to the schism. «Gogol carried inversion, speaking in support of serfdom, autocracy, and the church. But he also carried the mediational principle, destroying inversion, demanding the democratization of the church, defending the individual path to God, interpreting the divine from the standpoint of the values of the creative personality, sanctifying the pursuit of profit, essentially legalizing in Russia the spirit of Protestantism in both religion and entrepreneurship" [4].

Gogol's tragedy, from Davydov's point of view, lies in the fact that the great writer "could not unite opposites within himself and became the first and far from the last victim in the Russian literary environment of sociocultural contradiction, of the schism between inversion and mediation" [5].

If it were only a matter of confirming this scheme using Gogol as an example, Davydov's book would hardly be so interesting; but it is, in fact, profound and thought-provoking. Davydov indeed tries to understand why Gogol abandoned his writing vocation and began to preach things that were, from the Russian intellectual's point of view, dubious – for example, he calls for understanding the thief and the bribe-taker, preserving the established order of unjust life traditionally supported by the Orthodox Church, and generally abandoning social change. «The essence,» writes Davydov, «of the conflict that occurs between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Russian person has been the same through the ages: the person wants to break free from the bounds of tradition, and the church wants to return him to archaic historical frameworks, in particular to God, to the church, to the House of the Most Holy Theotokos, into the embrace of imperial power, the Orthodox people, the one and indivisible land, etc. And Gogol, as it happened, in his book proposed that people voluntarily renounce the right to be freed from these stereotypes and restore within themselves deification, churchification, statehood, and mythological ways of thinking. In essence, he called on society to stop the process of personality formation in the Russian person, to halt development" [6].

Davydov undertakes genuine «archaeological excavations» of Gogol's personality, showing through the analysis of his works and the three stages of his creative work that Gogol sincerely tried to explain his position to the Russian public and genuinely wanted good for Russia. However, the tragedy is that Gogol's concept of good was perceived by Russian society either as a mockery of its aspirations or simply as evil. Why did this happen? Because Gogol's soul, according to Davydov, was originally divided between archaism and modernity, faith in God the Father and Christ, traditionalist and European values. It is Gogol, Davydov asserts, who begins the path of Russian religious philosophy in Russia. From Gogol onwards, the opposition within society intensified, and in his work, whether he wanted it or not, the contradictions and schism of Russian culture manifested themselves clearly. Again, contradictions and schism. In general, in my view, the concept of schism and the actual empirical analysis of Gogol's work and personality in Davydov's book do not converge; or rather, they sometimes correspond and then decidedly diverge. Above, however, I mentioned that while reading Davydov, I often recalled the research of V.F. Chizh.

In 1903 and 1904, a series of his articles devoted to explaining Gogol's illness and fate was published in the journal «Questions

of Philosophy and Psychology". Chizh offered a strictly psychiatric interpretation of the great writer's life. Already in early youth, Gogol shows symptoms of mental illness: delusions of persecution and grandeur. In a letter to his mother dated March 1, 1828, Gogol writes: «You consider me capricious, some kind of unbearable pedant, who thinks he is smarter than everyone else, that he is created differently from other people... Think of me as you please, but only from my present path will you learn my true character" [7]. Ideas of grandeur, an essential element of the paranoid character, notes Chizh, appeared in Gogol very early; in the aforementioned letter to his mother, he already promises to repay "all their bad deeds" with benefactions, because their evil has turned into good for him... "no one has completely understood me" [8]. Gogol studied rather poorly at the Gymnasium of Higher Sciences in Nizhyn, but after moving to St. Petersburg, driven by claims to his high mission, he managed to achieve success as a writer and create his main immortal works up to 1836. Then the illness took over. «For a psychiatrist, it is perfectly understandable that almost everything by Gogol was created before 1836; this is indeed the best period for individuals with such a pathological organization of the nervous system as Gogol had. With the end of youth, the illness progressed more rapidly, deterioration began to accelerate, premature withering appeared, and consequently, a weakening of productivity" [9].

If the preconditions for Gogol's illness are lost in youth, then, in Chizh's opinion, the illness itself can be ascertained starting from the 1840s. "In 1841, Gogol finally formed delusional ideas of grandeur, the rudiments of which were already present in youth and which throughout his life gradually crystallized and became clearer, until finally, under the influence of an exacerbation of the illness in 1840, they reached fullness and completeness" [10]. Nevertheless, the writer's friends doubted his illness until the end, even when "Selected Passages from Correspondence with Friends" appeared. «Belinsky, with an instinct that correctly understood the main symptom of Gogol's illness ("The thought of becoming some kind of abstract perfection, of rising above all through humility, can be the fruit only of either pride or feeble-mindedness..."), due to his incorrect understanding of the essence of mental illness, doubted Gogol's illness: 'Some stopped at the thought that your book is the fruit of a mental disorder close to positive insanity. But they soon abandoned such a conclusion: it is clear that the book was written not in a day, not a week, not a month, but perhaps a year, two, or

three; there is a connection in it; through the careless presentation, deliberation shines through, and the hymns to the powers that be well arrange the earthly position of the pious author" [11].

It is understandable, notes Chizh, that those who like the main ideas of «Selected Passages...» will never agree that Gogol was ill when he wrote this book. They will think that Gogol developed, became wiser, achieved perfection, and therefore, instead of the, in their opinion, pernicious "Inspector General" and "Dead Souls," he was deemed worthy to write such a wonderful book as "Selected Passages" [12]. Indeed, even today this opinion is widespread in Orthodox literature. For example, in the article «Thy Will Be Done,» Vladimir Voropaev writes: «Among those who knew Gogol, Father Matthew understood him perhaps more than anyone. 'The usual phenomenon of our Russian life was repeated with him,' he said. 'Our Russian life has many examples of how strong natures, weary of worldly vanity or finding themselves incapable of former broad activity, abandoned everything and went to a monastery to seek inner peace and the purification of their conscience. <...> So it was with Gogol. He previously said that he 'needed a spiritual monastery,' and before his death, he desired it even more strongly.'» «It is known that Gogol died in a state of spiritual enlightenment. His last words, spoken in full consciousness, were: 'How sweet it is to die!'" [13].

Analyzing the development of Gogol's illness, Chizh asserts that Gogol's personality fully corresponded to his illness, reinforcing it. Gogol, Chizh tries to show, was cold towards people, calculating and selfish; he used his fame and friends to achieve material well-being; he knew no love for women and therefore truly loved no one; socially, he was extremely irresponsible; his religiosity was not sincere but coerced by fear of illness, death, and hell. «Due to the pathological organization of his nervous system, he did not like to study either at school or in life and therefore was never a truly educated person; he was not accessible to wonder before truth, nor indignation before injustice. For the same reason, he could not love people, could not love the insulted and humiliated, although, as a brilliant artist, he managed to awaken in us love for Akakiy Akakievichs and Poprishchins... Severe physical suffering, whether caused by some actual organic disease or of a purely hypochondriacal nature, greatly frightened Gogol and made him pious... Before this time, Gogol was not distinguished by particular piety. They say religiosity was instilled in him by his mother, and

they even attribute this merit to the religious instructor at the Nizhyn Gymnasium; however, all the memories of those who knew Gogol, and mainly his letters, testify that his piety developed in parallel with the development of his illness... In the last days of his life, Gogol suffered inexpressibly from the fear of death and hell; he suffered terribly, awaited death with inexpressible fear, and even, in all probability, wished that the terrible moment for him would come sooner... Whoever could not be useful to Gogol, did not share his views, did not submit to him, could not be his friend. The sick poet could not be interested in the convictions, aspirations, or people; he needed means for treatment, means for life without obligatory labor, to which he was incapable due to illness; he needed devoted disciples who recognized his immeasurable superiority, and therefore he chose friends who rendered him services, who looked at him as an oracle" [14].

It was precisely the illness, Chizh asserts, that led to Gogol, when literary creativity had completely dried up again due to the illness, beginning to preach under the influence of his delusions of grandeur. «Gogol's genius finally faded in 1841; artistic creation became impossible, but his pathological organization remained; on the basis of this organization, or as a result of it, pathological phenomena developed that explain to us Gogol's activity during this period. The pathological manifestations of Gogol's organization were previously overshadowed by his genius creativity; the rudiments of the illness or its seeds now fully manifested themselves, and the brilliant artist turned into a moralist and preacher" [15].

Chizh concludes his articles as follows. «The study of Gogol's illness, while not explaining to us the inscrutable organization of our common teacher, nevertheless has its significance; we learn to separate the healthy from the sick in the works and activities of the writer of whom our Fatherland is proud. Thanks to such study, we correctly explain the negative aspects of the works and activities of the brilliant author; we understand why our great satirist created so little, finished his activity so early, so necessary for Russia, why he spent the best period of his life, in terms of activity, abroad, why he was completely alien to social activity" [16].

Let us compare the two discourses. Chizh asserts that Gogol's life and personality, in all their main manifestations, were predetermined by his mental illness. Davydov denies this, stating that the main reason lies elsewhere – Gogol could not overcome

the sociocultural contradiction and schism in his soul, and they ultimately killed him. But the question is, how exactly? An enormous number of people live with contradictions they cannot resolve, and yet, while suffering, they live out their allotted time, sometimes to a ripe old age. How can sociocultural contradictions by themselves kill a person? Is there not here an illegitimate reduction of a concrete individual to abstract sociological categories? Davydov, and in my view correctly, emphasizes the role of personality in the life of culture and society. However, what is personality?

According to Davydov, it turns out that personality is a direct projection of social relations and contradictions, bypassing its unique morphology (corporeality, psyche). Much as my teacher, G.P. Shchedrovitsky, used to say at the end of his life. «From all sides I hear: man!.. personality!.. All lies: I am a vessel for living, self-developing thinking; I am thinking thought, its hypostasis and materialization, the organism of thought. And nothing more... I always imply one thing: I am a knecht, a servant of my thinking, and beyond that are the actions of thinking, mine and others', which, in particular, communicate. At some point – I was about twenty then – I felt an amazing transformation happening to me: I realized that thinking had settled on me and that this is my value and my essence as a human being... All our behavior is merely a reflection and imprint of the power of the sociocultural forms we use, but not the creation of the individual mind. And in this sense, I say: the game plays, and thinking thinks" [17].

True, such an understanding allows for the inclusion of an analysis of sociocultural factors and conditions in the theoretical explanation, which Davydov does. For example, he shows that Gogol in his development successively passes through three different cultures (traditional small-estate Cossack culture, imperial cold St. Petersburg, bourgeois Europe), consciously or unconsciously borrowing from them. He was greatly influenced not only by the Orthodox Church; the poorly recognized influence of Catholicism and Protestantism also had an effect. Gogol listened both to «Pushkin's circle» and to the opinions of priests and authorities, but no less to the applause and hissing of the public. As if in response to this, Chizh on many pages tries to show that Gogol perceived in all these external situations only what was refracted through his morbid consciousness. He saw and was interested in nothing that did not fall within the field of his interests. According to Chizh, neither St. Petersburg, nor Pushkin with his circle, nor abroad, nor Protestantism had any serious influence on Gogol.

Now let us look more closely at the discourse of the schism theory itself. Firstly, this discourse presupposes the idea of some whole; otherwise, what is splitting? What is this whole? Russian culture, society, the individual's consciousness? Which were unified and then became covered with cracks of contradictions and split? We see nothing of the sort on the horizon. Russian culture has always been heterogeneous and contradictory and has never been integral. Russian society as well, and besides, it was most often in a semi-conscious state, only occasionally waking up during periods of social catastrophe. The consciousness of a Russian person is an even more incomprehensible thing; moreover, in one individual it can be integral, while in another – quite the opposite.

Secondly, the schism (in the sociologists' discourse) seems automatically to presuppose a certain social action – the search for a middle ground, overcoming the schism. Again, nothing of the sort is visible. According to my observations, culture and society can exist for decades and centuries in the same contradictory state. Moreover, the chapter on Gogol's search for a middle ground, as mediation against the schism, is the least convincing in Davydov's book. As the quotations provided by Davydov show, Gogol is talking about something entirely different, namely, that extremes must be avoided.

I do not want to say that the concept of schism does not work at all. On its basis, Davydov analyzes the sociocultural factors and conditions that, as he assumes, influenced Gogol's life. In addition, this concept allows one to present both Gogol's life and Russian life in such a way that a certain type of social action suggests itself. Yes, you guessed it – the necessity of overcoming contradictions, the necessity of synthesis. No one will object if our sociologists insist on this necessity. But the question is, how realistic and feasible is all this?

Thirdly, the value position of the proponents of the schism theory is not very clear. On the one hand, they seem to be proponents of modernization and Westernizers, hence the schism is seen as something opposed to the unified West (as if there were no contradictions in the West). But on the other hand, the schism is simultaneously understood as a natural state of Russian culture and society. If it is natural, then why overcome the schism, especially since, as we see, all attempts at modernization in Russia (with rare exceptions) fail? Even in our time, reforms stall and stall, mainly

being imitated to cover up something quite opposite, such as non-legal and undemocratic practices. How then should we evaluate Gogol's position, who in many of his letters (in his second life) called for not undermining traditional foundations – faith in God the Father, the Orthodox Church, the people – and convinced that every person, even a thief and a rogue, is good in their own way and can be understood? Perhaps this position is not so retrograde, but simply realistic and culturally preservative?

At the same time, I should not be understood as being generally against contradictions and schism in any understanding. Contradictions differ from each other. Many of them are, in fact, very productive. Take Emanuel Swedenborg. He, too, by the way, abandoned his life's work – science and engineering – and began to preach. And he, too, was accused of abnormality, and by none other than Kant himself. "Therefore I shall by no means blame the reader," writes Kant, "if he, instead of regarding spirit-seers as half-belonging to another world, immediately registers them as candidates for treatment in a hospital and thus spares himself any further investigation... in Swedenborg's writings I find that same whimsical play of imagination that many other lovers have found in the play of nature, when in the outlines of spotted marble they imagined the holy family, or in stalactite formations – monks, fonts, and church organs... I am tired of citing the wild ravings of the worst of all visionaries or continuing them up to his description of the state after death... it would be futile to try to conceal the barrenness of all this labor – it is obvious to everyone" [18].

But Swedenborg did not begin to preach by chance. From his youth onwards, on many of his quite secular scientific, engineering, and philosophical manuscripts, the following instruction to himself runs along the bottom of the pages:

- Often read the Word of God and meditate upon it.
- Submit oneself in all things to the will of Divine Providence.
- Observe true propriety in all actions and always keep an irreproachable conscience.
- Fulfill honestly and truly the duties of one's calling and official obligations, and strive to make oneself in all respects a useful member of society" [19].

That is, Swedenborg, like Pavel Florensky, was, so to speak, a servant of two masters. I mean Swedenborg's simultaneous

adherence to two worldviews – the scientific and the religious. He could not renounce either the first or the second; rather, both worldviews equally determined his life and actions. And how could it be otherwise: Swedenborg's main occupation for almost half a century was science; his basic way of life and worldview was Christianity.

Here, however, the reader might object, saying: "So what, many scientists believe in God and go to church. Their faith and scientific worldview may be completely unrelated; one such scientist put it this way: 'my faith and science are in different rooms.'" Indeed, there are people, and probably the majority, who live in "two rooms". Being in one room, they forget about the other, and vice versa.

Apparently, Swedenborg was not such a personality; after all, it is not difficult to assume that the understanding of the world and the way of life depend on the character of the individual. For him, the world of science and the Lord were not two different rooms, but one, a unified world and life. A philosopher and psychologist would say that his consciousness was integral. The consciousness of St. Augustine, Descartes, Kant, R. Steiner, and P. Florensky was also integral. I did not accidentally mention René Descartes in this list. He not only largely determined the attitude of the modern European scientist towards the Creator of all things but also set a number of features of the modern European scientific worldview. It seems that Swedenborg, too, did not escape the influence of Cartesianism. Like Descartes, Swedenborg not only believed that man approaches the Lord in his perfection, which is why angels are perfect people, but also that one can know both nature, the Lord, and heaven. Moreover, in knowing, the thinker reproduces the Lord and, as it were, creates the world, relying only on himself.

It was precisely as a Cartesian and a scientist that Swedenborg could not fail to recognize the presence of many contradictions in the Holy Scriptures. How can God exist in three persons? That is an obvious contradiction. Why did He allow evil and Lucifer if the Lord is love and goodness? What does the resurrection of man and death mean if disappearance into nothingness means that the Lord hardly recreates each person anew after death? How to understand that "man was created in the image and likeness of God"? What are heaven and hell, angels and demons? Why will pagans not be saved when many of them live more righteously than Christians and know nothing about the Lord at all? And so on and so forth. An ordinary

believer does not ask such questions, but Swedenborg was not only a Christian but also a scientist and a Cartesian.

As a result of these fundamental doubts and reflections, but not a renunciation of faith, Swedenborg begins to rethink religious reality. I am sure, already in the first period of his scientific life. It is another matter that he could, for a time, turn a blind eye to his own work of thought; not that he didn't notice it – such a thing is hard not to see – but rather pushed it into the background, which is what we often do. In what direction did this rethinking go? We know it well from his second spiritual period. Swedenborg began to revise contradictory and unrelated religious narratives, replacing them with his own constructions in the spirit of rational Cartesian thinking; in doing so, he created quasi-scientific concepts and arrived at a conception of reality resembling not only the sacred world but also spiritual nature. Swedenborg was confident that he was merely clarifying the true state of affairs, conducting a kind of cognition of spiritual reality, still understood as canonical. It is clear that this work was quite lengthy and complex, stretching over many years, involving a "shuttle movement," that is, returning to and revising the initial foundations and constructions. But one must take into account (this I know from myself, in particular) that in a person living by thinking, the work of thought occurs constantly and partly automatically, sometimes even in parallel with other activities.

As a consequence, alongside the two main realities – the scientific and the religious world – a third reality gradually enters Swedenborg's consciousness. This is the reality he himself creates as a result of rethinking the second world. On the one hand, it resembles this world; on the other, it is radically different from it. Swedenborg, of course, could not fail to notice that the new reality contradicts canonical Christian teaching on many points. But there was another serious problem. Swedenborg understood his work as the cognition of spiritual reality in the spirit of the newest natural science of his time. And that required facts and experiment. The latter, however, were absent. The situation for Swedenborg was quite dramatic. The new spiritual reality had practically already taken the place of the canonical one; it was perceived as the true state of affairs, but it contradicted both the religious dogmas of the church and Swedenborg's own methodological scientific principles, according to which this reality needed confirmation by experience.

It was precisely in this situation that the psyche came to the rescue, beginning to produce spontaneous dream-like narratives that, on the one hand, supplemented the missing elements of scientific thinking and reality, and, on the other, painted a picture in which Swedenborg received sanction from above for a new way of cognition and thinking. Swedenborg did not suddenly abandon his state service and begin to preach, but did so in connection with a specific event.

"This event," writes Jorge Luis Borges, "was the revelation. It came to Swedenborg in London; as noted in his diary, the revelation was preceded by dreams... Explaining his doctrine, Swedenborg always writes very clearly. In London, a stranger followed him down the street and, entering his house, identified himself as Jesus Christ. He said that the Church was declining, like the Jewish church before the coming of Christ, and that Swedenborg was to renew it by creating the third church, the church of Jerusalem. This may seem absurd, incredible, but Swedenborg's works remain. They are numerous, and written in a very calm manner. He never argues. Recall Emerson's well-known statement: arguments convince no one. Swedenborg authoritatively expounds everything, with calm confidence in his rightness.

So, Jesus told Swedenborg that a mission had been laid upon him to renew the Church. He said that Swedenborg would be allowed to visit the other world, the world of spirits with its countless heavens and hells. He said that Swedenborg should study the Holy Scriptures. And before writing anything, Swedenborg devoted two years to studying the Hebrew language, because he wanted to read the Sacred Texts in the original. He began to study them again and found in them the basis for his doctrine. This is somewhat reminiscent of the Kabbalists, who base their searches on the Sacred Texts" [20].

Thus, it is very important how the personality is structured, not just culture and society. Swedenborg was a Cartesian and a scientist; he was an integral personality and therefore sought to resolve the contradictions that arose in him in a scientific manner; he constructs a renewed Holy Scripture as a normal science modeled on natural science. St. Augustine was a philosopher and also an integral personality, so he resolves the contradictions between faith and ratio on the basis of philosophy. Pavel Florensky was a priest and a scientist and considered himself truly divided (crucified) between faith and science. In the mid-1920s, he wrote

about it thus: "This was a characteristic illness of all modern thought, of the entire Renaissance; now, in retrospect, I can define it as the disconnection of humanity and scientificity. Inhuman scientific thought – on the one hand, and meaningless humanity – on the other... In me, these two elements collided with particular force, because Renaissance scientificity was not an external appendage or plumage, but a second nature, and I understood its true meaning not because I learned it from someone, but knew it directly, like my own desires. But this understanding was opposed by an equally strong experience, the Renaissance designs denying them at their root" (emphasis mine – V.R.) [21].

Possessing such a consciousness, P. Florensky actually realizes a synthesis. By combining science and faith, rethinking them, he brought closer (spiritually identified) absolute Truth and God. Having worshiped love and beauty all his life, he endows God with these features as well. Being himself "crucified" on the cross of contradictory aspirations, he endowed the world, man, and even the Holy Scriptures with antinomies. "The Sacred Book," writes Pavel, "is full of antinomies... Only genuine religious experience discerns the antinomies and sees how their factual reconciliation is possible" [22]. Forced to reconcile science and theology, Pavel Florensky limits God by His own decisions (God is limited by darkness; He granted man free will and has no right to revoke it; God limited Himself by His desire to save man, and so forth). As a result, Florensky's God resembles nature with its laws – that is, of course, mystical nature, but nature.

Finally, Gogol was an artist and was not an integral personality. He did not at all rush between opposing meanings and ideas, as Davydov thinks. Gogol resolved his contradictions by creating works of art. This means building aesthetic worlds, absolutely independent of each other. In one world (for example, "Evenings on a Farm..."), there may be archaic realities, and in another (the St. Petersburg cycle) – modern urban plots, the little man, and criticism of the faceless city. In the first volume of "Dead Souls" – satire on Russian reality, essentially from the standpoint of a European worldview, while in the second, as Davydov shows, – justification of Russian reality with elements of early capitalist utopia. The artist is not obliged to coordinate the artistic realities created in different works.

Chizh asserts that Gogol's "artistic personality" had little in common with his "spiritual personality," and that two autonomous

personalities, as it were, lived in Gogol. The first was brilliant and free, and the second was “deformed” and insensitive to people. “It is obvious that genius and what it created,” writes Chizh, “always remained alien and extraneous to the rest of Gogol’s personality. Genius was, as it were, separated, not merged with the entire spiritual organization, and therefore we must always separate genius and its creations from the rest of the spiritual life of the sick poet. Artistic creativity was so alien and extraneous to the rest of the spiritual life of the great poet that Gogol as a person did not at all sympathize with the great ideas expressed in his artistic works. He never understood that all great works lead humanity forward; as a brilliant artist, he perceived with amazing insight the main negative phenomena of his era and at the same time decidedly did not understand the necessity of improvements; as a person, he was not indignant at either serfdom, or the pre-reform court, or the terrible condition of the people. Only by the fact that artistic genius was alien and extraneous to the entire spiritual personality of the great satirist can we explain his negative attitude towards his own artistic works, the amazing contradiction between the main ideas of the artistic and theoretical works, and finally, the even greater discrepancy in the value of the former and the latter” [23].

Is this so? Here I want to offer my own version of Gogol’s tragedy. I am not fully satisfied with the analyses of Davydov and Chizh, although I will use their reconstructions. I am not satisfied because they still subsumed Gogol under their theories, making the living Gogol an illustration of the corresponding concepts. I, however, want to follow M. Bakhtin, who wrote that other people’s consciousnesses “cannot be contemplated, analyzed, defined as objects, as things – one can only communicate with them dialogically. To think about them means to speak with them; otherwise, they immediately turn their objective side towards us: they fall silent, close up, and freeze into completed objectivized images” [24].

How can we incline Gogol to a conversation? First of all, not to rush into conceptualizations, but truly try to understand Gogol as an ordinary person, which does not mean attempting to do without theoretical tools altogether. The individual’s illness likely must be taken into account, for it makes a contribution, often significant, to the development of the person. At the same time, of course, both external factors and internal circumstances (states and processes) are subject to analysis and reconstruction. Looking closely and

listening to Gogol’s life, I would note two points that are unclear to me: why did he react somewhat strangely to the success of his works and soon leave Russia, and also, what can explain Gogol’s transition from writing to Christian preaching? If your works are so resoundingly successful, why not continue writing in the same vein, and why leave Russia? If you are a writer, why did you become a preacher?

Yes, Gogol enjoyed colossal success in society after “Evenings,” the “St. Petersburg Tales,” and “The Inspector General”. But let us consider three important circumstances. As an artist, Gogol possessed an amazing ability to see, as if from the outside, what other people did not see, and also to very convincingly recreate the lives of his characters. At the same time, he had absolutely no desire to re-educate or remake anyone. Even in “The Inspector General” and “Dead Souls,” Gogol was far from that. The Russian public, however, understood his works differently: as sharp social criticism, as a call to restructure Russian reality. All this was alien to Gogol.

Second. Gogol, as we have already noted, was secretive and cold towards people, suspicious; he thought people envied him and plotted against him; finally, he lived in the enclosed space of his own individual world, the world of fantasy, practically unrelated to ordinary life (one should not discount the fact that Gogol never had his own family, staying with one person or another, or simply living alone).

Third circumstance. Gogol undoubtedly sought fame and recognition; he was extremely ambitious. Temporarily, he steps back, pretending that public recognition is unnecessary for him, that he is satisfied with the life of a simple ordinary person. But all this, of course, is not true; it is temporary, and sooner or later the desire for fame and recognition wins out and compels Gogol to act. Should we not in this case assume the following scenario?

Gogol did not believe in the sincerity of the praise directed at him; he suspected intrigues, did not want to engage in the polemics surrounding his works, and was even afraid of them. And most importantly, he could not accept society’s attitude towards his works. So he simply fled abroad, effectively failing to cope with the situation. In Gogol’s letters of 1836, we read: “A contemporary writer, a comic writer, a writer of morals must be far from his

homeland. A prophet has no honor in his fatherland". "My poor soul: there is no shelter for it here, or rather, there is no such shelter here for it where the agitations would not reach it" [25].

Unable to cope with the situation, Gogol strives, on the one hand, to justify his actions, and on the other, to make sense of what happened. Gogol first justifies his behavior by saying he is seriously ill. In a letter to Belozersky dated April 12, 1840, we read: "My health and I myself are no longer fit for the climate here, and mainly – my poor soul: there is no shelter for it here, or rather, there is no such shelter here for it where the agitations would not reach it. And I am now more fit for a monastery than for secular life" [26]. The theme of illness then constantly deepens and develops, explaining the long days of creative stagnation and much else.

Later, Gogol adds a second reason to the first. He arrives at the idea of early Christianity, likening himself either to St. Paul or to Christ himself. Here, Gogol's conviction in his highest mission and, as it seemed to him, the similarity of the Russian situation to the early Christian one (in both, society does not understand and persecutes Christians, but they carry their cross to the end) came into play. "Another Leviathan," writes Gogol, "is being undertaken. A sacred trembling seizes me in advance when I think of it: I hear something from it... I will taste divine moments... but... now I am completely immersed in Dead Souls. My creation is immensely great, and its end is not soon. Still, new classes and many different gentlemen will rise up against me; but what am I to do! Such is my fate to be at enmity with my countrymen. Patience! Someone invisible is writing before me with a powerful rod" [27].

Gogol does not just liken himself to Paul and Christ; as an artist, he begins to create a kind of work of art out of himself, building his life on the model of the saints. It is here that Gogol arrives at the idea of the transformation of his soul. "Since I left Russia," he writes in 1844 to Smirnova, "a great change has occurred in me. The soul has occupied me entirely, and I saw too clearly that without directing my soul towards its best perfection, I would not be able to move any of my abilities, any side of my mind, for the good and benefit of my brethren; and without this spiritual education, all my labor would be only temporarily brilliant, but vain in its essence" [28]. Accordingly, Gogol immerses himself in the illness, justifying his explanation of what was happening. In other words, I want to say that the transformation that occurred with Gogol did not take

place without his participation and creativity. He made of himself both a saint and a sick man; he truly became sick, but not a saint.

We see that Gogol does not want to continue his previous literary work. And it is clear why. The public perceives his works not at all as Gogol intended, and they mistake him for someone else. Therefore, Gogol is forced to reflect on his values and worldview, and it turns out they are not like those expected in Russian society. Gogol arrives at another important thought: the reader must be prepared for the correct perception of his works, meaning he must, to some extent, re-educate them. Especially since the temporarily suppressed desire for fame has long been asserting itself. And Gogol undertakes a difficult feat.

This was Gogol's solution to an equation with many unknowns (including those circumstances pointed out by Chizh, and those problems and contradictions discussed in Davydov's book). Initially, these thoughts and solutions (I am incurably ill, I am like Paul and Christ) were simply a composition on the theme of the current situation (being a brilliant writer, Gogol had no trouble assembling all this into one bouquet), but gradually the great writer came to believe in the reality he had invented; it began to be perceived by him as what truly existed. Further, he strives to live following the deformed reality he himself constructed, and he succeeds quite well in this. Artistic creativity played a significant role in this process, allowing him to build imagined worlds and live in them. It is also partly understandable why he now turned to preaching rather than artistic works. Firstly, preaching is close to an artistic work; according to Schleiermacher, preaching is an act of artistic verbal representation or reproduction of the content of the preacher's personal worldview, which is akin to the task of a poet. Secondly, the main power of preaching lies in the grace bestowed from above, and Gogol considered himself a conductor of sacred forces.

Gogol writes «Selected Passages..», corresponds with readers, explains, and preaches. The result is even sadder: a public scandal, complete rejection by society. Now he has nowhere to flee, nowhere can he realize himself. Spurred on by these circumstances, the illness quickly consumes the great writer of the Russian land.

Gogol's first life proceeded before the illness; the second merges with the illness. His tragedy, however, lies not in the fact that Gogol did not meet the expectations of Russian society and the public, but in the fact that as an artist, he lived through within himself

various conceivable and inconceivable cultural scenarios, all truly relevant to Russia (here Davydov is certainly right), yet failed to build his own personality. The latter is quite strange, considering the lifestyle he led in his final years. But perhaps Chizh was right in saying that Gogol's religiosity was purely external, that he more imitated the transformation of his soul than actually worked on it.

Plato, solving similar problems in the field of philosophy, living through its plots within himself, perfectly understood that the necessary condition for his mission was «care of the self,» the building of oneself as a personality, the «gestation of spiritual fruits». Therefore, on the very threshold of death, he could say, referring to himself: "Such a man, even when he completes his allotted span of life by death, will not have many sensations as now, but will attain a single lot, will become a unity out of multiplicity, will be happy, exceedingly wise, and at the same time blessed" [29]. Alas, Gogol was not a philosopher or a follower of Plato. He was a writer, whose fate in Russia is often tragic.

## Conclusion

The analysis conducted shows that neither the socio-cultural concept of "schism" by A. Davydov nor the strictly psychiatric model of V.F. Chizh are sufficient to explain Gogol's fate. Both theories, each in their own way, subsume the complex and contradictory personality of the writer under a predetermined scheme, turning him into an illustration of either social contradictions or a clinical case. However, the living Gogol, like any great consciousness, resists such objectifying analysis and demands a dialogical understanding.

This article proposes an alternative perspective. The key to Gogol's tragedy lies not in passively experiencing socio-cultural collisions or in the fatal predetermination of illness, but in an active, albeit failed, effort to construct his own personality. Gogol was not an integral personality like Swedenborg or Florensky, capable of holding together and creatively synthesizing diverse worldviews. He was an artist who created autonomous aesthetic worlds, not directly connected to his everyday life.

The tragedy began when Gogol could not accept or understand society's interpretation of his works. Instead of continuing a dialogue with his reader, he fled abroad and began constructing a new reality in which his personality would acquire a sacred mission, comprehensible at least to himself. However, this construction

was pursued not through "care of the self" and the maturation of spiritual fruits (as with Plato or the Church Fathers), but through morbid imagination and the "fiction-making" of himself — first in letters, and then in actual behavior. Gogol began to perceive himself as both a sick man and a prophet, attempting to re-educate his public through sermons. But this artificial, constructed personality proved unviable. Having encountered total rejection from society, the writer finally lost his ground, and the illness, which he himself had partly cultivated as an explanation for his failures, consumed him. Thus, Gogol's demise is the result not merely of socio-cultural pressure or neurosis, but of the collapse of an existential project of self-creation — a project that was supported neither by deep personal integrity nor by the understanding of his contemporaries.

## Bibliography

1. Davydov AP. Gogol's soul. M., (2008): 115, 46, 44, 45, 146.
2. Ibid. Page 33.
3. Ibid. Page 27.
4. Ibid. Page 28.
5. Ibid. Page.
6. Ibid. Page. 170-171.
7. Chizh VF. N.V. Gogol / Biography / Illness of N.V. Gogol. (2007).
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Voropaev V. "Thy Will Be Done". On the Causes of Gogol's Death. Online Journal of the Sretensky Monastery.
14. Chizh. Cit. op.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.

17. Shchedrovitsky LP. "Was there an MMK?" Questions of Methodology 1-2 (1997): 9, 12.
18. Kant. "Dreams of a Spiritualist, Explained by the Dreams of Metaphysics". Kant. Works in 6 volumes. Moscow, 2 (1964): 327, 340, 347.
19. Emanuel Swedenborg, On Heaven, the Spirit World, and Hell. Kyiv, (1993): 4.
20. Jorge Luis Borges. "Thinking Out Loud". Borges. Collected Works. St. Petersburg 3 (2005): 520-521.
21. Priest Pavel Florensky. "To my children. Memories of past days". Genealogical research. From the Solovki letters. Testament. Moscow, (1992): 217-218.
22. Florensky PA. "The Pillar and Ground of Truth (I)". Moscow, 1 (1990): 162.
23. Chizh. Cit. op.
24. Bakhtin M. "Aesthetics of Verbal Creativity". Moscow, (1979): 116.
25. Chizh. Cit. op.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Gogol NV. "Letter to A.O. Smirnova". Gogol N.V. Collected Works. In 9 volumes. Moscow, 9 (1994): 288.
29. Plato. Afterlaw. Collected Works in 4 Volumes. Moscow, 4 (1994): 458.