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THE CONCEPT OF ANGST IN NIKOLAI GOGOL'S "THE NOSE"

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Summary

This paper explores the insights that philosophy can bring to administrative and bureaucratic critique, focusing on the work of Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose". It examines the ways in which Gogol's "The Nose" represents the concept of angst in order to satirize the Russian social and religious status. This paper reads "The Nose" as a text thoroughly of its time. It moves into fantastic themes and draws its project of recovering social histories becoming a key example of the productive coalescence of society and religion during the early nineteenth-century concerns. Gogol's satire of society presages many subsequent social religious analyses, presenting a severe indictment of society as a rigid and impersonal state machine producing meaninglessness, absurdity, and tragedy. These encompass the institutional level and fundamental ruptures in society caused by a surfeit of religion depicted in "The Nose." On a more philosophical level, "The Nose" explores the effects of society on the individual, portraying the alienation, futile activity, and servility caused in lower level functionaries through problems, such as the loss of identity, the absence of meaningful existence, and a lack of integration between public and private lives.

Key Words: Absurdity, Angst, Existence, Society, Nikolai Gogol.

Introduction

Nikolai Gogol's realistic writing reflects a satiric view of the time. It enables a re-vision and criticism of religious and social thought of contemporary "thinkers." He read works of the church fathers, and of Russian religious thinkers, such as Stephan Yavorsky. His fiction, furthermore, is

advice to accept the existing social order, but live like Christians. Gogol was out of tune with the public mood, restive under an anachronistic political and social structure, and attracted to socialism, or to the romance of Slavophilism. Gogol's religious faith is evident from his earliest letters.

"The Nose" (1994), although clearly informed by popular Russian social radical readings of fantasy, equally demonstrates the effects of religious historical discourse of Christianity. It is a three-part story recounting Major Kovalyov nose which leaves Petersburg's face and leads a personal life. The barber Ivan Yakovlevich is surprised to find the nose in his breakfast. After being thrown into the Neva River, the nose is caught by a policeman. Major Kovalyov wakes up without a nose. He wanders in the streets and finds his nose at Kazan Cathedral.

The nose claims to be a human being. Major Kovalyov goes home to find the nose with the officer, but the former refuses to return to the face. Major Kovalyov gets the nose stuck on his face when waking up the next morning and is happy to show his face to people.

"The Nose" operates as an existentialist text by elaborating a number of themes generally associated with philosophy, and by telling a tale that simultaneously highlights the absurdity of human existence and the deep sense of pathos with respect to it. The narrative is established as the representation of social life, but also possibly contained hidden information valuable to Christianity. Major Kovalyov, surely one of Gogol's most original characters, represents the ultimate figure of divided selfhood. The chief aspect of Major Kovalyov malaise, and of Gogol's exploration of existential angst in "The Nose," is the crisis of social life, occasioned by wearing so many masks so often. The absurdity of existence is highlighted in Major Kovalyov's meticulous analysis of his own self and its relations to his world.

Socio-Religious Satire in "The Nose"

This article examines the ways in which Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose" represents the concept of angst in order to satirize the Russian social and religious status. This paper reads "The Nose" as a text thoroughly of its time. It moves into fantastic themes and draws its project of recovering social histories becoming a key example of the productive coalescence of society and religion during the early nineteenth-century concerns.

At the beginning of "The Nose" the description of the Barber Ivan Yakovlevitch embodies the social life of the Russian. It is driven by an inward impetus to change and interact with other people. In this sense, the social individual gets into a transitional change into another social life. Here, Ivan Yakovlevitch wakes in the morning attracted not by his usual work, but by the smell of bread:

For that morning Barber Ivan Yakovlevitch, a dweller on the Voznesensky Prospekt (his family name is lost now — it no longer figures on a signboard bearing a portrait of a gentleman with a soaped cheek, and the words: "Also, Blood Let Here") — for that morning Barber Ivan Yakovlevitch awoke early, and caught the smell of newly baked bread (1).

Change in individuals' social life emanates from self drives which construct the presence of angst. This idea is echoed in Zaine Ridling's book *Philosophy Then and Now* (2001). Ridling contends that the internal "activity" of humans is crucial in forming the change of man into a new being which is a result of angst: "It is an attempt to answer the question of what man is and what he can become; and this activity, wholly unlike that of science, is one of mere thought, through the 'inwardness' of which a man becomes aware of the deepest levels of Being" (125).

Similarly, Ivan Yakovlevitch's case is his unusual perception of the bread smell in the

morning though he is usually goes to work and distracted by other things. Interestingly, the bread smell attracts his attention to something new in around him.

Individual change undergoes some social effects which are motivating factors for such change. In "The Nose," Yakovlevitch's wondering about the nose identity in his shop reveals his physical reaction towards its place: " But Ivan Yakovlevitch was neither alive nor dead. He realized that the nose was none other than that Collegiate Assessor Kovalev, whom he was shaved every Wednesday and Sunday" (1). Ivan Yakovlevitch bewilderment carries out his psychological status, i.e., to find a live nose in his shop without its face makes him more confused. This confusion puts him between life and death. Consequently, a sense of anxiety grows out from the "inward" psyche (Ivan Yakovlevitch's psyche) as a result of his astonishment.

Søren Kierkegaard, in *The Concept of Anxiety* (1980), argues that anxiety is one of the formative relationships between the internal drives of angst and the physical manifestation of these drives. Being so, angst can be the physical reaction of the individual's psyche: "That anxiety makes its appearance is pivotal. Man is a synthesis of the psychical and the physical; however, a synthesis is unthinkable if the two are not united in a third. This third is "spirit" (43). Thus Kierkegaard believes that the "spirit is a hostile and a friendly power at the same time" (44). By the same token, Ivan Yakovlevitch's death-in-life experience is attributed to the angst created by his inward expectation and his spiritual anxiety.

Furthermore, society provides various effects on the relationship between the individual and other people. Ridling claims that the individual "consciousness" becomes more harmonious when encountered with other people: "The project remains, however, that of the particular individual of a unique consciousness – but of a consciousness that tries to become totalized; i.e., to enter into relationship with others so as to constitute, with others, human groups that are more and more comprehensive" (401).

This individuality gets evident in the articulation of a particular kind of "comprehensive" consciousness in "The Nose." One particularly illustrative example of the cohesion between the public and private consciousness is provided in Major's hesitance to go outside without a nose: "Luckily no customers were present in the restaurant — merely some waiters were sweeping out the rooms, and rearranging the chairs, and others, sleepy-eyed fellows, were setting forth trayfuls of hot pastries. On chairs and tables last night's newspapers, coffee-stained, were strewn" (5). Major Kovalyov's interaction with other people is hindered since he suffers from a lack of his "consciousness," whereby people get unfamiliar with his appearance. He is fortunate now because he does not find people in the restaurant.

The uncanny characters face difficulties within society due to the "epistemic" consciousness. The particular embodiment of knowledge is the feeling of angst. In addition, this feeling causes troubles and disruption among social relationships. In "The Absurd" (1985), T. Nagel argues that the "epistemic" consciousness is what drives people to their social environment: "The epistemic angst that is warranted by arguments thus concerns a very specific lacuna in our epistemic standing" (49).

When Major Kovalyov leaves the restaurant to the streets, he meets other people. Now he knows his appearance and feels upset about it. This awareness, moreover, holds a great deal of anxious knowledge of self-appearance. The obvious case in this regard is the individual "epistemic" recognition of others. In the quotation below, Major Kovalyov is completely anxious because he cannot feel socially "independent." Accordingly, he strives to regain the nose before he becomes isolated from other people:

Poor Kovalev felt almost demented. The astounding event left him utterly at a loss. For how could the nose which had been on his face but yesterday, and able then neither to drive nor

to walk independently, now be going about in uniform? — He started in pursuit of the carriage, which, luckily, did not go far, and soon halted before the Gostiny Dvor (5).

Anthony Udeji is another critic to discuss the concept of angst. In *Dread in Heidegger and Kierkegaard* (2012), he tackles angst within "human conditions." Man, says Udeji, can decide his freedom through dread experience: "anxiety and concepts such as anguish fear and dread point to a human condition stemming from freedom. Man recognizes his own freedom; he becomes aware of the fact that he can make conscious choices in life and that his destiny lies in his hands" (3).

After Major Kovalyov recognition of his state among others, he tries to find solutions till he catches his nose. His anguish – caused by his nose bleeding – is disregarded because he is aware of his more painful social condition. He, consequently, tries to cover his face so as to make other people not to see him: "Ill luck had it, that morning, that not a cab was visible throughout the street's whole length; so, huddling himself up in his cloak, and covering his face with a handkerchief (to make it look as though his nose were bleeding), he had to start upon his way on foot" (4).

Henceforth, Major Kovalyov goes back on foot rather than by any transportation means to avoid people. Here, it is obvious that Major Kovalyov's dread and suffering are forming his anxiety. Furthermore, this condition makes him more conscious and self-aware. In order to get over his worries, he is now free to go his way alone. Though this action is unusual of him, but he is under conscious conditions to avoid any other outer anguish from the surrounding environment. Even he is personally concerned with the nose, yet there are other decisive conditions which may control his conscious behavior like his society.

Furthermore, Martin Heidegger discusses the concept of angst. In *Being and Time* (1962), he contends that the human "being" is phenomenologically relevant to anxiety. Being so, human character goes along with the other peripheries: "how is it that in anxiety Dasein gets brought before itself through its own Being, so that we can define phenomenologically the character of the entity disclosed in anxiety and define it as such in its Being or make adequate preparations for doing so?" (228).

In "The Nose," Major Kovalyov recognition of his state reveals his response to the contiguous "entity" of the society. As he moves to the restaurant, he prepares for the way to get his nose back. The point of angst here is when he reacts physically and emotionally to get rid of his dread and anxiety: "He bit his lips with vexation, and hurried out of the restaurant. No; as he went along he must look at no one, and smile at no one. Then he halted as though riveted to earth. For in front of the doors of a mansion he saw occur a phenomenon of which, simply, no explanation was possible" (5). Major Kovalyov movement to the restaurant provides additional indication of the impending anxiety. More important, however, such action constantly foregrounds the phenomenological manifestation in Major Kovalyov's character. When recognized his state and its relationship to other people, he acts physically to evade his angst. In this sense, the projected feeling on the environment is the anxious anguish response to the personal entity.

Anthony Kenny tackles the "spiritual" implication of angst in *A Brief History of Western Philosophy* (1998). In his discussion of Kierkegaard's concept of angst, Kenny argues that the "individual" personal and spiritual entity dissolves into an "aesthetic sphere" if it approves its new emotional or "anonymous" peculiarities; Kenny writes:

Kierkegaard sketches out for us a spiritual career which ends with asceticism; but each upward phase in the career, far from being a diminution or renunciation of individuality, is a stage in the affirmation of one's own unique personality...the individual is no more than an anonymous member of a crowd; accepting unquestioningly the opinions, sentiments, and goals of the mob. The first stage towards self-realization is the entry into the aesthetic

sphere (327).

When Major Kovalyov gets into the restaurant, he covers his bleeding face. In so doing, he hides his own personality but in fact it remains anonymous to other people. As he speaks with a man, he stumbles down and seems confused. The man notices that confusion and tells Major Kovalyov that he did get the speech. The man says that Major Kovalyov is erroneous: "My dear sir, you speak in error," ... [Major Kovalyov replies] "I am just myself — myself separately. And in any case there cannot ever have existed a close relation between us, for, judging from the buttons of your undress uniform, your service is being performed in another department than my own" (6). Caught in this situation, consequently, Major Kovalyov tries to make his speech clearer with the man.

In *From Plato to Nietzsche* (1957), E. Allen emphasizes the social prestige which comes after angst experience. He contends that if society has "an elite," then all other social superiorities would not exist. Nevertheless, the individual becomes a part of the "mass" society since the feeling of angst hinders the relationship between individuals and collective world: "For society needs an elite that will set a pattern and curb the thoughtlessness of the mass. The principal characteristic of the time was its rejection of the aristocratic principle, the 'revolt of the masses'... the common man could not endure the rebuke of superior ability" (169).

The same implications can be reflected in Major Kovalyov's serious steps forward with other people. Now he meets the officer's lady. Thus the loss of his nose motivates him to interact with other people's customs. Having recognized the officer's lady, he decides carefully how to get his nose through her. In this way Major Kovalyov's personality undergoes other people and customs of which his individuality is a part:

Next, the Major made his plans. Either he would sue the Staff-Officer's lady in legal form or he would pay her a surprise visit, and catch her in a trap. Then the foregoing reflections were cut short by a glimmer showing through the chink of the door — a sign that Ivan had just lit a candle in the hall: and presently Ivan himself appeared, carrying the candle in front of him, and throwing the room into such clear radiance that Kovalev had hastily to snatch up the handkerchief again, and once more cover the place where the nose had been but yesterday, lest the stupid fellow should be led to stand gaping at the monstrosity on his master's features (13).

Similarly, Steven Crowell, in "Existentialism" (2010), focuses on the importance of the collective entity in society, yet he fuses society with religion. Crowell claims that the individual relationship with other people implies the sense of angst. The human personality needs to engage with other social members, but in "Christianity" the whole matter is denied since man can become directly a part of others through religion. In this sense, there is no angst; Crowell comments:

The crowd is, roughly, public opinion in the widest sense—the ideas that a given age takes for granted; the ordinary and accepted way of doing things; the complacent attitude that comes from the conformity necessary for social life —and what condemns it to "untruth" ... an individual's own sense of who she is, relieving her of the burden of being herself: if everyone is a Christian there is no need for me to "become" one (6).

In "The Nose," when Major Kovalyov finds his nose, he contemplates his new state. He says that man without nose is like a devil. Man can feel the blessing of God if he is complete without any physical defects. In this sense, man can get along with people, get underpinned, and become an ideal social "citizen." In the quotation below, Major Kovalyov's relief appears when he talks about the futility of his nose's escape from his face:

My God, my God! why has this misfortune come upon me? Even loss of hands or feet would have been better, for a man without a nose is the devil knows what — a bird, but not

a bird, a citizen, but not a citizen, a thing just to be thrown out of window. It would have been better, too, to have had my nose cut off in action, or in a duel, or through my own act: whereas here is the nose gone with nothing to show for it — uselessly — for not a groat's profit! — No, though," he added after thought, "it's not likely that the nose is gone for good: it's not likely at all (13).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have tried to expose the meaning of angst especially from a social and cultural point of view in Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose." There is an inherent sense of social satire of Russian society which represents an array of religious, social, and cultural beliefs. From the Kierkegaard notion, angst can be lived by man in a constructive manner because it takes us from human beings to humanity awareness through the possibility of repentance which can bring us back to the absolute God.

As this brief account from Nikolai Gogol suggests, one enduring characteristic of the existential turn is a propensity for anxious human being. Even though this propensity was looked upon unfavorably in the at the time by those evaluating literary texts with a religious framework, noting the extensive use of sustained socio-religious overwhelming obsession with Gogol's satirical remarks which help us see him and high existential writers as more ethically engaged than their detractors sometimes admit. Far from being simply an example of the religious sensibility's social self-absorption, highly digressive narratives and the ethical work they can encourage, suggest that new conceptions of form carry with them fresh ways of engaging real-world problems. From an act so fundamental as Major Kovalyov's recognizing the humanity of his routine life to one so profound as Ivan Yakovlevich's registering the existence of whole subcultures of the politically disenfranchised human encounters, existence can help readers used to certain literary structures notice that works of fiction—like political and historical narratives—are ordered in ways that favor some people while subordinating others.

Gogol's Story is especially suggestive in this regard as its digressive flights of fancy ask readers to recalibrate the ways they assign significance and meaning in their own lives. Thus, it assigns itself a place among Russian socio-religious critiques.

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