

Alexey V. Malinov
DISCOURSE OF NATURE IN GREGORY SKOVORODA'S
TEACHING¹

Abstract

Gregory Savich Skovoroda (1724-1794) belongs both to the Russian and Ukrainian philosophy. His philosophical doctrine was only revived at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries, which was caused by the affinity of the philosophical searches of the Silver Age (beginning of the 1890s-1922) with the religious and philosophical doctrine by Gregory Skovoroda. In the history of philosophy, Gregory Skovoroda can be considered «boundary figure» marking transition from the Middle Ages to the culture of the Modernity. The article deals with the thinker's ethical doctrine, particularly, with two interpretations of nature: essential and voluntary. Moralizing was the main aim and content of the most works by Gregory Skovoroda. Practical philosophy by Gregory Skovoroda immediately sides with his understanding of nature. Volition, wish (desire), affinity, true man are its basic categories. The main aim of Skovoroda's moralizing is to show the way to the happy life. The essential topic of the Skovoroda's creative work are concentrated in his ethics: ontology, or doctrine of three worlds (microcosm, macrocosm, symbolic world – the Bible), exegetical method of cognition and symbolism, doctrine of nature and category of affinity, the principle of self-cognition and doctrine of the «true man», doctrine of heart and anthropology, eudemonism and problem of reality of the evil and the good in the world. According to the canons of the symbolism Skovoroda criticizes material, corporeal side of the world and gives preference to its spiritual meaning. Nevertheless, Skovoroda remains a religious thinker in his practical philosophy; he meditates per religious canons. For the 18th century Gregory Skovoroda's doctrine had been as archaic as it became relevant at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries.

¹ The reported study was funded by RFBR according to the research project n. 16-03-00442 at St. Petersburg State University.

1. Introduction

Gregory Skovoroda (1724-1794) entered the history of Russian philosophy on the turn of the 20th century, that is one hundred years after his death. First and foremost, we own reactualization of his legacy to Dmitry I. Bahaley² and Vladimir F. Ern.³ However, interest to Skovoroda was provoked not only by publication of his writings, but also by their interpretation of his legacy. In fact, Dmitry Bahaley and Vladimir Ern were the first to describe Gregory Skovoroda as a philosopher. Since that time, the interest in philosophical legacy of Skovoroda has not waned both in the émigré community (both Russian and Ukrainian) and in the Soviet Russia. The publications released in recent years can prove this statement. In particular, one can mention the publication of a valuable anthology «Hryhorij Skovoroda: an anthology of critical articles»;⁴ the editors of the volume refer the beginning of the tradition of Skovoroda studies to D.I. Chyzhevsky. On the words of O.V. Marchenko, a modern researcher, «it is totally impossible to affirm this idea»,⁵ as it neglects the rich research history formed long before D.I. Chyzhevsky had started his studies. Several fundamental monographies on Skovoroda has recently been published by L.A. Safronova,⁶ E. Erdmann,⁷ and O.V. Marchenko⁸. A range of aspects of Skovoroda's creative work were considered in a plenty of articles: the problem of personality,⁹ poetic-rhetorical analysis of language and texts,¹⁰ symbolism and exegetical method,¹¹ analysis of Scovoroda's doctrine as a variant of «Christian Plutarchism»¹² or Origenism,¹³ the study of masonic motifs in Skovoroda's texts,¹⁴ reception of G. Galilei's views by Skovoroda,¹⁵

² Skovoroda (1894); Bagalej (1923).

³ Jern (1912).

⁴ Marshall and Bird (1994).

⁵ Marchenko (2009: 36).

⁶ Sofronova (2002).

⁷ Von Erdmann-Pandžić (1990); Von Erdmann (2005).

⁸ Marchenko (2007).

⁹ Berg (2008).

¹⁰ Pylypiuk (1990); Bartolini (2014); Sukhanova and Tsylyyova (2015).

¹¹ Scherer (1998, 2004, 2008); Malinov (2013).

¹² Perri (2016).

¹³ Kamenskikh (2015).

¹⁴ Betko (2016).

¹⁵ Obolevitch (2015).

rethinking of the Skovoroda's views from the point of view of national originality of Russian philosophy.¹⁶

Perception of Skovoroda's teachings and his personality varied greatly in different periods. Thus, for his contemporaries he was first of all a teacher of life. During most of the 19th century his name was rather rarely mentioned. The publication of Skovoroda's works¹⁷ was taken quite skeptically, and only at the end of the 19th century he was for the first time called a philosopher. Skovoroda's literary works (poems and fables) hadn't got any significant influence on either Russian or Ukrainian literature, and only when he had been declared a philosopher, his writings gained some importance. I am writing "he had been declared" because Skovoroda did not consider himself to be a philosopher. But he became a part of ideologically approved pantheon of Soviet history of philosophy exactly as a philosopher. It is not necessary to enter into details describing different historical and historiographical periods (Silver age, emigration, the Soviet philosophy, Ukrainian nationalist historiography) when Skovoroda's doctrine often earned diametrically opposite assessments, though it is worth saying that his actual philosophical ideas were not particularly important for the majority of his critics. He didn't found any considerable "school"; nobody carried on or developed his ideas. However, Skovoroda's philosophical solitude did not prevent him from entering the ranks of founders of Ukrainian and, in some versions, even Russian philosophy.

Why did it happen? Why historians of philosophy do their best to overlook the fact that Skovoroda was first of all a moralist, not a philosopher? If we compare Skovoroda's teaching with philosophical ideas of his contemporaries, he won't benefit from that. In the 18th century he, who had inherited rhetoric erudition of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and was, in terms of his social status, a wandering beggar or a professional sponger – represented a clearly archaic phenomenon. Of course, the perception of his teaching was changed not by suddenly discovered philosophical depth and originality of his ideas but by the transformation of cultural "form", which turning a marginal into a symbolic figure of the philosophical mainstream.¹⁸ In the Ukraine Skovoroda has become an essential part of national mythology, the cornerstone of currently constructed national philosophical tradition. But here he once again ceases to be a philosopher: Skovoroda is a national symbol.

The possibility of such a radical reinterpretation and reactualization is inherent to the borderline status of Skovoroda as a historical figure. In Russian culture he signifies or even ends the process of transition from the Middle ages to the Modern era. In Ukrainian culture he is one of the sources of phil-

¹⁶ Mjøl (2014).

¹⁷ Skovoroda (1861).

¹⁸ Troitskiy, Begun, Voloshuk and Chertenko (2014: 89).

sophical creativity, which can already be separated from Russian heritage. For Russia his times were the era of Europeanization, the Enlightenment; it was the period when by the end of the century the criticism of Europeanism had emerged and national consciousness had been shaped. At the same time or even thanks to these processes by the end of the 18th century the expansion of Little Russia's culture had become weaker. With regard to the 17th and the 18th centuries, we can talk about intellectual colonization of Russia by immigrants from Little Russia. Skovoroda was a representative of this already weakening wave of cultural expansion, which maintained a common cultural space and shaped Russian literary language.

2. *The moral philosophy and ontology*

Moralistic doctrine of righteous or happy life comprises the contents of the majority of Skovoroda's writings. His ethics is closely associated with his ontology – the doctrine of three worlds – or even follows from it. In particular, it is connected with the concept of “nature” and its synonymous: essence, *natura*. In Skovoroda's interpretation of nature we can hear repercussions of several philosophical conceptions. First of all, it is the conception of nature as a revelation, which goes back to Maximus the Confessor (we can find a reception of this conception in Schelling's writings), though for Skovoroda Maximus' idea of man as a microcosm (as well as the idea of symbolic interpretation) seems to be more important; it is also the conception of two natures: the created and creative one, – which Skovoroda interpreted in the context of the Christian idea of creation (rather in accord with Averroes' view than those of Spinoza). The Aristotelian conception of nature as something arising from itself and the scholastic conception of nature as comprehensible by reason existence (a tradition shared by the whole range of thinkers from Boethius to Thomas Aquinas) were of less significance to him. However, sometimes Skovoroda uses dual interpretation of the term “nature”: nature as essence and nature as will. Nature as essence is important for ontology, while its “volitional” aspects – for ethics. What does this mean? As I have already noted, there are almost no essential structures in Skovoroda's writings. The term “nature” is not only piquant metaphysical seasoning for ontological dualism, but above all an additional descriptive language or rather extension of descriptive language, explaining the visible external world. Semantic flavour of this world is rather plain. Entering tangible world, we, paradoxically, find ourselves in the realm of shadows, the world of flat and gloomy figures, whose twilight existence can be traced back to the image of Plato's cave. The defective nature of this world is explained by the fact that it is created. At the same time, this very fact (that the world is created, produced, invented, and derived from the creator) guarantees the salvation of the world. The term “nature” emphasizes the created character of the world.

This word signifies all-and-all which is born in the whole machine of this world, and what is unborn, as the fire, and all what is being born in general is called the world.¹⁹

Nature is only a part of the world. On the one hand, it describes the world as the creation of God; on the other hand, it expresses the regenerative capacity of existence. The productive function of the nature, the ability of existence to reproduce the same forms – generic forms – that is to be equal to oneself, the same, identical, and, finally, to be itself (as the identification with a kind), allows us to understand nature as inherence to a kind. Creation means the transition from possible to actual, which results in the production of something new. This transition is temporary. Nature plays the very role of materializing and temporalizing power of creation. Nature is fertile. God disposes of the world as nature. Accidentally citing Nicholas of Cusa, Skovoroda expresses this idea as follows:

Moreover. This word *natura* describes not only every born and transitory creature, but also the mysterious economy of that everlasting force, which has its center or main central point everywhere, and circumference nowhere, as a ball, depicting this force on paintings: Who like God? It is called *natura*, because everything, which is happening outside or born by its unlimited mysterious interior as by the womb of universal mother, has its beginning in time.²⁰

Yet the essential character of nature can have its own independent ontological dimension. In this case, the inherent temporality of nature is understood not as a feature of a created being, which belittles it in the face of its creator, but as a characteristic of the process of things' (entities) formation or a qualitative form of their embodiment. The term "nature" corresponds with one of the meanings of the concept of "existence". If we understand nature in that way, it won't be reducible to some interpretative symbolic language evoking semantic illusionism: it characterizes entity as reality (*entitas* as *realitas*). And vice versa, nature is the existential reality. As the latter, it is intelligible, that is it can manifest itself in mind in a special way. Nature as an embodied, implemented existence (real existence) separates and arranges the actions of entities, assimilates them. The nature of things is present in mind as quidditas and therefore it is defined by its kind and generic difference. In conformity with that, the specific things, since they have their own intrinsic nature, can at the same time belong to kinds and species, that is be both individual and universal, multitude (as a really existing entities) and singularity (as an opportunity to express essence through a definition).

¹⁹ Skovoroda (1973, 1: 319).

²⁰ Ivi, 1: 319.

3. Nature: will and desire

Like almost every concept in Skovoroda's writings "nature" (in accordance with the canons of symbolism) has its downside. He uses almost the same words and expressions when speaks about nature as will and desire or, rather, inclination.

Nature is mother of inclination. Inclination is zeal and wish to move. According to proverb, inclination is stronger than necessity".²¹

Thus, interpreted in terms of wish and desire, "nature" becomes an ethical category. "Everything is pleasant with inclination. Where there is inclination there is nature".²² At the same time ethical issues gain semantic privileges of the discourse of nature. More precisely, the discourse of nature is a kind of discourse of transition from ontology to ethics. In the context of ethics the term "nature" allows for the use of the expression "human nature". Skovoroda does not use this exact expression. He introduces an euphemism, a category of *cognition* (however, this term has been previously used by A. D. Kantemir), once again emphasizing that the notion of nature lies in the basis of both categories: cognation (*с-роднос ть*), in-nate (*при-роднос ть*). In Russian language these words are almost synonymous: they have the same root and different (but close in their meanings) prefixes. "Cognition" is analogous to "nature" in the sphere of ethics, which should be understood as inherence to the kind. "And this means to be happy: to know oneself or one's nature, to take one's share and dwell with one's part of universal duty".²³ It is not a random occurrence that in this formula for happiness the justification of possibility of cognition is connected with the categories of nature and cognition. According to Skovoroda, cognition can only be symbolic. Possibility of the cognition of nature as possibility to imagine and to express it as quidditas in definition does not correspond to the Ukrainian philosopher's ideal of symbolic cognition. Cognitive force of "cognition" is defined not by its connection with the possibility of essential knowledge of nature, but by the opportunity to explain things tropologically ("with one's part", that is as a metonymy, or as a cognation or similarity, that is as a metaphor). In this case cognition becomes a semantic transfer or transition (as an analogue of not essential, but creative knowledge of the nature, location and value of nature-as-cognition in the structure of creation). It can be said that "cognition" means "human nature" and the opportunity to cognize it (symbolically).

The legitimacy of the expression "human nature" in the context of ethics is also related to the anthropological and ethical nuances of Skovoroda's ontology.

²¹ Ivi, 1: 418-419.

²² Ivi, 1: 431.

²³ Ivi, 1: 418.

On the one hand, a man as a microcosm is an independent ontological unity; on the other hand, the ethical attitude is inherent to the very structure of the worlds: first of all, of course, to the structure of microcosm, where it turns into attraction to the visible nature or, in Skovoroda's words, into the "desire for appearances"²⁴ which gives birth to passions (in Skovoroda's terminology, "evil spirit"). If the ontological aspect of "human nature" expresses the essential core of microcosm (namely, its essence, understanding of its own meaning as identical to itself), in ethics this expression refers to the fact that human nature is created or produced. Hence the awareness of the possibility to create, to shape, to change created human nature (*natura naturata*) in Skovoroda's ethics. It also generates a belief that moral preaching in an effective method, allowing to influence and to change human nature. Such are the foundations of the predominance of ethical and didactic themes in the works of Gregory Skovoroda. This is a consequence of the transfer of the category of "nature" from ontological to ethical discourse. In the field of ethics the category of "nature" or "human nature" has no unambiguous equivalent. It expresses itself through a set of terms: cognition, that is the reproduction of a generic form (single) and, at the same time, the formula of knowledge; inclination, that is volitional, mobile and rushing aspect of coming-into-being existence, existence as an act; ground, that is, the ability to conform to nature (which is also characteristic of cognition and inclination) – here it means basis, support, foundation.²⁵ In the latter case the substantial motives of "human nature" are obvious: it is understood as a subject. Occasionally nature-cognition appears as a lot (fate).

It has already been said that the possibility of volitional understanding of nature is inherent to the ontological structure of existence, where semantic polarization is not accompanied by sustainable and harmonious coexistence of natures. This indicates the connection between ontological and ethical issues in Skovoroda's writings. Through the discourse of nature ontological discourse becomes ethical. However, it is difficult to talk about the inverse influence. It is almost impossible to find an example of ethical evaluation of ontological status. Here we can easily make a mistake. It is true that Skovoroda bitterly reproaches the visible world, rejects it, and prefers his ontological antipode, "the subtlest second nature",²⁶ which, however, he describes rather vague; but his negation of material existence finds its practical expression: Skovoroda makes it a part of his life and grants it a status of a personal example. There is no any clear moral evaluation of the worlds in his writings. His critical assessment of the outside world is rather emotional than axiological. Ontological dualism is certainly not identified with ethical dualism.

²⁴ Ivi, 1: 121.

²⁵ Ivi, 1: 422.

²⁶ Ivi, 1: 254.

It may seem that the following passage eliminates aforementioned vagueness:

Every man is composed of two principles or natures opposing and fighting each other: one celestial, another low, that is to say one eternal and another decaying. Therefore, in every person there are two demons or angels, that is to say the messengers and ambassadors of their kings: a good angel and an evil angel, a keeper and a destroyer, one peaceful, another rebellious, one of them an angel of light, another – an angel of darkness... Examine yourself, my friends, look inside yourself. Hey, I tell you, you will see a secret struggle between two armies of thought, which becomes even more vehement when we have something important to do. [...] they are the source and the seed for every deed, even for the pettiest act.²⁷

Here Skovoroda definitely speaks about the struggle between two principles: good and evil, light and darkness. His dualism obtains gnostic hue. To understand the world as a microcosm means not only to ontologize a human being, but also to anthropologize existence. Anthropologism, which unites Skovoroda's ontology and ethics, is the general consequence of this process. A motive of struggle directly leads to the transition from ontology to ethics. In this case, the struggle is not so much a universal principle as a principle of moral differentiation underlying the principle of individuation, which makes sense only in ethical and anthropological perspective.

Thus, the discourse of nature leads us directly to the sphere of ethics, where we face the phenomenon of struggle, resulting in moral grow (or fail), moral improvement. "These two kingdoms are fighting in every single soul",²⁸ – Skovoroda writes, implying the opposite ethical principles. In its turn the struggle is an expression and a method of embodiment of will, acquiring the form of choice and implementation of one of these two ethical principles. In the sphere of ethics positively "coloured" will – the good will – is at the same time a principle of life. This interpretation of will is expressed in the category of cognation, which, I dare to remind, is an equivalent of volitional interpretation of "nature" transferred into the sphere of ethics. "To devoid soul of cognate action means to devoid it of its vitality. That is the most ferocious death".²⁹ The effects of cognation – joy and merriment – are emotional correlates of goodness, a phenomenal aspect of happiness: "And the native merriment of heart dwells in a cognate act. The more cognate it is, the more delightful it appears to be".³⁰ Cognation is not just an existence which conforms to nature: it is a peculiar embodiment of the law of human nature. In this connection Skovoroda introduces some elements of work

²⁷ Ivi, 1: 283-284.

²⁸ Ivi, 2: 65.

²⁹ Ivi, 1: 442.

³⁰ Ivi, 1: 433.

ethics. Understanding the life as an action, he believes that minding your own business, that is doing something intrinsic or cognate to your own nature, leads not only to success or merriment, but also to divine benevolence. Cognate life (when there is a place for both action and service in one's life) is the godly life.

The category of will owns its significance to the divine creative ability which is also understood as will-as-a-wish. This transcendental support leads to absolutization and deification of the principle of will.

The harmony of will is a soul and one single heart; and what is better than friendship between you and the highest? At that time, all will be done according to your will as well as the wisest will. And that means to be happy about everything.³¹

The harmony with God secures happiness, and God, generally speaking, is the guarantor and the basis of good and goodness.

Now we know, what is our true happiness. It lives in the inner heart of our world, and the world is in harmony with God. The more perfect is your harmony, the happier you are.³²

In the sphere of ethics and anthropology the peace of a human soul is the analogue for this harmony. In their turn, these considerations lead to the deification of the principle which regulates the activity of a soul and its knowledge, that is, self-knowledge.

Your happiness and your world, your paradise and your God is within you. He is within you; and being inside you, He meditates and teaches you, calling you upon for the things which are the most useful to you, that is to the things honest and decent. And you see to it that your God is always within you. [...] To live with nature and to be with God are the same; life and deed are the same.³³

Divine echo of self-reflection is obvious in the following quote: "And it is the knowledge of oneself which paths the way to a soul for the light of divine knowledge, bringing with it the peaceful way of happiness".³⁴ Thus, self-knowledge is the way to happiness and bliss. The opposite of the knowledge of one's own nature – disassociation – leads to dissatisfaction, boredom, sadness and anguish. The universality of the principle of the will, prevailing also in the sphere of self-knowledge, is emphasized by Ern:

³¹ Ivi, 1: 334-335.

³² Ivi, 1: 335.

³³ Ivi, 1: 423.

³⁴ Ivi, 1: 414.

In the process of self-cognition the truth about a man (and therefore about the whole life) is revealed, namely that intellect is not the only aspect of the essence of a human being; the essence of human being is also in its heart, in its will; and Skovoroda sticks to the most radical voluntarism. It is not existence for knowledge, but knowledge for existence. A goal of learning is not some abstract knowledge, but the most genuine existence.³⁵

4. *The doctrine of happiness*

Joy and merriment are the characteristic features of bliss, manifestations of happiness. And happiness is the goal of all human actions and deeds. “If you consider it, you’ll see that all the myriad diverse human undertakings have one common goal – the joy of heart”.³⁶ “Our supreme desire is to be happy”,³⁷ – Skovoroda repeats. He gives the most eloquent description of the world, where deeds and activities never bring happiness.

And I myself often wonder why we are overly curious, zealous, and keen about random and superfluous facts: we have measured the sea, the land, the air, and the sky, we have disturbed the womb the earth in search of metals; we have demarcated planets, we have found mountains, rivers, and cities in the moon, as well as innumerable outer worlds, we have built strange machines, we are filling up abysses, we are turning back and changing the streams of water, and every day brings new experiments and wild inventions. [...] It is pity that this notwithstanding it seems that something great is missing.³⁸

Happiness is not determined by “place, time, flesh, and blood”, “happiness is always granted everywhere as something necessary”.³⁹ “It is not somewhere, because it is everywhere”.⁴⁰ Happiness doesn’t have its own external characteristic features, and therefore it is concentrated in the soul: “Our happiness is the peace of our souls, but this peace is not a feature of something material”.⁴¹ Skovoroda describes the same phenomenon using the cumulative folk logic: “Happiness is in heart. Heart is in love, love is in the eternal law”.⁴² Easiness is another quality of happiness. Happiness is not a burden. “You need only one thing,

³⁵ Jern 1912: 217.

³⁶ Skovoroda (1973, 1: 313).

³⁷ Ivi, 1: 317.

³⁸ Ivi, 1: 326.

³⁹ Ivi, 1: 111.

⁴⁰ Ivi, 1: 325.

⁴¹ Ivi, 1: 355.

⁴² Ivi, 1: 111.

and this is the only good and easy thing, while everything else is labour and sorrow”,⁴³ – says Skovoroda, accidentally citing Epicurus. The main conclusion of his eudaemonic considerations is as follows: “To be happy is to know oneself, to find oneself”.⁴⁴ The search for happiness is crowned by self-knowledge.

Speaking of happiness and seeking it, Skovoroda cannot deny himself the pleasure to moralize and offer specific recipes of happiness. “Avoid rumors, embrace solitude, love poverty, kiss, chastity, make friends with patience, live with humility, be zealous for the Lord Almighty”.⁴⁵ This painstaking enumeration of steps on the way to the blessed life is typical for Skovoroda. Utilitarian application of ethical principles, their adaptation to everyday life turns ethical categories into maxims of conduct. And ethics in general becomes a guide to the achievement of bliss. Healing activities of Skovoroda remodel his ethical teaching and transform it into a manual of decent life. Happiness is replaced by well-being, which can be achieved in a way as simple as it is traditional:

First of all, be loyal and zealous for your emperor, obedient to a governor, polite to a priest, humble to your parents, grateful to your teachers and benefactors – this is the true path to your eternal and temporal well-being in the reinforcement of your family.⁴⁶

Lectures and moral sermons make Skovoroda’s favorite genre. The idea that a person has some nature-cognition defined by his or her created nature, makes the precondition for moral instruction, that is reformation, remodeling of human nature. The belief that these instructions will be successful and can reach everybody results in another idea, which is expressed by Skovoroda’s term “the true man”. This term means that people not only have the nature, which can be created and corrected: this nature is the same for all human beings. The true man is hidden in every single person. He can be revealed through the cognition of the duality of human nature: “If you know two, you know the true man, who is above humanity, who is always one and the same, and who dwells in every single person”.⁴⁷ The notion of “true man” is the result of the universalization of the formula of self-knowledge. Comprehended as a basis for opposing properties and qualities (carnal, visible and spiritual, invisible), the true man can be understood as a substance of human nature. Skovoroda doesn’t directly say whether the true man can be created in the process of reformation of human nature or it can only be found through self-cognition.

⁴³ Ivi, 1: 111.

⁴⁴ Ivi, 1: 329.

⁴⁵ Ivi, 1: 260.

⁴⁶ Ivi, 1: 119.

⁴⁷ Ivi, 1: 254.

The deification of self-knowledge allows Skovoroda argue that the true man can be revealed on the path of faith: “Only the true faith sees this wonderful man whose shadows we all are”.⁴⁸ If self-knowledge makes the true man universal and “available for everybody”, then the religious faith makes him absolute and divine (as it will do to everything entering its orbit). When it comes to the religious faith, reason and its method (that is, self-cognition) become superfluous and stray stage on the way of comprehension of existence through the communion with the Absolute. To reveal in oneself the true man with the help of faith means to go through the second birth. Skovoroda prefers to call such a person “a spiritual man”. “A spiritual man is free. He flies upwards, downwards, and for any distance without limits”.⁴⁹

Symbolic identification of the true man with heart speaks in favour of his essentialism. Heart is the symbol of human essence. Skovoroda tends to repeat that “a heart defines true nature of every person”.⁵⁰ Since for Skovoroda his activities are a kind of healing of souls by means of symbolically expressed moral lessons, his search for moral foundations of human soul takes the form of rather peculiar symbolic anatomy. That is how heart turns into symbolically understood organ of morality:

The true man is the heart of a person, and this heart, deep and known only to God, is nothing else than limitless abyss of our thoughts, that is a soul, a true essence, something essential (as they say), our grain and strength, which is the only source of [cognate] life.⁵¹

Heart, soul, grain, head are the substantivized designations of the same capacity, namely the capacity for moral action. Heart is localization of good will, that is the force that carries out any moral act. As a typical sage, here Skovoroda deals with a ready-made thought in its symbolic packaging. He knows in advance the answer to any question and willingly indicates trustworthy prospects of any practical action. And in its turn wisdom is the source of symbolic vagueness and ambiguity of the heart: “You envelope and contain everything, and nothing can contain you”.⁵² This versatility of the heart is extended to knowledge. “We see and perceive in reality, we notice and possess in heart”.⁵³ Heart is an antonym to appearance: face and body in general. Appearance, face, flesh, idol

⁴⁸ Ivi, 1: 305.

⁴⁹ Ivi, 2: 47.

⁵⁰ Ivi, 1: 124.

⁵¹ Ivi, 1: 142.

⁵² Ivi, 1: 136.

⁵³ Ivi, 1: 272.

is nothing – that is how Skovoroda juggles these related concepts.⁵⁴ Hence the way to heal the heart (that is the moral contents of human being) through humiliation of flesh. “First of all, heal the sorrows of heart and do not afraid of anything killing the body”.⁵⁵

In contrast to his contempt for flesh, Skovoroda is more tolerant of evil. The point is that, according to his opinion, evil is the predicate of judgment about some violation of order. “And as far as I noticed”, – Skovoroda wrote to V. Maksimovich, – “this mess for the most part depends on time, space, action and person”.⁵⁶ Evil is relative and it does not exist in the real world: “There is no evil anywhere, in anything, ever”.⁵⁷ The Creator is good, evil is manifested only when someone acts “against nature”. “Hence the most despicable thing can be a cause of human happiness, if it natural for a person”.⁵⁸ An evil deed can be a cause of happiness as easy as a good deed. Death receives absolution, along with evil. “On the contrary, not only labour is sweet, if it is in harmony with one’s nature, but death itself is pleasant”.⁵⁹ Besides, death is desirable for Skovoroda as it brings the destruction of the hated material world. However, death as the conclusion and end of life can be identified with life. In this sense, life and death are the same. Rejection of life is extended to death, which by virtue of that fact cannot make the cause of happiness. “Don’t regard as happiness anything which can be is refuted. Judge every deed according to its fruits and ends. I do not love life: it is sealed by death, it is death”.⁶⁰ This contradictory attitude to death is not only a consequence of the gnostic rejection of the world and life in general, but also the result of the ambiguity of any symbolism.

5. Conclusion

Skovoroda’s ethics combines the main themes of his work: the doctrine of three worlds (microcosm, macrocosm, symbolic world – the Bible), exegetical method of learning, the teaching about nature and the category of cognation, the principle of self-knowledge, the teaching about heart. The essential range of Skovoroda’s ideas should be referred to the Christian Platonism. There are rare mentions of the Plato in the Skovoroda’s texts. The reception of Platonism,

⁵⁴ Ivi, 1: 124.

⁵⁵ Ivi, 1: 363.

⁵⁶ Ivi, 2: 303.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁸ Ivi, 2: 304.

⁵⁹ Ivi, 1: 431.

⁶⁰ Ivi, 2: 245-246.

particularly, the Skovoroda's doctrine of "three natures" and of "two natures", was mediated with the works of Philo of Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Dionysius the Areopagite and Maximus the Confessor. The East Christian model of salvation through theosis is presented in Skovoroda's creative work with the notion of "interior person" as a reflection of the divine nature in man (man as the image of God), that is his affinity to God. Such analysis of the platonic ideas in Skovoroda's creative works has already been carried out in research literature.⁶¹ The synthesis of philosophy and literature as well as the elements of philosophical thinking and rhetoric methods typical of the Baroque culture are notable in Skovoroda's texts⁶². While criticizing the official church, Skovoroda remains a bearer of religious consciousness. This criticism brings him close to rationalist sectarianism and Masons. Masonic symbolism in Skovoroda's writings and the fact that at the beginning of the 20th century they were published for the time in Masonic periodicals only reinforce such proximity. Generally speaking, Skovoroda remains a representative of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy tradition of education, but in some respects he marks the transition to a new type of culture. However, the main trends of this culture – secularism, national spirit – were alien to him. In history of philosophy he is a representative of frontier: both in terms of the transition from one type of culture to another, and in the sense of a border as the beginning of a new process in history of philosophy.

Bibliography

BAGALEJ, D.I.

- 1923, *Ukrainskij stranstvujushhij filosof G.S. Skovoroda* [Ukrainian itinerant philosopher G.S. Skovoroda], Har'kov, Tipografija narodnogo komissariata prosveshhenija.

BARTOLINI, M.G.

- 2014, *Skovoroda's text ubuzhdesjsja, viděša slavu ego: A catechetical instruction on the liturgical feast of the transfiguration?* [Il testo skovorodiano *Ubuždešjsja, viděša slavu ego. Un trattato catechetico-liturgico sulla festa della Trasfigurazione?*], "Studi Slavistici", 11: 7-22.

BERG, A.V.

- 2008, *How to be a Narcissist: G.S. Skovoroda's Three Conceptions of Selfhood*, "Filosofskij vek. Almanah. Chelovek v filosofii Prosveshhenija" [Philosophical age. Almanac], 34: 11-18.

BETKO, I.

- 2016, *Hryhoriy Skovoroda - The Older Contemporary of Nicolay Karamzin* [Probe of comparative psychological-biographical analysis], "Slavia Orientalis", 65, 4: 675-696.

⁶¹ Marchenko and Ushkalov (1993); Cjapalo (1996).

⁶² Sofronova (2002: 38).

- CJAPALO, R.
- 1996, *Kljuchovi platonichni elementi u filofsfskij dumci Grigorija Skovorodi* [*Key Platonic elements in philosophical thought of Grigory Skovoroda*], “Filosofija. Istorija kul’turi. Osvita. Tretij mizhdunarodnij kongres Ukraïnistiv” [Philosophy. History of culture. Education The Third International Congress of Ukrainians], Harkiv, Oko: 69-70.
- ERDMANN-PANDŽIĆ VON, E.
- 1990, *Bemerkunsen zu Leben und Werk von H. S. Skovoroda*, “Zeitschrift fur Slawistik”, 35, 1-6: 645-653.
- ERDMANN VON, E.
- 2005, *Unähnliche Ähnlichkeit: die Onto-Poetik des ukrainischen Philosophen Hryhorij Skovoroda (1722-1794)*, Köln, Böhlau.
- JERN, V.
- 1912, *Grigorij Savvich Skovoroda. Zhizn’ i uchenie*, [*Gregory Skovoroda. The life and teachings*], Moskva, Put’.
- KAMENSKIKH, A.
- 2015, *Origen in Russian philosophy: From Gregory Skovoroda to Nikolai Berdyaev*, “Schole”, 9, 2: 446-459.
- MALINOV, A.V.
- 2013, *The Method of Symbolic Interpretation of Grigory Skovoroda*, “SCRINIUM. Journal of Patrology, Critical Hagiography and Ecclesiastical History”, 9: 285-308.
- MARCHENKO, O.V.
- 2007, *Grigorij Skovoroda i russkaja filofsfskaja mysl’ XIX-XX vekov. Issledovanija i materialy. Chast’ I*. [*Grigory Skovoroda and Russian philosophical thought of the XIX-XX centuries. Research and materials. Part I*], Moskva, bez izdatel’sstva.
 - 2009, *Tvorcestvo Grigorija Skovorody v razmyshlenijah Dmitrija Chizhevskogo: nekotorye zamechanija* [*Creativity of Grigory Skovoroda in the reflections of Dmitry Chizhevsky: some comments*], “Vestnik Pravoslavnogo Svjato-Tihonovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta” (Bulletin of St. Tikhon’s Orthodox State University), I. Bogoslovie, Filosofija, 3, 37: 35-43.
- MARCHENKO, O.V., USHKALOV, L.V.
- 1993, *Narisi z filofsfi Grigorija Skovorodi* [*Essays on Philosophy of Grigory Skovoroda*], Harkiv, Osnova.
- MARSHALL, R.H. JR., BIRD, T.E. (eds)
- 1994, *Hryhorij Skovoroda: an anthology of critical articles*, Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies.
- MJØR, K.J.
- 2014, *Philosophy, modernity and national identity: The quest for a Russian philosophy at the turn of the twentieth century*, “Slavonic and East European Review”, 92, 4: 622-652.
- OBOLEVITCH, T.
- 2015, *Galileo in the Russian Orthodox context: History, philosophy, theology, and science*, “Zygon”, 50, 4: 788-808.
- PERRI, G.
- 2016, *Content and meaning of the Prologue to Narcissus by Hryhorij Skovoroda* [*Contenuto e significato del prologo al narciso di Hryhorij Skovoroda*], “Rivista di Storia della Filosofia”, 71, 1: 25-46.

PYLYPIUK, N.

- 1990, *The Primary Door: at the threshold of Skovoroda's theology and poetics*, "Harvard Ukrainian Studies", 14, 3-4: 551-583.

SCHERER, S.P.

- 1998, *Structure, symbol and style in Hryhorii Skovoroda's "Potop Zmiin"*, "East European Quarterly", 32, 3: 409-428.
- 2004, *The evolution of hryhorij skovoroda's biblical thinking*, "East European Quarterly", 38, 3: 347-370.
- 2008, *Skovoroda by the numbers: Numbers and geometric figures in the philosophy of Hryhorij Skovoroda (1722-1794)*, "East European Quarterly", 42, 4: 435-450.

SKOVORODA, G.S.

- 1861, *Sochinenija v stihah i proze [The works in verse and prose]*, St. Petersburg, Tipografija shtaba otdel'nogo korpusa voennoj strazhi.
- 1894, *Sochinenija Grigorija Savvicha Skovorody, sobrannye i redaktirovannye prof. D.I. Bagaleem. Jubilejnoe izdanie (1794-1894)*, [Works of Gregory Skovoroda, collected and edited by prof. D.I. Bagalei. Anniversary edition (1794-1894)], Har'kov, Tipografija Gubernskogo Pravlenija.
- 1973, *Sochinenija*, [Writings], Moskva, Nauka, voll. 1-2.

SOFRONOVA, L.A.

- 2002, *Tri mira Grigorija Skovorody (Three worlds of Grigory Skovoroda)*, Moskva, Izdatel'stvo «Indrik».

SUKHANOVA, S.YU., TSYPILOVA, P.A.

- 2015, *Philosophical and poetic experience of the world as part of the Slavic artistic consciousness: Skovoroda and Dragomoshchenko*, "Rusin", 41, 3: 144-152.

TROITSKIY, S., BEGUN, B., VOLOSHUK, E., CHERTENKO, A.

- 2014, *Strategies of the study on the cultural exclusion zones*, "Modern Studies of Russian Society: A collective monograph", Helsinki, Unigrafia: 79-94.