

To the sources of self-fulfillment: Contemporary interpretations of the ideas of Hryhoriy Skovoroda

Oresta Losyk¹

Abstract

The article examines the features of the modern methodological-philosophical reception of the legacy of the most famous Ukrainian philosopher, Hryhoriy Skovoroda (1722–1794), and its timeless heuristic influence on cultural sociality. The introduction outlines the general state of the development of academic Skovorodian studies. For the first time, the specifics of three research approaches in understanding the central issues of Skovoroda’s teachings – the sources of human self-realization – are analyzed in comparative juxtaposition. In the first paragraph, it is emphasized that the cultural approach views Skovoroda’s ideas through the lens of the dominant Neoplatonic Ukrainian tradition of philosophizing, known as the “philosophy of the heart”. In the second paragraph, it is argued that the ethno-psychological approach significantly helps to systematize Skovoroda’s ideas by considering their connection with the national Ukrainian mentality and the Slavic “worldview”. As an example, the practical ethics of Skovoroda and Masaryk are compared. The third paragraph, using a semiotic approach, interprets the teachings on self-realization in light of Skovoroda’s proposed theses on the antinomy of human cognition, the dual nature of man, and the concept of vocation. It is argued that, in each of the approaches discussed, Skovoroda’s conscious integration of his “life philosophy” and personal self-fulfillment into Ukrainian reality is emphasized, aiming to revive the inherent values of freedom, dignity, and justice in collective national identity and culture.

Keywords: Skovoroda, Skovorodiana, “philosophy of the heart”, self-fulfillment, national mentality, vocation

Introduction

Even during Hryhoriy Skovoroda’s lifetime, his work began to create a cultural and spiritual phenomenon that steadily gained prominence both in theoretical understanding (Skovorodiana) and in practical popularization (Skovorodism). Since the 19th until early 21st centuries, interest in the ideas of this Ukrainian philosopher has only grown within national, pan-Slavic, and global humanities.²

In academic Skovorodian studies, primarily among Ukrainian researchers, there are currently no fundamentally irreconcilable contradictions in the understanding of the legacy of the “Ukrainian Socrates”. At the same time, thematic academic events (conferences, round tables, seminars) are regularly organized, and lively research is being conducted with a distinct interdisciplinary focus.³

The interest in this philosopher’s ideas within the broader philosophical community, not just among specialized Skovoroda scholars, remains strong and undiminished. However, this interest cannot be called intensive, except for notable commemorative occasions celebrating Skovoroda. As for the selection of topics, researchers increasingly opt to (re)interpret Skovoroda’s ideas through the lens of many modern trends in the non-classical paradigm, particularly linguistic philosophy, existentialism, psychoanalysis, personalism, and neo-Thomism. Here, attempts to read and interpret Skovoroda’s ideas through the philosophical

¹ Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (Ukraine); oresta.losyk@lnu.edu.ua; ORCID: 0000-0001-8245-3780

² Today, according to rough estimates, there are far more than 3,500 diverse biobibliographic entries dedicated to this thinker, as well as publications and reprints of the philosopher’s works, including translations into more than a dozen languages (Ushkalov, 2004, pp. 27–774; Neudachyna, Romanovska & Korobkina, 2022).

³ From the latest publications, see: Fedorak, N. (2022): *SkovoroDAR. Zhyttia, tvorchist', spadok* [SkovoroDAR. Life, works, legacy]. Kharkiv: Shkola; Lyutyi, T. (2022): *Skovoroda. Samovladannia* [Skovoroda. Self-mastery]. Kyiv: Tempora. For many Ukrainian systematic academic publications, Skovoroda-related topics have become inseparable or even central (Losyk, 2022; see also “Pereiaslav Skovorodian Studies: Philology, Philosophy, Pedagogy” (2011–2022, iss. 1–9).

concepts of thinkers such as Ernst Jean Cassirer, Karl Jaspers, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Carl Jung, Charles Taylor, Jean Baudrillard, and many others are highlighted (Skrynnyk, 2023).

Overall, the active progress of modern Skovorodian studies can be described as synergistic (especially after a long period of ideological censorship). However, within the philosophical niche, its trajectory presents certain risks and challenges. A greater focus on producing new interpretations is reflected in the use of increasingly fresh bibliographic sources, leading, in my opinion, to noticeable neglect and ignorance of already established Skovorodian scholarship (even if it dates back only a few decades). Retrospectively, philosophical Skovorodian studies are not entirely neglected, but their work on researching their historiographical formation and development is somewhat passive. Based on this, I formulate my *first working hypothesis*: contemporary philosophical Skovorodian studies, despite their methodological diversity, are capable of maintaining the continuity of the traditional model of Ukrainian reflection, which Skovoroda himself represented.

It is important to emphasize that the central issue of Skovoroda's teachings – the sources of authentic self-fulfillment – extends far beyond intellectual musings. After all, throughout his life, he not only theorized about them but comprehended them personally, and, by the example of his own words and actions, brought them closer to his native people. The profound societal resonance of the deliberate destruction of the Hryhoriy Skovoroda National Literary-Memorial Museum (in the village of Skovorodynivka, Kharkiv region) on the night of May 7, 2022, reflected not merely the outrage and sorrow over the loss of an architectural monument but demonstrated that this act of vandalism was perceived as an assault on the collective identity of the people, their sovereign rights, freedoms, and authentic “spirit”, the “desire to erase not only from Ukrainian land but also from Ukrainian self-consciousness the imperative “know yourself and be yourself”” (Skrynnyk, 2023, p. 108). My *second working hypothesis* is this: Skovoroda's practical ethics correspond to the existential needs of modern Ukrainians because they continue to reflect the basic characteristics of national mentality and worldview, especially individualism and love of freedom.

Considering the above-formulated working hypotheses, the main question I propose to examine is: what are the characteristics of contemporary interpretations of Skovoroda's ethics of self-fulfillment in terms of their correspondence to a) the Ukrainian tradition of philosophizing; and b) the worldview values and existential needs of Ukrainian society. The novelty of my contribution lies in the fact that I introduce anew (and for the first time in a comparative juxtaposition with each other) into Skovorodian discourse interpretations by Mirchuk, Pashuk, Skrynnyk, and Karas, which have been overlooked in current scholarship. It is important to emphasize that their authors are not merely researchers but also thinkers who represent the development of Ukrainian philosophical thought in different periods of its diachronic unfolding.

The bibliography selected to accomplish the task is purposefully limited to a few texts dedicated to the ethical dimensions of self-fulfillment and their sources in Skovoroda's thought. The studies I analyze, in line with the formulated working hypotheses, are undeservedly forgotten but contain rich and, in my opinion, underutilized semantic potential for the future development of Skovorodian studies. My task is to highlight and articulate the scientific-theoretical significance of these sources, as they propose genuinely innovative methodological approaches for Ukrainian philosophy (Mirchuk, Skrynnyk, Karas) or offer a deepened interpretation of little-studied areas of Skovoroda's scholarship, particularly the issue of freedom (Pashuk).

The “national face” of the Ukrainian philosophical tradition

“The phenomenon of Ukrainian national philosophy is historically linked with the name of Hryhoriy Skovoroda”, writes a contemporary researcher (Skrynnyk, 1996, p. 88). We are likely

not mistaken in assuming that most researchers of the ideas of this philosopher, whose 300th anniversary was recently celebrated, would agree with this thesis without any exaggeration. This was the belief of those who, shortly after his death, began to be interested in and study the phenomenon of his life and work, and this belief continues among the authors of the most recent studies.

Hryhoriy Skovoroda's worldview was shaped in an environment typical for him as a Ukrainian, an atmosphere of national mentality that remained close and dear to him throughout his life. Moreover, it helped him to determine the direction of his life, influenced the milestones of his biography, and left its mark on the formation of his philosophical stance. His philosophical "I" was deeply rooted in Ukrainian culture and inspired by it. Since philosophy is the most comprehensive and highest form of cultural life, the thinker Skovoroda absorbed, inherited, personified, and further developed the leading Ukrainian spiritual and cultural tradition known as the "philosophy of the heart". He did this so thoroughly and qualitatively that he himself became an unparalleled bearer, representative, and creator of the Ukrainian "philosophical national face", and even more so – the first original Ukrainian philosopher (Chyzhevskyi, 1931, pp. 13, 35).

The origins of this tradition are rooted in Neoplatonism, and in the national context, in the form of the "philosophy of the heart", it manifests as a way of comprehending reality through the lens of existential and life-meaningful questions, rather than abstract and speculative ones. Although the "philosophy of the heart" was known in other European countries during the medieval and modern periods, it gained special significance and widespread acceptance among Ukrainians, corresponding to the mental and psychological features of the national worldview, namely: religiosity, emotionality, so-called psychological flexibility, aestheticism, respect for individual freedom, closeness to nature, and the cult of the land (Mirchuk, 1942). The path of knowledge begins, first of all, with turning to oneself, one's own "I", namely – the inner spiritual foundation, which is the heart. Through the heart, a person connects with the transcendent (Divine). Hearing one's "heart's voice" means realizing one's belonging and identifying with the "spirit" of one's native people, thus affirming in one's existential identity and surrounding reality the priority "affinity with what comes from God – homeland, language, culture" (Skrynnyk, 1996, p. 95). Self-knowledge, and therefore, authenticity and truthfulness, is nationally oriented.

In the methodological perspective, for understanding the specifics of the "philosophy of the heart" (and more broadly – the Ukrainian tradition of philosophy, its historical development, main characteristics, and interconnection with national culture and worldview), a specific research approach was initiated with corresponding theoretical justification. This approach was highlighted and put into practice in numerous works by the historian of philosophy Dmytro Chyzhevskyi, who, among other things, tested it in almost fifty of his own Skovoroda studies.⁴ Over the decades, the strategy proposed by him for considering Ukrainian philosophy in the context of the nation's spiritual and cultural progress has not lost its relevance and has many supporters today. One of them, Mykhailo Skrynnyk, adds his arguments in favor of further use and improvement of the approach initiated by Chyzhevskyi, defining it as cultural and providing a persuasive confirming example in the form of Hryhoriy Skovoroda's philosophy (Skrynnyk, 1996).

To defend the advantages of the chosen methodology, Skrynnyk compares it with an alternative, namely – the so-called realistic approach. The criteria of the latter involve considering national philosophy exclusively as a clearly structured system of scientific knowledge, the belonging to which is verified through the prism of intellectual succession and does not allow for the value-based interpretation of reality. The philosophical tradition in the

⁴ See, in particular, the most fundamental of these, *Filosofia H. S. Skovorody* [*The philosophy of H. S. Skovoroda*] (1934; latest reprint 2004).

realistic approach is equated exclusively with established categorical-conceptual apparatus and verified approaches to comprehending being, human, etc.

In this approach, the organic interconnection of national worldview and national philosophy is perceived as secondary and generally insignificant, as national identity is reduced to the spatio-temporal parameters in which the people live. Without denying the importance of these parameters for revealing the characteristic traits of the community in this or that historical period, Skrynnyk still does not consider them significant “regarding the substantial core of the nation” (Skrynnyk, 1996, p. 89). Overall, the imposition of the requirements and criteria of the realistic approach on the Neoplatonic tradition of Ukrainian philosophy examines and compares the teachings of several thinkers to primarily identify differences and distinctions among them. Moreover, since few of them created their own theoretical systems, there is a great risk of questioning not just continuity but the very existence and “national status” of the Ukrainian intellectual-philosophical tradition (Skrynnyk, 1996, pp. 89, 95).

In contrast, the cultural approach emphasizes the “reflexive function of philosophy concerning the values of culture”, as it is itself considered a system of meanings and significances of human and world existence, united by the common “spiritual and cultural experience of the nation”. Therefore, the Ukrainian tradition of philosophizing, from its very beginnings (that is, from the times of Kyivan Rus), has been characterized by a timeless ethicization and a prioritization of moral issues (Horskyi, 1997, pp. 21–23). Just as Chyzhevskiy once did, Skrynnyk defends Skovoroda’s legacy as “belong[ing] to a tradition that chose symbols, not discursive thinking, sensory experience, and experiment, as a means of attaining truth” (Skrynnyk, 1996, p. 91). According to the “philosophy of the heart”, the connection between the immanent and the transcendent in his teachings manifests itself “as an ethical and ethical-religious interpretation of the meanings of existence” that does not require a logically structured system as in the realistic approach (Skrynnyk, 1996, p. 91).

Examining Hryhoriy Skovoroda’s ideas in the context of belonging to Ukrainian culture helps to uncover new or still underexplored (despite the impressive thematic bibliography) meanings of the philosopher’s reflections, such as the issue of freedom. This was noted by one of the famous representatives of contemporary senior researchers, Andriy Pashuk, arguing in his study that it is “genetically present in the Ukrainian sage’s philosophical concept, permeates it, and flows from it” (Pashuk, 1994, p. 406).

Through his life and activity, Skovoroda embodied the fundamental necessity and naturalness of freedom’s presence in human life. From the beginning, he fully realized its irreplaceable value because he was born and raised as an individual, formed himself as a personality in an environment of his native community that had fought for independence for centuries and never renounced the desire for freedom. As we know, he won and established his personal freedom at the highest level of maturity possible, zealously guarding it while simultaneously directing its individual dimension towards interaction with the societal. Thus, the freedom-loving collective mentality of the nation manifested in the work of the Skovoroda “not only in the demand for the liberation of the individual from everything that shackles their spiritual and social essence, but through the freedom of the individual and the liberation of the entire people, for the path to the freedom of the people lies through the freedom of the individual” (Pashuk, 1994, p. 406).

Freedom is not inherent in every person, but primarily in the one whom Skovoroda calls the “spiritual man”. One can become such a person through proper self-realization (Ukrainian: “srodnist’”, affinity). The choice of “srodnist’” is already a manifestation of personal freedom and always remains with the individual. Nevertheless, “the wisdom of this freedom lies in choosing good, truth, and not evil, deceit, and so on” (Pashuk, 1994, p. 411). Therefore, the choice is significantly complemented by moral-ethical elements, which guide it in the right direction and prevent it from being random, based on arbitrary desires.

Moral-ethical principles are embedded in the so-called “invisible” (spiritual, Divine) nature of humans and the world, which is comprehended through thought, reflection, and knowledge. The deeper a person’s awareness, the “more successful their choice will be, and thus, the more wisely and justly they will act in the external world” (Pashuk, 1994, p. 414). Knowledge, in turn, contributes to self-knowledge (“through reflection, a person as a subject recognizes their affinity as an object”) (Pashuk, 1994, p. 412), helps avoid inappropriate choices, and even if such a choice is made, it provides the opportunity to recognize mistakes, understand the responsibilities for one’s actions, and so on. Thus, Skovoroda’s thesis “Know God within yourself” (or also “Know your God”) indicates that the thinker does not absolutize the incomprehensibility of higher powers, nor do they treat the person as a blind executor of their will. Instead, they emphasize the need to realize one’s potential for freedom as fully as possible – creatively, talentfully, worthily, and capably. A multitude of free “spiritual people” creates, accordingly, a free society.

If, however, by neglecting the “invisible” and becoming captivated by the “visible” nature, a person chooses “nesrodnist” (non-affinity), then personal harmony cannot even be discussed. They not only fail to become a happy “spiritual person”, but also ruin their destiny. Since, in Skovoroda’s view, the individual-personal is in harmony with the collective-social, in the process of self-fulfillment, the counterpart of personal tragedy becomes the collective defeat of the nation: the deformation of the human personality occurs, and through it, “the destruction of social life, in which, on the basis of non-affinity, disharmony of relationships prevails, everything is shifted, distorted, entangled” (Pashuk, 1994, p. 420). Freedom, choice, humanism, moral-ethical virtues disappear, and despotism, violence, and enslavement take their place.

The socio-historical and political circumstances of complete colonization, which Ukraine experienced during Skovoroda’s time, did not allow him to freely proclaim his philosophical teachings in the official academic world, which was subject to strict censorship. Had he limited himself to the theoretical declaration of his calls to reject the “visible” (false, non-Ukrainian) reality, it would have had “rather a comic significance” (Karas & Zakhara, 1996, p. 7) and could have sooner or later developed into political opposition to the imperial regime. However, the thinker found another, in his own way, radical, means of protest, forever changing his way of life. “Skovoroda’s departure into wandering became the best way to complete his philosophical rejection of the social world” while remaining true to himself, that is, to his native people, continuing to be present in Ukrainian reality “in the image of a moral bell tower” (Karas & Zakhara, 1996, pp. 7–8).

The cultural approach in the study of Skovoroda, used by Skrynnyk and Pashuk, argues for the clear practical-ethical focus of the thinker’s philosophy. However, it is insufficient to say that it merely reflects features of our national worldview. Skovoroda “extracts” it from potential negative and destructive directions in which collective and individual self-identification might go. Furthermore, through the tolerant and benevolent realization of his own educational mission to “know yourself”, he invites constructive self-fulfillment, without denying or renouncing one’s own identity and attributes of national belonging (language, faith, ancestors, territory) and their accompanying values (Gluchman, 2023a, pp. 1273–1274). Therefore, his philosophy, in the cultural interpretation, is undeniably heuristic. The described approach serves as a conceptual basis for other methodological directions in Skovoroda studies, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Practical ethics of Skovoroda from the perspective of ethnopsychology

As noted in the introduction, that authors of recent texts – at least in the philosophical domain – often overlook important thematic works from the relatively recent past. Yet, the substantial completeness and innovation of the reflections of predecessors once laid the theoretical and methodological foundation for subsequent Skovoroda studies, particularly in the contemporary

context.

Therefore, among the wide palette of diverse publications, it is worth examining more closely two small but significant studies by the philosopher Ivan Mirchuk (Mirchuk, 1926; 1930). These studies are significant, firstly, due to the influence of Skovoroda's figure on the formation of Mirchuk as both a philosopher and a researcher, whose works have constituted a significant layer of national philosophical and humanitarian knowledge in modern times. Secondly, they are significant due to the effectiveness of Mirchuk's inspiration by Skovoroda's teachings, resulting in the creation of his author's concept of Slavic philosophy and methodology for its study. Thirdly, they are significant in terms of the high level of implementation and establishment of Skovoroda's legacy in the academic and cultural environments outside of Ukraine.

Mirchuk began his academic journey in the field of philosophy with an in-depth focus on Ukrainian source material, which remained a priority throughout his intellectual biography. Over the subsequent decades, the researcher deepened his study of Ukrainian (as well as Slavic) philosophical thought, making pioneering contributions and achievements in the ethnopsychological direction.

It is important to emphasize that it was precisely the philosophical creativity and personality of Hryhoriy Skovoroda that became the first and thereafter inseparable motivation for Mirchuk to substantiate the interconnection between philosophical reflection and national culture with autochthonous mentality, character, and worldview on Ukrainian soil. In fact, he became the first Ukrainian scholar in the 20th century to innovatively formulate, develop, and justify the methodology of the aforementioned issues.⁵ His full argumentation can be found in the work *Svitohliad ukrains'koho narodu. Sproba kharakterystyky* (1942), where the author "refers exclusively to his philosophical studies" (Yaniv, 1974, p. 152, note 8), prepared and published in previous years in scientific collections, periodicals, and monographs.⁶

Drawing on the analysis of Skovoroda's teachings, Mirchuk formulated two methodological approaches to the study of the phenomenon of national philosophy and its connection to the worldview of a particular community. These approaches, presented by the author at European philosophical conferences and congresses, for example, in Warsaw (1927) and Oxford (1930), did not go unnoticed, sparking lively discussions and debates.⁷ The essence of the approaches is as follows:

1) In the first approach, based on the convergence of ideological issues and the direction of philosophical tendencies among Slavic peoples (which are affirmed through the study and comparison of ideas of their prominent thinkers, regardless of the time in which they lived), the existence of a common cultural and spiritual tradition among them is allowed;

2) In the second approach, based on the analysis of literary works by prominent writers of a particular community, the correspondence of their worldview to the characteristics of the collective mentality of their native people is traced, followed by a comparison of the national characters of those same neighbouring Slavic peoples.⁸

Among all of Mirchuk's publications, of particular interest is the one dedicated exclusively to Skovoroda. The study *H. S. Skovoroda (Zamitky do istorii ukrains'koi kul'tury)* entered the

⁵ Before the works of Mirchuk on the topic of Ukrainian ethnopsychology appeared, there was perhaps only the work *Dvi rus'ki narodnosti* [Two Ruthenian Nationalities], prepared by Mykola Kostomarov as early as 1861.

⁶ See, for example, his review of: Tvrđý, J. (1929): *Filozofie u Slovanů* [Philosophy among the Slavs] In: *Slované: kulturní obraz slovanského světa* [The Slavs: A cultural picture of the Slavic world]. Part III. Prague: Vešmír), published in 1931 in "Jahrbücher für Kultur und Geschichte der Slaven" (7(2), pp. 206–209).

⁷ Compare: O słowiańskiej filozofii (Próba charakterystyki). In: *Przegląd filozoficzny*, 1927, 30(2–3), p. 21; VII Mizhnarodnyj filosofichnyj konhres v Oksfordi (1–5.IX.1930). In: *Bohosloviia*, 1931, 9(3), pp. 262–271.

⁸ In this approach, Hryhoriy Skovoroda appears as a writer. See: Mirchuk, I. (1929): Tolstoj und Skovoroda, zwei nationale Typen. In: *Abhandlungen des Ukrainischen Wissenschaftlichen Institutes in Berlin*. Vol. II. Berlin: UWI, pp. 24–51.

public philosophical space in 1921, five years before it was published (Mirchuk, 1926). Mirchuk delivered it as his inaugural lecture when he began teaching at the Ukrainian Free University.⁹

Although this study was written a hundred years ago, it was the first to be argued by a Ukrainian philosopher about the connection between Ukrainian thought and the cultural environment and national worldview: Mirchuk “has the special merit of considering individual cultural manifestations in their close structural interdependence from a philosophical perspective, simultaneously linking philosophy and national culture with the folk psyche – the character of a particular people, or (as he himself most often describes it) with its worldview” (Yaniv, 1974, p. 149). The text in question is considered to be a prolegomenon to the cultural studies approach (described in the previous paragraph) regarding the interpretation of the specificity of Ukrainian “love of wisdom” as an intrinsic and at the same time inseparable part of Western philosophical thought.

Mirchuk treated Skovoroda as the first Ukrainian philosopher, so original that it is futile to search for adequate counterparts in the history of the past or present. However, he agreed to call him the “Ukrainian Socrates”, while clearly emphasizing that although – compared to the fundamental contribution of the Greek thinker in directing Western thought towards anthropological and ethical channels – Skovoroda “does not reach that magnitude”, he is unsurpassed in his syncretism, in which “as if in a focus, not only all earlier and contemporary philosophical trends intersect but also certain thoughts for the future are outlined” (Mirchuk, 1926, p. 25). Like his ancient predecessor, Skovoroda was indifferent to material goods, exerted a great influence on his surroundings through his behavior as a “living example” of the consistency between his words and actions, prioritized moral issues in his reflections, but above all, in both, there is no clear conceptual-categorical thought (the presence of which would greatly contribute to the convergence of evaluations of their ideological heritage), and most importantly – “they are philosophers without a system” (Mirchuk, 1926, p. 22). The assertion of the lack of systematization in Skovoroda’s work became one of the key points in Mirchuk’s analysis, which he did not doubt in all his subsequent studies. Moreover, he did not consider it a disadvantage that impoverishes the significance of this Ukrainian thinker, but rather an advantage that helped Skovoroda remain true to himself and his ideas, and in a supra-personal sense, reflected the authentic specificity, inherent Ukrainian national worldview, and the Slavic ethos in general.

The researcher considers it futile, unnecessary, and impossible to seek the meaning of Skovoroda’s ideas as a philosopher “in the full sense of the word”, as his methods of scientific work do not offer anything innovative, his reflections have “an as yet unrecorded form”, moreover – the legacy is “not rich in quantity and unoriginal in form” of the works left behind, which, incidentally, “arose quite by chance”, repeat the same assertions, even (sic) – “poor in content” (Mirchuk, 1926, pp. 23, 25, 30).

The depth of Hryhoriy Skovoroda’s teachings, his significant role and importance, are not based on logical proof, Mirchuk believes, though, in terms of influence, they are more important than some multi-volume works by European thinkers. Because, first and foremost, his philosophy – “is himself” (Mirchuk, 1926, p. 25), and the written legacy of the thinker is merely “an explanation, a theoretical interpretation of his life” (Mirchuk, 1926, p. 24). Therefore, “Skovoroda touches on all abstract ideas only insofar as they relate to the main goal of his

⁹ The Ukrainian Free University is the first higher educational institution for Ukrainian émigrés abroad. Founded on the initiative of Ukrainian intellectual circles in Vienna (1921), it operated in Prague from 1921 to 1945 and later, and to this day, in Munich. Throughout the so-called Prague period, it received legal and material support from the Czechoslovak government and personally from President Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, as well as from the scientific and cultural community of the Republic.

philosophy, to his ethical views. The strength of his creativity lies not in theory, but in practice, and therefore practical philosophy must be placed first” (Mirchuk, 1926, p. 29).

One of Ivan Mirchuk’s colleagues, the scholar Volodymyr Yaniv, who also worked in the field of ethnopsychology, notes that in this first study, the author does not yet directly link Skovoroda’s philosophical worldview with the national “worldview”. However, it is still possible to distinguish a number of characteristics in it that are distinctly connected with the Ukrainian mentality (Yaniv, 1974, p. 157). Agreeing with this statement, are listed, according to Yaniv, these features: the aforementioned *lack of systematization* and «*life philosophy*» (Yaniv writes «*Lebensphilosophie*»), also *eudaimonism* (the main goal and ultimate purpose of human life, personally for Skovoroda, embodied in “living as a philosopher”), the prerequisite of which is *the ethical orientation of a person*, related to it *religiosity*, as well as *ecumenism* (for the deeply religious Skovoroda, true faith went beyond confessional belonging and recognition, was “universal in the original sense”, including pagans; and such views in his time – by the way, two centuries before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council – were perceived as bordering on heresy), then – *anthropologism*¹⁰ permeated with a pantheistic spirit (reflected in national mentality as individualism), “*internalization*” (cognitive introversion, focusing on one’s own “I” is identified with the realization of understanding true happiness), multidimensional *idealism* of both theoretical and practical character, and, finally, *emotionality* (starting from the need to feel wonder at the grandeur of life – but not the ordinary (visible, material), but the spiritual (value), which is constantly created by thought, word, deed, imagination, and acquires wholeness in the “philosophy of the heart”).

The outline of the ethnopsychological interpretation of Skovoroda’s teachings on self-fulfillment proposed in this paragraph, of course, does not exhaust the topic raised. Nevertheless, even in such a brief overview, it is still necessary to mention one “unusual coincidence” and “exceptional parallelism” noted by Mirchuk in his author’s approach to the study of the cultural and worldview prerequisites for the formation of national philosophies. This refers to the comparison of the life and ideas of Hryhoriy Skovoroda and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

The report *Filosofichni osnovy svitohliadu Masaryka*, delivered on the occasion of honoring the 75th birthday of the president of the newly restored independent state¹¹, was written during the period of Mirchuk’s in-depth development of the methodology of Slavic philosophical reflection and, accordingly, the search for related sources. Comparing its conceptual content with the above-analyzed study by Mirchuk on Skovoroda, we can observe a number of analogies. It is likely that the author considered the intellectual biography and achievements of Masaryk under the influence and in the prism of Skovoroda’s theory and practice of self-fulfillment.

Thus, each of the thinkers was a product-“child” of their time, reflecting and absorbing the “spirit of the era”, while simultaneously surpassing it, opposing and resisting dominant tendencies. From this perspective, both reformers were similarly perceived by their contemporaries: both were highly popular and held undisputed authority, as well as faced sharp criticism and rejection. They successfully realized their strategies of self-realization and also spread them on a large and effective scale. They intertwined their destinies with the history of their native communities, actively integrating them with their beliefs and activities, leaving

¹⁰ According to Mirchuk, this is of a “threefold nature”: since a person is a microcosm and identical with God (ontological component), they can know the Universe (God) only through themselves (epistemological component) in order to live a true – joyful, peaceful, harmonious – in short, happy life (ethical component) (Mirchuk, 1926, p. 26).

¹¹ Mirchuk’s speech was central to the program of the ceremonial Academy organized by the Ukrainian Free University in Prague on March 7, 1925, particularly because it was prepared and delivered by a philosopher in honor of another philosopher. The text was published a little later in the second volume of the collection dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Masaryk’s birth.

behind a powerful ideological and spiritual legacy (Gluchman, 2023b). Just as Skovoroda became the creator of national philosophy for the Ukrainian people, so did Masaryk for the Czech people, and they entered history as their most prominent and irreplaceable representatives. In his report, Mirchuk directly refers to the shared characteristic of both figures – the lack of systematization in their philosophical creativity.¹² This becomes for him a convincing argument to consider the Czech leader – like Skovoroda – “a thoroughly Slavic thinker” (Mirchuk, 1930, p. 9).

What is particularly valuable is that in both of Mirchuk’s studies, the observed similarity of the ideological and worldview beliefs of both philosophers is indirectly emphasized, despite the fact that they were separated by a century and a half and surrounded by completely different historical, political, and social conditions. Due to the unique talent inherent in both the Ukrainian and the Czech, they formulated “life philosophies” in which: a) the person is treated as an undeniable value; b) feelings (the will of the heart) were given priority over intellectual (rational knowledge); c) the priority of ethical direction in self-knowledge efforts was emphasized; d) self-reflection was accompanied by practical implementation (consistency of principles and deeds); e) an eudaimonic concept of harmonious life was proposed. Practical philosophy with a strong moral-ethical foundation was, in Skovoroda, “the same can be said *mutatis mutandis* about Masaryk. His philosophy – is his life, it is himself” (Mirchuk, 1930, p. 10). There are a number of other resonant points, but this already deserves a separate, more detailed and broader study.¹³

As we can see, “Skovoroda’s inspiration turned out to be far stronger than Mirchuk himself could have anticipated at the time of writing his introductory study” on the Ukrainian thinker (Yaniv, 1974, p. 162) and – as the interpretation of Masaryk’s ideas shows – convinced him to continue his ethnopsychological research. I believe that Mirchuk’s approach is by no means outdated. In Skovoroda studies, ethnopsychological arguments “ground” the originality of the philosopher’s thinking in the life reality familiar to him. They further confirm the absolute resonance of his philosophical teachings on self-fulfillment with the “life” values he personally practiced. Combined with the cultural methodology, they legitimize Ukrainian philosophical reflection in its historically inherent ethical forms (far beyond the institutional format, though that too) and extend it to a much broader sphere than the academic one – the national (or also Slavic) philosophical culture.

Self-fulfillment in a semiotic projection

The ideologically multifaceted legacy of Skovoroda encourages the expansion of approaches to its study. New interpretations serve as a visible confirmation of the thesis regarding the complexity, and even the “impossibility of approaching it with the usual measure of criticism [...] using conventional critical method” (Mirchuk, 1926, pp. 23–24).¹⁴

¹² The researcher explains: the subject matter of Masaryk’s works is “grounded” in real life, “it does not encompass issues of a general nature, it does not pose cosmological and metaphysical constructs, it is not confined or fixed in certain established logical forms – yet it is so great in its influence on contemporary society, significant in its results. Its weight and importance lie primarily in the person of its author and, further, in its direct relation to actual concrete life and its needs” (Mirchuk, 1930, p. 8).

¹³ See also on this topic: Hryniv, O. (1996): *Filosofia H. Skovorody na tli slov'ians'koi dukhovnosti u doslidzhenniakh I. Mirchuka* [The Philosophy of H. Skovoroda against the Background of Slavic Spirituality in the Studies of I. Mirchuk]. In: A. Karas (ed.): *Spadschyna Hryhoriia Skovorody i suchasnist': Materialy chytan' do 200-richchia z dnia smerti H. Skovorody (21-22 hrudnia 1994 r.)* [The Legacy of Hryhoriia Skovoroda and the Present. Materials from the Readings on the 200th Anniversary of H. Skovoroda's Death (December 21-22, 1994)]. Lviv: Svit, pp. 71–76.

¹⁴ Mirchuk, in his time, saw great potential in analyzing the teachings and life of Skovoroda in light of the then-emerging field of psychoanalysis.

Guided by this perspective, among more recent studies, attention should be drawn to Anatoliy Karas' work, written in the vein of semiotic analysis (Karas, 1996). The researcher undertakes to explore, in a specialized field close to him, the well-established approach in Ukrainian philosophical thought concerning the direction initiated by Skovoroda, the "philosophy of the heart". More narrowly, to interpret "from an axiological and cultural perspective" the famous saying of the thinker, engraved according to his will on the tombstone at his burial site: "The world tried to catch me, but it failed". The contemporary semiotician does this systematically in several interrelated thematic blocks, which can be conventionally named: a) the peculiarities of human cognition; b) the inner nature of a person; c) the concept of vocation. Let us examine their content in more detail:

a) The activity of consciousness indicates that human thinking works: through the acquisition of knowledge, i.e., cognition, awareness, occurs. The need to know the world is inseparable from the need to know oneself: they, Skovoroda is convinced, coincide, and even more – are interdependent: without self-knowledge, it is impossible to know anything else. The intellectual processes of cognition and self-knowledge reveal the inherent contradiction of what they are directed at, namely: the dual nature of the world (reality) and the duality of human nature. This opposition manifests itself in pairs such as external/internal, spatial/non-spatial, temporal/eternal, earthly/spiritual, etc. It forms the fundamental principle of all of Skovoroda's philosophy, where he extensively uses the method of antithesis throughout his works.

Thus, the being of both the world and a person appears as a reality in which two components – the visible and the invisible – simultaneously exist. The thinker pays particular attention to explaining the vast potential of the invisible nature of the human world, through which one can adequately know oneself and realize oneself according to one's purpose in the world. All processes of (self-)cognition culminate in the heart. For Skovoroda, the heart is the seat of thought, but also of faith – a process contrary, so to speak, to rational comprehension. Their coexistence and interaction, according to the antithetical approach, are unconditionally necessary for holistic self-recognition. Thought is "the substance that connects the visible and invisible worlds and is simultaneously the force of differentiation and synthesis", explains Karas (Karas, 1996, p. 38). However, as "the condition for recognizing the truth of the world", it is possible not in a "pure" (direct) form, but only "through softening by sensitivity and life" (Karas, 1996, p. 38), which is precisely ensured by faith ("the voice of faith"). Again, we observe a doubling: active self-awareness through thought reflects the need to supplement the acquired "visible" knowledge with "invisible" faith, which, in turn, becomes an irreplaceable "force of recognition" of the truth of oneself and the world. Without faith, thought, however skillful it may be, remains unclear, even false, and will never lead to authentic self-knowledge or self-realization. Thus, the heart becomes the place where opposites interact, and by revealing and nurturing them, a person grows spiritually and, in the process of knowing oneself and the world, walks the true, correct path.

The semiotic "highlight" of Karas' interpretation lies in distinguishing between the two key words that describe the process of human cognition and understanding of the world and one's essence: "to perceive" (Ukrainian: "vidaty") and "to know" (Ukrainian: "znaty"). For him, these are independent, not synonymous, concepts. The scholar believes that Skovoroda interpreted them in the same way. *Perception* accompanies a person and all of humanity at the earliest stages of their development, manifesting itself accordingly in the childlike and mythological worldview. It is characterized by spontaneous, intense, even passionate curiosity, which, as is known, does not assume logical proof or any subsequent worldview reflection. Thus, "to perceive" is an archaic "blind knowledge and frenzied understanding" – it remains for a person the primary "norm of awareness of the power of the world" (Karas, 1996, p. 39). *Knowledge* arises as a result of self-knowledge, including the awareness of one's desires and the state of perception as such. It becomes "the norm of 'I' awareness", strengthening its personalization

in relation to the world (in other words, reducing the “insignificance” of a person’s position in the cosmic cosmology). In the end, knowledge is impossible without prior perception, and thus “the reflection of the “I” (knowledge, self-awareness) and the “not-I” (the world of perception) is a combination of the reality of a person and the world, is an inherently dual reality of being” (Karas, 1996, p. 41). “To know”, therefore, means the interaction of the “I” with the “visible nature” and broad (self-)reflection, including through symbols, in relation to the “invisible nature”. Through not so much self-knowledge based on knowledge, but rather, especially, through the aforementioned symbolic context, a person begins to grasp their inner calling to move toward their true purpose. Thus, knowledge interacts again with perception (Karas writes that it even transforms into it), complementing and elevating the initial spontaneous perception of connection with the world to a higher form of awareness and union with its transcendence. In Skovoroda’s interpretation, the described symbiosis reflects a religious understanding of the world and is a prerequisite for the emergence of philosophical reflection «as insight into the eternity of one’s soul and its calling in the World” (Karas, 1996, p. 41).

b) Among the examples of Karas’ semiotic interpretation of the dual path of self-knowledge that Skovoroda wrote about, it should highlight one that is, in my opinion, quite original and promising for further interdisciplinary studies. It concerns the symbolic-meaningful content of the concepts “conscience” (Ukrainian: “sovist”) and “consciousness” (moral integrity) (Ukrainian: “sumlinnia”).

The states, actions, and forms of understanding associated with them, on the one hand, testify to their deep rootedness in pre-rational worldview (“they are a measure of the ontological nature of faith in the structure of behavior and life” (Karas, 1996, p. 42), and on the other hand, they require the attainment (including through upbringing) of a higher level of reflection and self-awareness. As the philosopher metaphorically writes, conscience and consciousness (moral integrity) are the “ears” of a person in their “ability to hear the voice of the spirit” (Karas, 1996, p. 42).

Conscience, like litmus paper, is an indicator of the balance of the individual “I” in the process of mastering “visible” nature (the world) and further realizing the need for faith to comprehend the spiritual (“invisible”) meanings of being. It turns into its antithesis – shamelessness – when a person, in acquiring knowledge, cannot resist the temptation of excessive fascination with it, and as a result, alienates themselves from both the external reality and the inner calling, falling into a egoistic and atheistic state of “non-perception”, “unconsciousness”, and ultimately, “helplessness or sinful pride”.

Even worse is when a person loses their consciousness (moral integrity). It plays an irreplaceable role both in perception and in knowledge. Among the always open polysemy of the contents of this concept, the timeless core of consciousness remains sacrifice. Its symbolism – from prehistoric sacrifice to the ethics of self-sacrifice – embodies, firstly, the effort to distance oneself from the immediate sensory reality (intolerable and aggressive in its primitiveness, audacity), and secondly, the need for devotion, which belongs to the highest level of understanding of spiritual values, as well as their practical implementation.

c) Conscience and consciousness (moral integrity) testify to the properly directed efforts of a person in the never easy process of self-knowledge. Through them, the connection (“kinship”) with the inner “nature”, which must be constantly maintained by nurturing values, is strengthened. However, what is the ultimate goal in the efforts to feel and realize one’s “calling of the heart”? It is unequivocal – to realize the unique, intrinsic, true fulfillment of oneself (in Skovoroda’s words, to hear “the will of the good spirit”). The essence and goal of the calling are not immediately comprehended: first, a person must respond to the “good will” (Divine), because in the heart there is potentially also an “evil, bad, unkind will”, which tempts us from the “visible” external world. Once the appropriate “kinship” (profession) is chosen, it is essential to fully realize it, while maintaining the unity of word and thought, theory and practice.

Continuing the thinker's thought, the researcher particularly emphasizes the responsibility of a vocation connected with intellectual activity. He highlights the risks of "rationalizing for its own sake", comparing it to a circus bear trained to dance: this "may be impressive, but it is not a vocation by nature" (Karas, 1996, p. 46). Linguistic "self-production" is an artificial satisfaction that alienates from the inner (true) nature, suppresses true goodwill, and leads to the devaluation of "kinship work" (affinity) as the most appropriate "life's work of a person".¹⁵ Karas sees direct parallels between Skovoroda's teaching on vocation and the Western (European) tradition, whose scientific reflection "arose in the context of a person's calling to action (deed) and ceases to be an organic phenomenon in culture without the latter" (Karas, 1996, p. 46).

Karas aptly provides a sad illustration of the rejection and forgetting of one's vocation, which, unfortunately, inseparably accompanies Ukrainian history both then and now – the phenomenon of Little Russianism (Ukrainian: "malorosijstvo"). The total imposition of a foreign "worldview" in various ways destroyed the sociality inherent in the national worldview and mentality, for in the Russian imperial worldview, the content of vocation (Russian: "prizvanije") is synonymous with the duty of regulated subordination and unequivocal submission to state and church authority. Under the influence of "constant temptation by unrighteous thoughts, pride, and greed", political and moral apostasy from the native, neglect of the national at the level of "I" and "We" increased in the Ukrainian environment, primarily in scientific and cultural circles. The loss of the need to seek one's true calling manifested itself in the form of "the dissolution of the intellectual and volitional element of a person" in favor of assimilationist adaptation and internal strife within the nation and within the individual. Karas calls this a "state of ingratitude", the content of which "is not a loss of will in general, but a renunciation of organic values. Instead, values with an opposing direction are introduced" (Karas, 1996, p. 48).

The counterbalance to this perversion of self-realization was resistance, struggle, and the defense of the independence of one's calling and the revival of the sources from which it grows, namely the native culture. Therefore, Skovoroda chose to live not just in Ukraine but also among the peasants – the bearers of traditional Ukrainian culture, those who, through their work on their native land, maintained the longest connection with the authenticity of "goodwill".¹⁶ In the end, the Ukrainian sage demonstrated several signs of a "true" (happy and self-fulfilled) person, namely: he understood his calling; he conscientiously and diligently realized it, combining word and deed; he chose "to be where you are most needed" (Karas, 1996, p. 37).

Conclusion

The existence of a nation's own philosophy is a clear indicator of its cultural independence. I unequivocally support the thesis once expressed by the leader of contemporary Skovoroda studies, Leonid Ushkalov: "Let us remember that studies on Skovoroda to a large extent determine the level of current Ukrainian humanities as a whole" (Ushkalov, 2004, p. 26). Indeed, in Ukraine, Skovoroda studies should not be treated merely as one of many thematic niches that gather interested specialists; their status is unquestionably much higher. This is due to both the strategic impact of his conceptual ideas on the development of Ukrainian philosophical thought in modern times and their equally powerful practical significance and influence on the worldview of Ukrainians.

¹⁵ Karas chooses this particular formulation instead of the commonly used "related work". Influenced by a semiotic perspective, he believes that the concept of "kinship work" (or its other Ukrainian equivalent, "chyn" (deed)) more fully reflects the value-laden meanings of Skovoroda's concept of vocation.

¹⁶ Following one's life calling in Skovoroda's view is identical to an identity-driven journey in the right direction – one that, in both a literal and figurative sense, leads "to one's land, one's people, and one's time", meaning it brings one back home "in a national sense" (Chyzhevskyi, 1934, pp. 176–177).

The interpretation of Hryhoriy Skovoroda's ideas through the proposed cultural, ethnopsychological, and semiotic approaches far from exhausts the semantic potential of the thinker's central research subject – sources of self-fulfillment. Examining each of them through selected interpretations allowed for clear analogies in the understanding of the origins, accompanying meanings, and ultimate goal of Skovoroda's "life" ethics.

Nevertheless, there are still "grey areas" in retrospective Skovoroda studies – forgotten works that are ripe for revisiting and reinterpreting through newer theoretical and methodological approaches. This is evidenced by, among others, the analyzed ethnopsychological method of Mirchuk, who, a century ago, pioneered its introduction into Ukrainian philosophical and humanitarian thought, drawing inspiration directly from Skovoroda's ideas. In my view, this approach very adequately develops the thesis on the national foundations/origins of Skovoroda's worldview as the most prominent creator and brilliant representative of the Ukrainian philosophical tradition. Moreover, it – alongside the cultural approach – reinforces the continuity of prioritizing moral-ethical issues ("philosophy of the heart") as the most authentic for national reflection throughout its historical development up to the present day.

At the same time, I assume that interest in the legacy of Hryhoriy Skovoroda from the broader Slavic and global humanities will deepen and be accompanied by an undeniable interdisciplinary dimension. Particularly promising here are international (including inter-Slavic) research projects dedicated to exploring the local (regional, national) and global dimensions of the direct and indirect influence of his ideas on the cultural realities of his contemporaries and descendants.

The search for comparative parallels between the philosophical stances and personal charisma of Skovoroda and other prominent figures from the Slavic intellectual community productively broadens our understanding of the specificity of philosophical reflection in these territories. It emphasizes such characteristic features as the preference for the applied nature of the "love of wisdom" over abstract theorizing and the ability to function and resonate effectively in non-institutional (non-academic) forms of cultural life. The proposed sketch of analogies between the worldviews of the Ukrainian Skovoroda and the Czech Masaryk serves here as just one of many potentially successful examples.

Meanwhile, the semiotic lens for interpreting Skovoroda's ideas asserts that the philosopher, through the syncretism of cognitive efforts and moral values, was able to defend and prove the fundamental importance of self-fulfillment (vocation) as the highest human goal on both individual and collective levels.

Finally, the exceptional heuristic potential of Skovoroda's reflections is demonstrated by his consistently positive reception in Ukrainian society. His ideas continue to resonate with the value orientations and worldview ideals of collective mentality. However, the choices and actions of the charismatic "Great Ukrainian" are becoming an actively embraced example for millions in the unprecedentedly dramatic context of today. Skovoroda's stance embodies an uncompromising choice of freedom and dignity as value-based guarantees of true self-knowledge, and, consequently, a happy, harmonious, and fulfilled life. Thus, beyond its theoretical significance, Skovoroda's legacy continues to inspire spiritual resilience, urging people not to renounce national, historical, and religious identity, and to fight for the valuable sources of authentic self-fulfillment – for oneself, one's Homeland, and all of humanity.

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