



KYIV-MOHYLA
HUMANITIES JOURNAL

KYIV-MOHYLA SCHOLARLY PEER-REVIEWED JOURNALS

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Source: Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal 9 (2022): 20–35

Published by: National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy

<http://kmhj.ukma.edu.ua/>

Hryhorii Skovoroda as a Liminal Hero of Ukrainian Culture

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the cultural and socio-political situation in Ukraine in the 18th century. At that time the administrative and social transformations took place, and the ethos of the old Ukrainian Cossack's culture was replaced by the imperial order. That cultural borderline allows us to understand the philosophical and life extraordinariness of Hryhorii Skovoroda. Instead of choosing one of these socio-cultural poles, he remained "on the edge," in a state of transition or liminality, which made his position vulnerable but at the same time free from social stereotypes. In cultural anthropology, the concept of liminality indicates a transitional position of man in the social system. A person could be in a liminal position only for a short period of time. This experience of individualization and being apart from the social system was so rare for the ordinary everyday life of collectivist cultures that made an unforgettable impression on a person. The wandering philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda completely falls under the characteristics of a liminal hero, but at his own request, he remained in a borderline position refusing to return to an orderly social system. Therefore, considering the features of his vital liminality helps to understand deeper the phenomenon of philosophical Skovorodianism.

Key Words: liminality, social status, social institutionalization, self-knowledge, freedom, nomadic philosopher, akin (related) work.



Introduction

Hryhorii Skovoroda is an archetypal figure of Ukrainian culture. Firstly, he is the most known and original Ukrainian philosopher. Secondly, as a thinker he was formed at the turn of the epochs: he acquaints the collectivist culture of the traditional epoch with the values of the modern age, namely the values of labor, individual spiritual pursuit, and happy self-sufficiency. Thirdly, his lifestyle becomes a decisive demonstration of the world attitudes he promoted.

Hryhorii Skovoroda was born in a Cossack family in the Poltava region on December 3, 1722. His educational path could be called typical of the noble representatives of Old Ukrainian culture: it began with school, then there followed Kyiv Academy, St. Petersburg Choir, a foreign mission to Hungary, after his return to Ukraine – teaching at the Kharkiv and Pereiaslav colleges, private tutoring. And then suddenly in 1769 and until his very death in 1794, the philosopher refused all his titles, achievements and started philosophical wandering life.

Even now his works have high cognitive and educational value, although their language differs from modern literary one, and philosophical considerations unfold in

the field of theological and scholastic discourse. However, he enriched them with completely new enlightenment and secular contexts: about “self-knowledge” in *Narkis abo rozmova pro te: piznai sebe* (Narcissus or Conversation about: Know Yourself),¹ “happy life” in *Vstupni dveri do khrystyianskoi dobrobravnosti* (Introduction to Christian Benevolence),² “akin work” in *Razgovor, nazyvaemyi alfavit, ili bukvar mira* (Conversation Called Alphabet, or Primer of the World).³

These postulates are unexpected in theological discourse, but their support by a wandering way of life, endow the figure of Skovoroda with intense liminal characteristics. The notion “liminality” means the situation when a person is passing a borderline, a threshold, a cardinal turn of personal life and social position when he/she has already lost the signs of belonging to the previous social group but has not yet been endowed with the attributes of another, higher affiliation. This is a state of extreme vulnerability and at the same time freedom from the role-stereotypes and external socio-cultural clichés. The state is accompanied by self-immersion, self-communication, and self-knowledge. So let’s focus on details, firstly, on the phenomenology of the liminal state and, secondly, on the liminal signs of Hryhorii Skovoroda worldview heritage and his nomadic lifestyle.

Liminality as Social Statuslessness

British anthropologist Victor Turner, an author of a book that became classical in the field of cultural anthropology *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure*,⁴ argued that alongside the rigid order, the sociocultural system always provides existential lacunas, where sincere, spontaneous relationships between people are formed and the need for close, direct communication is satisfied. The social system is clearly structured, regulated, it requires following demanded behavioral rules and reduces a person to a certain social role. Instead, the liminal state frees him/her from these functional frames, leaving a person alone “as he/she naturally is.”

The French ethnographer Arnold van Gennep, who was the first to study the rituals of status transition, singled out three of their obligatory phases: division, boundary, and union. In the first stage, a person loses all markers of belonging to the previous social group: he/she removes jewelry that indicates the craft or ancestral affiliation, status-marked clothing, untwists hair or even cuts it off. In the tribal communities of Nuer, Ndembu, Thalesy, described by Victor Turner, hair and the

1 Hryhorii Skovoroda, *Narkis abo rozmova pro te: piznai sebe* [*Narcissus or Conversation about: Know Yourself*] (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1994).

2 Hryhorii Skovoroda, *Vstupni dveri do khrystyianskoi dobrobravnosti* [*Introductory Door to Christian Benevolence*] (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1994).

3 Hryhorii Skovoroda, *Razgovor, nazyvaemyi alfavit, ili bukvar mira* [*Conversation called the Alphabet or Primer of the World*] (Kyiv: Naukova Dumka, pt. 1, 1973).

4 Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter Inc., 1969), 256.

specifics of its styling had a protective function, therefore, to get rid of this fetish meant to run into danger. An example of a typical liminal transition is the initiation ritual in which a person, in most cases boys, joins to adulthood and acquires the main features – ability to make decisions and be responsible. Initiation aims to check the candidate with dangerous, stressful situations which he could never face in future life.

The young men used to leave their settlement alongside the older male mentors for passing the initiation probation. They lived in the forest – a wild space, devoid of social markers. There they practiced asceticism by refusing all advantages of the previous civil life: they could even refuse to wear common clothes, showing their break with the social world and childhood, preparing for the birth as adolescent men.

Liminal beings, such as neophytes during the initiation process are perceived as possessing nothing.

Depending on the ethos and mentality of the tribal culture tasks predicted for the initiation rituals also differ. Mystical cults provide imitations of the young men meeting with dangerous otherworldly creatures. For this purpose, the use of psychedelic substances is allowed, shamanic dances are performed as well as ritual sacrifices, including one's own body parts. Sometimes these rituals involve a circumcision procedure. If the tribe is militant the main goal of the threshold phase is to test such young man features as physical training and courage. During the ritual performing, boys had to overcome bodily injuries that were been inflicted for checking their pain threshold and the ability to maintain emotional control even almost under the affective state.

In agricultural and pastoral tribes, in contrast to hunting ones, important traits of an adult are endurance, discipline, craftsmanship. Therefore, the rituals of initiation are intended to test the level of housekeeping competency of the candidate – his fishing skills, mastery in dwell-building, observation, and even love for animals and nature.

The second, the liminal (Latin word “limen” means “threshold”) stage of the ritual of social transition is characterized by an extreme vulnerability and even humiliation of the young man. The liminal person is an extra-status, extra-class, non-aged one. This stage is associated with symbols of death, fetal existence, invisibility, and androgyny.

According to the tribal traditions, at least once a person has experienced a liminal transition – during affiliation to adulthood. But some individuals had to go through a liminal test once more, but this time not collectively, but individually – this who pretended to become a tribal leader. Victor Turner described in detail the liminal transition on an example of the ritual of leader choosing in the Ndembu tribe. The applicant and his wife settled for a few days outside the common settlement. They wore the simplest clothes and sat on the lawn for several days in a “humble position.” For the night they could build a shelter from sticks found nearby. It was forbidden to cut branches or process them with any tools because in this case, wild materials would turn into cultural artifacts, and they should stay the fruits of the earth, full of chthonic energy.

The recently built hut, which must be destroyed after the ritual, was called “kufwu.” This is a direct allusion to the word “kufwa,” which in Ndembu means “death.” The liminal ritual of the tribal leader legitimizing is imbued with the mortal symbolism because it aims to show that in the process of transition a private person, an ordinary member of the community “dies,” and a public high-status person appears.

Any of the countrymen could express their attitude to the liminal candidate, mention former insults and guilt, give kicks on which the future chieftain was not allowed to respond by striking back. This was how emotional control and humble impartiality were nurtured, which the leader would later demonstrate towards his subordinates.

The ritual of initiation is played out as an indisputable accusation of the candidate in the most serious crimes, but at the highest point of emotional tension the nationwide forgiveness has to be declared to the leader. And only after these words, the chieftain is considered inviolable, respectful, and sacred.

Legends about life and administrative traditions of Zaporizhian Cossacks also mention a number of rituals designed to create a liminal atmosphere before letting a high-ranking candidate start his duties. Such were the customs of overcoming the Dnipro river rapids by the bravest men, assigning them new names, or “feeding kicks” to the newly elected ataman while he was walking down the square to the platform to take the oath.

The liminal phase is thus associated with significant mental and physical trials. However, it is clearly limited in time. The realization of the fact that all the tests will definitely come to an end, makes it easier for neophytes to survive this threshold period. Another factor of mental relief is that the young candidates usually overcome the ritual of initiation not alone but as a whole age group. Due to this, special relations of brotherhood, reciprocity, and solidarity arose among the neophytes. This phenomenon is characterized as the state of anti-structure and was called by Victor Turner “*communitas*.”

Communitas has a spontaneous, immediate nature, in contrast to the normative, institutionalized social structure. In the traditional era, the structure was represented by the usual family ties, opposite to it, the *communitas* appeared as the special friendship that arose in a situation of liminal vulnerability. Thus, alongside the sacred blood ties, there developed no less strong friendships.

As liminality opposes structure, so organically united community contrasts with a mechanically combined society. *Communitas* is such association of people in which they share common interests and are not ranked by status. *Communitas* is a kind of ideal cohesion in which everyone acts for the benefit of himself and others, satisfies demands of the public good, and is completely authentic to himself, that is, when individuals achieve complete harmony with themselves and the world, avoiding dilemmas about choosing between individual and collective interests. *Communitas* is an abstract concept, an ideal type, in the words of Max Weber. If the structure tends towards sustainability, regulation, hierarchization, stratification, control, and

punishment of those who break the rules. *Communitas* is a state of cohesion where equality, solidarity, complicity, and mutual understanding dominate. Such an utopian-religious-mystical ideal, from which mass religious movements, grassroots political processes, strikes, associations, orders begin. The state of the collective *communitas* is achieved for a short period of time, but it gives a lasting existential experience, through which the involved individuals return to the social system with new strength and motivation. The experience of a liminal state is the basis for a person to obtain a higher social status.

Communitas acquires the character of an utopian ideal when it becomes a doctrine of the good life, a political ideal of an “earthly paradise,” that is when it is promised to be established for us forever. However, *communitas*, in contrast to structure, is a temporary phenomenon, but extremely emotional, energetic and motivating.

Every stable and effective socio-cultural system includes *communitas* as a temporary, but repetitive and obligatory period, accompanied by specific rituals. Thus, conducting his research among the African tribe Ndembu in Zambia, Victor Turner observed how the ritual of male initiation (liminal and communitarian experience) contributed to further friendly cooperation between young men even after their return to social structures, and how the experience of this spontaneous solidarity was transited into daily life interactions.

The phenomenon of *communitas* is inseparable from the rituals of transition (from lower social status to higher) and the liminal states caused by them.

In the third phase of the ritual of transition, the person returns to society, unites with it, but already in a new higher status, with more important and honorable obligations. The main experience that a person has gained through the ritual of transition is the liminal experiences and bonds of friendship. Those trusting relations later would be transferred from the ritual borderline to the orderly reality of later life.

Communitas breaks through the cracks of the structure into liminality, through its borders – into marginality. Almost everywhere this state is treated as sacred or “blessed,” probably because it violates or abolishes the norms that govern structural and institutionalized relations, and is accompanied by extremely powerful experiences.

18th Century: Confusing Spirit of the Era

What actions of Skovoroda allow us to speak of him as a liminal hero? First of all, his initial successful integration into the social structure, and then followed the sudden abandonment of all previously acquired statuses and achievements. A highly educated intellectual began to teach ordinary people in the squares and streets. He did not have a permanent residence; the philosopher accepted an invitation to live temporarily at dwells of one or another friend. Skovoroda did not own any property except personal belongings.

So to evaluate what perspectives Skovoroda rejected or what advantages he acquired choosing a liminal way of life, we should find out what was the specificity of social mobility and the “social elevators” of that time.

Democratic institutions formed during the Cossack's Hetmanate were still effective, but also they got at risk to be absorbed or even abolished by the administrative system of the newly formed Russian Empire. It is worth briefly mentioning the dynamics of administrative and political changes in Ukraine after the signing of the Pereiaslav agreements of 1654 and the Andrusiv contract of 1667. The territory of Ukraine was divided along the Dnipro between the Moscovia and the Polish Commonwealth. Each side tried to curtail Cossack's rights that they were actively resisting. Thus, in 1669 thanks to the uprising led by Petro Doroshenko, Moscow agreed to return almost all freedoms granted yet to Bohdan Khmelnytskyi. Instead, the rights decrease continued on the Right-bank Ukraine. For this reason, the Left-bank Ukraine began to fill up with immigrants from the territories of Polish subordination and to strengthen economically. Therefore, in the 18th century, the core of socio-political life in the Ukrainian lands moved to the East. In the study “*Essay on the History of Culture of Ukraine*” Myroslav Popovych proves this with demographic statistics:

At the end of the 18th century, Ukraine within the Russian Empire had a population of 8.236 million, including 4.761 million on the Left Bank and 3.475 million on the Right Bank. The lands of the Rus and Belz voivodships, Ternopil, Podillia, Zakarpattia, and Bukovyna were ceded to Austria; about 1.5 million Ukrainians lived here. Thus, over the centuries, from a demographic point of view, the center of gravity has shifted more and more to the east and south of Ukraine. From the cultural and political point of view, the growing role of the Left Bank and Kyiv in the whole public life of Ukraine corresponded to this relocation of the center.⁵

Kyiv was originally expected to be bestowed to Warsaw, but by the efforts and requests of local clergy remained under the Moscow protectorate. Because the capital city was temporarily protected from political struggle social development and cultural prosperity continued there.

It especially contributed to the formation of educational environment and book culture of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. A whole galaxy of outstanding professors of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy trained a talented generation of cultural, church, and political leaders. Some of them, however, played a significant role in the formation and institutionalization of the Russian imperial system. Thus, Lazar Baranovych, Symeon Polotskyi, and Theophan Prokopovych became ideologues of reforming the Orthodox

5 Myroslav Popovych, *Narysy z istorii kultury Ukrainy* [*Essay on the History of Culture of Ukraine*] (Kyiv: ArtEk, 1998), 238.

Church under the auspices of Moscow. In general, in the 17th century the Moscow ethnocentric kingdom began to be formatted into a despotic bureaucratic empire. The representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox clerical circles become supporters of the project of enlightened absolutism in the Russian Empire. At that time it desperately needed such an intellectual resource because of the lack of its own educational and scientific traditions. It was a strange intellectual and political symbiosis that enriched the Moscow political environment with the ideas of a supra-ethnic empire, and the church organization with awareness of the advantages of monarchical (rather than elected hetman's governance) protection. On that subject historian Serhii Plokhii notes, "But cultural exchange took place in both directions. Bringing Western cultural models from Ukraine to Moscovia, Kyivan clergymen simultaneously borrowed an arsenal of Moscow political ideology. The key to this ideology was the idea of the Orthodox tsar as the main element of the new religious and political space."⁶

If a position of the clergy only intensified from the symbiosis with the tsarist authorities, the hetman's officials clearly lost in this confrontation. The imperial project of Peter I aimed to stop the limiting ethnocentrism of Moscovia. The empire ought to have a clear administrative division canceling historical administrative units and traditions of self-government on its territories. Hetman's autonomy inside the political Leviathan, which was gaining power and expanding its possessions both as in Asia so in Northern Europe, categorically contradicted the state-administrative vision of the Russian emperors. However, the self-governing and military traditions of the Hetmanate were still quite strong, so the struggle against them lasted for decades – either with the oppression of local Cossack municipality by the supervisory authorities (Little Russia Council) or with temporary concessions (restoration of the Cossack's Hetmanate republic led by Kyrylo Rozumovskiy.)

How did the administrative and geopolitical changes described above affect the everyday life of the average Ukrainian habitant? What were the new social elevators in the reformed state?

An important resource for strengthening the social and career positions was the educational level of a person. Scholar traditions of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy played an important educational role among the descendants of Cossack officials and helped them to occupy high positions in the imperial aristocracy and bureaucracy, competing with the invited German professors.

Skovoroda was also formed in these educational and social coordinates. At first, he studied at the Kyiv Academy, later as a talented musician he got to the court choir, and then followed his trip abroad to Hungary and returning from there. In Ukraine, the philosopher tried teaching at Kharkiv and Pereiaslav colleges, private tutoring. At that time he began to write poetry, philosophical dialogues, homily, and fables. For someone else it would be logical to continue the career, using advantages of the available achievements. But in 1769, at the age of 47, Skovoroda left the previous way of

6 Sergii Plokhii, *Brama Yevropy. Istoriiia Ukrainy vid skifskykh voien do nezalezhnosti* [*The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*] (Kharkiv: Klub Simeinoho Dozvillia, 2018), 168.

life and became a free traveler. He rejected the benefits of being in a structure to maintain liminal freedom.

Liminal heroes deny the logic of a system from within due to knowledge of its essence and internal contradictions. The demand for liminal states is dictated by the logic of a social system itself. What were the peculiarities of the imperial social system of the time, which did not avoid bloody violence to establish order but no less passionately needed examples of liminal freedom and greatness?

The eighteenth century was a period of active reforming of the administrative apparatus of the Russian Empire when the system tried to mechanize and algorithmize social, economic, and political processes. At that time, it included vast territories inhabited by peoples and ethnic groups that had nothing to do with the cultural memory and traditions of the Moscow kingdom, which was expressed by the slogan “Moscow – the Third Rome.”

To overcome ethnocentrism, which Moscow symbolically embodied, a new capital was established in a new inaccessible place, which was to testify cosmopolitanism of the bureaucratic empire. However, the emergence of a new capital did not negate the role of the previous one, but only highlighted a new line of Russian ideological rift: between traditionalist conservatism and bureaucratic cosmopolitanism, ethno-religious state and empire, Slavophilism and Westernization.

But at least in the eighteenth century anticipations were relied on the imperial, Western pole of the ideological dichotomy, which led to the active forming of socio-dynamic bureaucratic despotism, because only the “mechanized” administrative apparatus could ensure the functioning of such a multi-ethnic political Leviathan. Only the conjoint administrative and legal field was to regulate the rules of coexistence of culturally different nationalities, in fact, the internal colonies of the empire. That is why Cossack Ukraine was oppressed, losing the remnants of statehood, becoming a province of the empire.

There were three political formations on the Left Bank of Ukraine: the Hetmanate, Sloboda Ukraine, and Zaporizhian Sich. Gradually, their autonomy was leveled: new administrative institutions displaced previous Cossack management practices. In this context, it is worth mentioning the regulation of civil service according to the “Table of Ranks” passed in 1722, also in 1785 the “Given Charter for the Gentry” was enacted, which inscribed the Cossack officials into the Russian nobility and bureaucratic hierarchy. Ukrainian statehood within the Hetmanate was gradually abolished because of the creation of the first (1722–1727) and then the second Little Russia Council (1764). There continued the militarization of Russian-controlled Ukrainian lands: Sloboda Cossacks regiments were transformed into regular hussars (1763), the regimental-hundred administrative subdivisions were replaced by gubernias. Finally in 1775 Zaporizhian Sich, the stronghold of the Cossack community, its civil and military self-organization, was liquidated.

But in addition to legal support reforms require, first and foremost, strong human capital – educated officials and employees. Therefore, the 18th century was also

a period of initiation and approval of educational institutions – from cadet corps, schools, choirs, to universities.

A distinctive feature of the institutionalization of education in the Russian Empire is that universities were established as a result of “state order” and not of grassroots social movements or self-governing religious communities, as it had happened in Europe.

And the fact that the educational and scientific ethos of Cossack Ukraine deviated from this pattern became a symbolic advantage of the Cossack official’s descendants. It is worth mentioning the fact that in the Ukrainian lands the process of establishing primary and higher educational institutions was consistent with the European: in the 16th–18th centuries urban Orthodox fraternities founded schools, some of them were the same to Jesuit ones on criteria of organization and quality of education. In 1632 on the basis of the Kyiv fraternal and Lavra schools a higher educational institution, known as the Kyiv-Mohyla Collegium, was formed. Educational initiatives in this case traditionally sprouted from the initiative of urban communities, based on clerical bookish culture. Adhering to the anthropological conceptual system, such educational institutionalization reflects the process of community transformation into a structure, homogeneity – into heterogeneity, the ideological impulse into a hierarchical educational institution.

Instead, the Russian-imperial educational initiative is a consequence of how the system replicates another similar system. It happened with bypassing the liminal phase, which generates a creative impulse and a special social environment – the *communitas*.

Classical universities in the Russian Empire were initiated only by monarchical decrees, as evidenced from the method of naming these institutions, which is “imperial universities.” Thus, in 1755 the Imperial Moscow University was founded, in 1799 – the Imperial Dorpat University (now the city of Tartu, Estonia), in 1803 – the Imperial Vilnius University (Vilnius, Lithuania), in 1803 – the Imperial Kharkiv University, in 1804 – the Imperial Kazan University, in 1819 – Petrograd Imperial University, the same year – Imperial Alexander University (Helsinki, Finland), 1834 – St. Volodymyr Imperial University (Kyiv, now Kyiv National Taras Shevchenko University), 1865 – Imperial Novorosiiskyi University (Odesa).

Thus, the educational sphere in which Hryhorii Skovoroda firstly tried his self-realization had been actively structuring, so it was open for talented activists. It’s worth mentioning at least Theophan Prokopovych. At first, he had been a student of the Kyiv-Mohyla Collegium, and then a talented man became a student of Volodymyr-Volyn Greek Catholic Collegium, as well as later studied at the Pontifical Greek College of St. Athanasius in Rome. He was a connoisseur of Greek, Latin, mathematician, physicist, philosopher, bishop, one of the founders of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, tsarist adviser, author of the idea of transforming the Moscow Kingdom into an empire according to the idea of enlightened absolutism. Church reform was also the result of his efforts. Theophan Prokopovych built the church hierarchy “for himself,”

hoping to lead the newly formed Holy Synod. However, this position was taken by his conservative opponent Stephan Yavorskyi. Moreover, the Secret Chancellery started a case against Prokopovych, and therefore after the death of Peter I, his situation was extremely precarious and dangerous. Thus, the career plans of Theophan Prokopovych from Kyiv were not realized, although his hands were used to build and establish institutions that still function today, for example, the Academy of Sciences. His fate is a metaphor for the role of Ukrainians in building the Russian imperial system, which has always been bureaucratically biased and took into account political preferences.

Nevertheless, the representatives of the “Ukrainian circle” in the Russian Empire made a significant contribution to the formation of the then elite culture, forming a special ethos of literature and high education. For example, the library of previously mentioned Theophan Prokopovych was one of the richest in Europe, numbering 3193 books. Only a French academic, the Louvre’s secretary Jean-Jacques d’Ortous de Mairan had more. His library encountered more than 3,400 ones. The novelty and variety of the author’s names in Prokopovych’s collection were fascinating: Lorenzo Valla, Hugo Grotius, Jan Amos Comenius, Tommaso Campanella, Niccolo Machiavelli, Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, as well as protestant apologists John Calvin, Martin Luther (he still belonged to that Early Modern generation of Orthodox theologians and bishops who was aware of Western philosophy and theology and read its most important treatises).

The “Ukrainian circle” in St. Petersburg also included Hryhorii Poletyka (hypothetical author of the “History of Rus,” translator in the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, a graduate of the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy), Yakiv Markovych (Lubny colonel, epistolary companion of Theophan Prokopovych), Marko Poltoratskyi who was invited to St. Petersburg by Oleksii Rozumovskyi and later became a conductor of the Court Choir, a teacher of Maxym Berezovskyi and Ivan Bortnianskyi. Descendents of the former Cossack officials became chancellors, judges, and academics.

But were they able to integrate permanently and unhindered into the imperial system? In the example of Oleksandr Bezborodko, we can see it is not quite. He was a son of the General Secretary of the Hetmanate Andrii Bezborodko. After studying in Kyiv, he enlisted in the army, participated in the Russo-Turkish War, later he was a member of the General Court and the Board of Foreign Affairs. Every day he personally reported to Catherine II on military and political affairs in the empire. At the same time, he supported educational processes in Ukraine, in particular by founding the Nizhyn Lyceum at his own expense. But still, he loved “strong words” in everyday life, simple, unethical behavior, sarcasm, bordering with sacred stupidity. Thus, he lived at the crossroads of the risky and unpredictable world of high politics and the mundaneness of the lower world, between the structural order, and the liminal niches of interpersonal relationships. As Myroslav Popovych concluded, “This mundaneness of the ‘lower world’ was directly next to the high world of art, religion, patriotism, but did not face it, and it was possible to live in two worlds at the same time, choosing each time a culture of behavior and a culture of thoughts and feelings.”⁷

7 Popovych, *Narysy z istorii kultury Ukrainy*, 262.

This dichotomy is manifested even more vividly through the worldview of Semen Hamalia, a cultural figure, freemason, and descendant of Hetmanate officer Ivan Hamalia. His whole worldview was built on the opposition of external and internal person. The outer man is subordinated with the rules of social life, but the inner incarnation is strong-willed, true, and is able to cultivate moral virtues, regardless of external statuses and roles. The sensuality of the inner man subdues with the mind and the mind – with faith. This was the Enlightenment-Baroque, pre-secular type of rationalism, which had not yet abandoned the theological worldview frames but was already in anticipation of new cultural trends – secularism, rationalism and bureaucracy.

Under such systemic and social conditions, the inner world of the inquisitive man stretched between the dichotomous, incompatible poles of mysticism and political fanaticism, rationalism, and ecclesiastical conservatism, the inner and outer man.

How did these identification difficulties affect Skovoroda life choice? He had every chance to build a successful career in the coordinates of imperial statehood. This path was chosen by a huge number of representatives of that time Ukrainian culture. The phenomenal nature of his worldview and life strategy is that he refused to choose it, to crucify himself between extremes. The philosopher remained in a liminal position: he renounced his former social status but did not accept new ones. He oriented at the sources of authenticity, denying the order of the structure, and creating a friendly community (*communitas*) around him. This is where the essence of Skovoroda's liminal position is revealed: choosing between belonging to the system or been its enemy, he took the third option – to remain in transition, not to integrate into the existing coordinate plane, and finally to escape so that the world could not catch him.

Semantic Frontier of the Philosophical Skovorodianism

A unique phenomenon of folk culture of the 18th century in Ukraine was the activity of itinerant deacons, who graduated from the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy but having a certain level of philosophical and theological knowledge, they did not detach from the realities of life of that time. Those nomadic sages were the exponents of the Cossack ethos of freedom, despair, social unrootedness. The most famous among them is Hryhorii Skovoroda, because of starting to publish his philosophical texts even in the pre-nomadic period of his life. Therefore, his theoretical heritage has survived to our time, and is not lost in the oral layers of folk culture.

Conventionally, the written legacy of the philosopher is divided into pre-wandering and post-wandering periods. The first period includes texts written during the time of private tutoring and teaching in Pereiaslav and Kharkiv colleges. They have a traditional literary and artistic form, and therefore are the most known, among them *Sad bozhestvennyh pisen* (Garden of Divine Songs), *Narkis abo rozmova pro te: piznai sebe* (Narcissus. Conversation about: Know Yourself), *Vstupni dveri do khrystyianskoi*

dobronravnosti (Introductory Door to Christian Benevolence). Such works as *Rozmova piaty podorozhnikh pro istynne shchastia v zhytti* (The Conversation of Five Travelers about True Happiness in Life), *Rozmova, zvana Alfavyt, chy Bukvar svitu* (A Conversation Called the Alphabet or the Primer of World) were written during the traveling. Here we wouldn't find clear epistemological or ontological theories, terminological unambiguity, and systematicity. Skovoroda did not even try to create a certain philosophical system, he was interested in questions of right life, not of veritable reasoning; of the inner man, not of the outer "Copernican" world: "The soul is the real being, and the true reality, and the essence itself, and the grain, and the force that is only life and existence, and without it, we are dead shadows, therefore it is the incomparable waste of losing oneself, even if a person took possession of all the Copernican worlds."⁸

The creative manner of the wandering philosopher is characterized not so much by logical consistency of reasoning as by imagery of edifications, not by an analytical way of philosophizing, but by a "rhetorical" one.

Although Skovoroda worldview unfolded in the orbit of the theological tradition, his works were filled with several "heretical" ideas, such as the blessing of work, attention to the process of inner individuation, and a person's love for him/herself. Especially these postulates became sloganistic for the thinker, transferred his philosophical contribution into a secular age, and actualized his legacy on the scale of the European cultural heritage.

Since Skovoroda was interested in the "very essence" of an individual, we will analyze in more details his anthropological ideas. The philosopher does not focus on "man's position in the world," but on how he feels, how he positions himself in relation to the world, not what opportunities he offers it, but who he becomes of good will and consciousness. Thus, the thinker was not just interested in man as a physical being, but a man of a certain quality, namely, happy, self-conscious, thirsty for knowledge, and therefore free and unbreakable. He brings to the frontier of the philosophical discourse such a modern or even postmodern question – the question of human happiness.

Happiness, in his opinion, is not localized somewhere in exotic places, as well as in general somewhere in the outside world:

Do not seek happiness overseas, do not ask a man to receive it, do not travel the planets, do not visit palaces, do not cross around the globe, do not wander Jerusalem... For gold you can buy possession or needed things, but happiness as the most necessary thing always and everywhere is given for free. Numerous bodily necessities await you but they don't bring happiness, for you there is only one need, and it is not far away. It is close. In your heart and your soul.⁹

8 Skovoroda, *Narkis abo rozmova*, 166.

9 Skovoroda, *Vstupni dveri*, 50.

In the *Book Called the Icon of Alcibiades*, the philosopher singled out three life horizons: the macrocosm (the outer world), the microcosm (the inner man's world), and the world of the Bible. The last component is the basis of Skovoroda's epistemology: God is a demiurge who has arranged everything intelligently and could be known by the mind. But he must be guided by faith. It subjugates both the mind and the actions of the person. Faith is an internal and external force in man: it expresses the inner will to act intelligently in the external world. The symbolic world of the Bible is not an unappealable authoritative guide. If the Bible is taken literally, it turns from symbolic truth into its opposite – into lies and proudly wisdom. Ritual pettiness breeds enmity, ostensibly in the name of God. The short-sighted, those who live “by the letter” instead of by the independent critical reasoning, are only corrupted by the Bible, but not because it misrepresents, but because it is misinterpreted. Thus, incompetent explication, worship of authorities against a person's inclinations and common sense, create misunderstandings and alienation from his / her own authenticity.

The search for truth is a difficult but noble activity that fills a life of joy. At the intersection of macro and microcosms locates an action, the akin work, more detailed analysis of which we are providing. Before that, it is worth mentioning Skovoroda colleague at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Paisii Velychkovskiy, who in his teachings also signed out the significance of action in the spiritual increase of a person.

The idea of the grace of action, the joy of work is pervasive for the intellectual discourse of the time – whether theological or philosophical. It literally “floated in the air.” And this was a great worldview shift. In the Orthodox tradition, work was interpreted as a punishment, a curse imposed by God on humanity after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the paradise. Since then, the human race has had to get bread in the sweat of its brow. Therefore, leisure was interpreted as a primary, close to the paradise state. And suddenly in the age of reason, in the Enlightenment, work has been proclaimed a source of happiness and joy. However, in Europe, this idea was established several centuries earlier, due to the spreading of Protestant work ethic. Labor was interpreted as an instrumentality of soul-saving because a person sins if he / she is unemployed, bored, unmotivated. Therefore, beloved work contributes to the salvation of the soul no less than the careful observance of the prayer rule. The goal here is to achieve the concentration of consciousness, which will distract from destructive actions and inclinations. As Max Weber affirmed in his exploration *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* the ideals of devotional monastic service were embodied by Protestants in professional activity.

Instead, in areas where Orthodoxy prevailed (that kept “safe” distance from Western-like Reformation movements) labor continued to be seen as a punishment to which the Lord condemns Adam and Eve, and in their persons all mankind, until the end of time. Therefore, the idea of the grace of labor became a speculative insight of such liminal figures as the philosopher Skovoroda and the monk Velychkovskiy.

They were the same age, even the years and months of their lives and deaths coincide: December 1722 – November 1794. Like Skovoroda, Petro (the secular name of

Paisii before his monastic vows) did not complete his full course at the Academy. In the fourth year of scholastic science, the man realized that he was most attracted to the spiritual life, not secular knowledge. Father Paisii's spiritual quest was no less wandering than Skovoroda nomadic philosophizing.

At first, his path passed through Ukrainian hermitages and monasteries – in Kyiv, Chernihiv, Chornobyl, and Chyhyryn, then he set out to experience monastic asceticism in Mount Athos and Moldova. It is interesting in these travels that Paisii actively sought the experience of true monastic life – simple, prayerful, humble, peaceful, but no monastic community could fully satisfy his praxeological demands, nowhere he allowed the corporative structure to capture him, remaining faithful to his principles, his inner man, not the statutory rules.

The second similarity between Father Paisii and Skovoroda is that they both chose literary work as the best mentoring tool, understanding that the oral word has a suggestive effect on a limited circle of listeners, and the written one multiples the audience both in space and in time. Scriptoriums, translation and printing workshops were organized at each monastery where he became a mentor (the Simonos-Petros monastery on Mount Athos, the Holy Spirit and Niamets monasteries in Moldova). He himself wrote morals, polemical works, and edifications.

The third identical feature of these archetypal figures of Old Ukrainian culture is the similarity of Skovoroda and Velychkovskyi's interpretation of the role of activity in human self-awareness and self-education. In the work *Chapters on intelligent prayer* the monk distinguishes between active and contemplative prayer practices: "...there are two reasonable prayers: the first (for beginners) belongs to action, and the second (for the perfect) belongs to contemplation; this prayer is for starting, and that one is for finishing, because the act is an ascent to contemplation."¹⁰

The religious path, according to the monk, consists in gradual self-concentration for the meeting with God in the depths of the inner world. But this must be preceded by harmonization with the outside world. This is possible through activity, through active physical practices – fasting and work, help and care about others. Thus, according to the views of Paisii, activity also appears as a means of spiritual ascent and salvation.

Instead, Skovoroda's teaching work leads not only to an "easier afterlife," but also to a happy and dignified earthly existence. As Skovoroda's deepest cognitive interest was intended not just to a person, but to a happy person, so it was about acting. The work must be "sweet," bring pleasure, and be related to human inclinations. It makes a person happy from the very process of action, not only from the expected result. In the process of akin work, a person seeks neither someone else's fate nor someone else's property. The individual is well to be in this exact place, in this epoch, in this surrounding. "Work is a living and indefatigable movement of the whole machine,

10 Paisii Velychkovskyi, *Ob umnoi ili vnutrennei molitve* [*Chapters on intelligent or inner prayer*] (Moscow: Strelbooks, 2015), accessed September 10, 2021, http://www.monasterium.by/biblioteka/nastolnaya_kniga/o-molitve/glavy-ob-umnoy-molitve-prepodobnyy-paisiy-velichkovskiy.

until the work is completed, which weaves a crown of joy for its creator. In short, nature inspires to work and strengthens to work, making it sweet.”¹¹

Instead, Hryhorii Skovoroda contrasts spiritual grace bringing by akin work with boredom and sadness which cause despair and despondency. This is where we see the congenial echo of the ideas of “sin as a consequence of boredom” in Protestant theology and Skovorodian “boredom-torment”:

When a related work is taken away from a person, then a deadly torment begins. He mourns and worries, like a bee locked in a room when a ray of sunlight calls it through the window to the honey meadows. This pain deprives a person of health, inner harmony, takes away vigor and strength. Then the person is dissatisfied with everything, disgusts both the position and a place of residence.¹²

The work *Narcissus. Conversation about: Know yourself* is dedicated to the question of self-consciousness efforts. The thinker suggests that to live in the body is not enough to declare you know yourself or you are in peace. So, the first and most important task is to “know yourself, and find yourself, and find a person.” To know the caves of the soul is at the same time to know the divine wisdom, to touch the substance of the symbolic world because in the inner man they are combined. To find happiness, it is important to perform both internal work and external action.

So what is needed for happiness, according to Skovoroda? He proposed to be true to oneself in both the microcosmic and macrocosmic dimensions: not to betray the inner man, to be an attentive recipient of this inner dimension, not to get tired of knowing oneself and not to be seduced by the outside world, not to take a consumerist position. To do this, a person needs to find the akin, related work, in which he / she straightens out without oppressing the inner genius.

Conclusion

Hryhorii Skovoroda philosophized in a very unusual way. He reasoned artistically through fables, parables, teachings, the basis of which was the Baroque rhetorical culture. Therefore, it is not worth looking for a successive philosophical system (ontology, epistemology, and aesthetics) in his philosophy heritage. However, the pervasive semantic emphasis of his works is the anthropological focus of the questioning about such phenomenon as self-recognition, self-sufficiency and joying of life. On the one hand, these are very conservative slogans that call to stop, to freeze, to wait until the surrounding world is transformed. But at the same time, he encourages another

¹¹ Skovoroda, *Razgovor, nazyvaemyi alfavit*, 421.

¹² *Ibid.*, 422.

position – to act, work and find in these things happiness and harmony with the world. So, is Skovoroda controversial? No, he is liminal, the philosopher ingeniously takes a position “between:” between the past and the future, between organically solidarized old Cossack society and mechanically institutionalized empire system, between the simple-minded people and the highbrow elitism. This is the position of preparing for the jerk, stopping before the start. Both Ukrainian philosophical thought and Ukrainian society in their historical progress moved further – into the age of enlightenment, organized cultural movements (Ukrainian literary process of the 18th century, ethnographic romanticism, formation of the national theater tradition, etc.), later – political party building, synchronization with world industrial and artistic avant-garde processes. And the more valuable is the liminal semantic gap that Skovoroda created with his philosophical and wandering life, leaving open this ideological portal between the Cossack-Hetman old Ukraine and the socio-political modernity of Ukrainian culture.

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