

Hryhorii Skovoroda's Socratic Dialogue in the Context of Modern Philosophy

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Abstract

This article explores the creative work of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda from the standpoint of the leading trends in contemporary philosophic thought: a communicative turn in philosophy, neo-Socratic dialogue, and ethics of discourse. Skovoroda's philosophy is interpreted not only in line with the 'know yourself' principle as a method of cognition, but, first of all, within the Socratic dialogue dimension when the methods of maieutics and elentics are used for joint searching for truth and solving moral problems. Skovoroda did not reduce philosophy to life, but he raised life to philosophy; philosophy itself was his life and in the first place, it was the practical philosophy of dialogue. Socratic dialogue appears in the practices of communication with people, in particular in the wandering habitus of the thinker. Wandering is an important element of his philosophy, his life, and his habitus. The wandering nature of Skovoroda's habitus takes his dialogues beyond epistemology bringing the dialogue into a practical, or rather moral and practical plane. As an educator, Skovoroda draws on the Ukrainian culture habitus and practices and transcends this habitus and thus elevating it to the habitus of reason. This paper asserts the idea of the need and necessity to develop and to practice the neo-Skovoroda's dialogue as a component of the global trend of dialogic civilization development.

Key Words: mind habitus, Socratic dialogue, elentics, maieutics of wandering, practical philosophy, communication



Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda, whose 300th anniversary is celebrated this year, is an outstanding Ukrainian thinker, philosopher, poet, translator, and musician. His creative work is an extraordinary phenomenon in the Ukrainian culture and an important component and factor of the Ukrainian identity formation. Skovoroda's work and life itself is, first, a philosophy – philosophy of Ukrainian personalism. At the same time, Skovoroda's creative work can be given many more definitions – he was the progenitor of the philosophy of the heart, philosophy of the symbolic world, philosophy of the human person, and philosophy of life. However, it should be stressed that Skovoroda did not reduce philosophy to life, but he raised life to philosophy, and philosophy was his life.

You can probably hardly find a single philosopher in Ukraine who was not influenced by Skovoroda's philosophy in one way or another, and who would not refer to his work and life history. Indeed, Skovoroda was not just an outstanding Ukrainian philosopher, but he was a majestic figure in the world's culture whose philosophy of life

and the life itself formed the unity of worldview, outlook on life, moral and practical habitus comparable only to the figure of Socrates.

I would like to thematize this moral and practical habitus of Skovoroda by proposing, after Jürgen Habermas, a method of philosophical and critical *reconstruction*. This method, unlike such methods as *restoration*, *regeneration* and *revision*, involves neither reproduction of an authentic phenomenon in culture or a return to the original theory, nor its revival for restoring the tradition lost in history, but it is precisely the *reconstruction* of some socio-cultural phenomenon based on its rethinking in accordance with the new socio-historical and cultural conditions provided this phenomenon has not exhausted its cultural or scientific and heuristic potential.¹ Moreover, such approach can be used in the study of any socio-cultural phenomenon, including habitus, as well as a philosophical theory or paradigm.

After all, nothing disappears without a trace and forever in the treasury of the history of culture, in particular in the history of philosophy. History is not a linear process, and it develops – forgive me this banality – in a spiral. The latter metaphorical remark also applies to social theories when an interpretation of a concept may start in an absolutely inappropriate way and, even more so, it may be initially applied in the ways that were not expected either by its author or by other interpreters thereof. Philosophy also develops in a spiral way, and seemingly forgotten concepts or even paradigms are repeated and emerge against a new background of historical or philosophical experience gaining new life and acquiring new connotations. This requires a method of structural comparison of such concepts, too. Therefore, this is not only a question of the history of philosophy and its periodization, but it is, first of all, a question of the significance of a particular philosophical paradigm in specific historical conditions, hence of its reconstruction.

Using the ancient Greek concept of a paradigm reconstructed by Thomas Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* and introduced by him for studying the history of science, one can identify certain paradigmatic positions and levels in the development of philosophy – namely “being,” “consciousness” and “language.” Here, I use the concept suggested by Jürgen Habermas in his book, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken*, in which he identifies the following paradigmatic ways of thinking: *ontological*, *reflective*, and *linguistic*.²

However, having chosen these basic paradigms for philosophical and critical reconstruction, one should note that the history of philosophy is not a consistent change of these paradigms when one paradigm is completely replaced by another. They can co-exist in the same historical *topos* while complementing each other and forming a common philosophical discourse. An example can be found in the philosophy of Hans Jonas, who replied wittily to the reproof by one of his readers on the antiquity

1 Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), 9.

2 Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988), 20.

of his philosophical language in *The Imperative of Responsibility* by saying that the language of narration corresponds to his somewhat archaic philosophy.³ Similarly, the habitual forms do not form any continuous unity, and – given the asynchrony of social development – are a complex entwinement of different life styles, life outlooks, and life forms. Therefore, on the one hand, they can contain some relict remnants – pre-modern, even archaic formations that can co-exist and intertwine in one culture, or even in one person. For instance, a person using various gadgets for contemporary communications can still have worldviews, beliefs and values that are far from the modern culture. On the other hand, there is a certain trap associated with the transfer of modern worldviews, including philosophical approaches, to those worldviews and philosophical systems that were formed in the past.

We have to remember that any historical and philosophical research looking at interpretation of far-off philosophical systems, cultures, life worlds, habituses, and symbolic forms is always a study “in the context of our experience” which we cannot disregard. Yet, this is not necessary if we want a specific philosophical system to be not only a “museum exhibit” but also a working system today. That is why we need the respective “spirit of narration” (Thomas Mann) as a method of “critical reconstruction,” which means not reproducing authenticity of a respective philosophical system but searching for new horizons of its life and action. This method is also related to the critical hermeneutics method which shows new possibilities for application of such philosophical system today rather than strives to find out what the philosopher was and was not able to succeed in and what he “came close to” or “where he stopped.”

Therefore, I would like to use this method of *reconstruction*, first of all, in the specified sense, which means reproducing some of its features that correspond to our time and have not lost their significance so they can be used in new conditions. Yet, I have to mention that in this case, reconstruction of Skovoroda’s philosophy and his habitus will not be included into this method in full, but rather some considerations related to such reconstruction will be discussed. It should also be added here that each historical period has its own image of Skovoroda as well as a vision of his creative work that is especially prominent on the occasion of the anniversary celebration. Such celebration encourages the search for new approaches focusing on new aspects of Skovoroda’s work. One should also mention that the previous anniversary was that of Skovoroda’s 250th birthday celebrated in 1972, and the fifth issue of the *Filosofska dumka* (Philosophical Thought), a journal of the Institute of Philosophy of the USSR Academy of Sciences, was dedicated to this occasion, as well as the scientific collection edited by V.M. Nichyk, *From Vyshenskyi to Skovoroda*,⁴ and some others.

3 Hans Jonas, *Pryntsyp vidpovidalnosti u poschukakh etyky dlia tekhnolohichnoi tsyvilizatsii* [*The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of Ethics for the Technological Civilization*] (Kyiv: Libra, 2001), 10.

4 Valeria Nichyk, *Vid Vyshenskoho do Skovorody* [*From Shevchenko to Skovoroda*] (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1972).

Our time, when the 300th birthday of the great thinker is celebrated in Ukraine and abroad, encourages us to seek new approaches, new methods, and new accents in studying Skovoroda's work in order to involve his work into modern discussion and in solving urgent problems in line with the leading trends of philosophical thought that are taking place in the world.

Skovoroda was a contemporary of Immanuel Kant, and the researchers often compare his work with the work of Kant and put a special emphasis on this fact. Indeed, they both were the forerunners of a new way of philosophizing: Kant – of German transcendental idealism and Skovoroda – of Ukrainian personalism. Both Kant and Skovoroda supported the philosophy of freedom. Skovoroda's philosophy can also be called the practical philosophy of dialogue, which is practical both in moral-practical sense, and in the linguistic-practical sense. In addition to this and similarly to Kant, he relied on the primacy of practical philosophy over theoretical philosophy.

At the first glance, however, the comparison with Kant is not in favor of Skovoroda. This is because Kant, as a protagonist and critic of the Enlightenment Mind and the founder of German transcendental idealism, had an advantage in many ways over the antique and even somewhat archaic, as of that time, paradigm of Skovoroda's philosophy of dialogue. Yet, this is only the first impression because Kant's concept, like the entire new European philosophy, was mostly a monologue marked not only by 'forgetting being,' but also by "forgetting dialogue," hence forgetting the original sources and foundations of philosophy itself.

After all, dialectics, which has a dialogical basis, becomes a monologue in the new European philosophy from Descartes to Hegel. The famous work by René Descartes, *Discours de la Methode*, reflects the reasoning of a solitary subject, and the prominent work by Friedrich Schleiermacher was called *Monologen*.⁵ Similarly, practical philosophy, having the praxis as a precondition associated with the pragma of speech and ethos, was gradually reduced to practice as technical-practical or goal-rational action of the monologue subject. Such reduction was reflected in the self-consciousness concept of Johan Gottlieb Fichte, and especially in the materialist philosophy of Marx's history. Social philosophy inspired by Weber's concept of "freedom from values" (*Wertfreiheit*), which included not only "freedom from evaluative judgments" but also "value (primarily ethical) neutrality" of social action and social institutions, is still part of the "epoch diagnosis" of contemporary society.

Thus, the tradition of dialogue in the new European philosophy is partly lost and "rehabilitated" again only in the late 19th and especially in the 20th centuries in various pragmatic bends: hermeneutic, linguistic, semiotic, pragmatic, and so on. This is what practical philosophy and the 21st century are concerned with when turning to the everyday practices of dialogue and moving its subject field from the realm of academic philosophy to the spheres that seem to be far away from philosophy, such as economics, politics, science, technology, etc. In particular, this applies also to the modern German

5 Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Monologen* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1978).

philosophy of discourse that is based on the foundations of the Christian idea of a community and (neo-) Socratic dialogue.

The discussion of the significance and relevance of Skovoroda's philosophy was launched by Petro Danilevskyi, who, in one of Skovoroda's biographies, mentioned that Skovoroda's writings "have no value for our time."⁶ Later, his assessment was criticized by Volodymyr Ern, who called Skovoroda "the first Russian philosopher", and especially by Dmytro Bahalii, who noted Skovoroda's "complete conformity between his teaching and life (taught as he lived)."⁷

For Skovoroda, philosophy, dialectics, and practice appealed to the primary origins, to the tradition of dialogue, namely – to the Socratic dialogue. It is not without reason that, when talking about Skovoroda's philosophy, people compare it to Socrates' philosophy and call Skovoroda the "Ukrainian Socrates." However, the points of contact between Skovoroda and Socrates are associated primarily with the Socratic principle of "know yourself"⁸ borrowed by Socrates from the Delphic oracle. This principle laid the foundation for reflexive philosophy of subjectivity when the question "What is the world?" in the ontological paradigm was replaced with the question "How and by which means can it be cognized?" in the mental paradigm. This principle was professed by Skovoroda, and it gave grounds for calling him the founder of Ukrainian personalism, as can be seen in numerous studies also by foreign researchers such as Maria Gracia Bartolini⁹ and Michal Tadeusz Handzel.¹⁰ However, more important, in my opinion, is the tradition of Socratic dialogue that, at first glance, appears in Skovoroda's times somewhat outdated against the background of the then monologue philosophy of consciousness with its sameness of thinking and being.

It should be mentioned that Skovoroda uses all three paradigms – ontological, mental, and communicative.¹¹ This methodology follows from his concept of three worlds. However, the statement about the paradigmatic unity requires additional attention, which is out of scope of this paper. In my article, I argue that it is Skovoroda's dialogical philosophy that plays the leading role in his research, in his life, and in his habitus. This is exactly what makes it relevant and significant ("valuable") today.

Skovoroda practices the dialogue that, in his case, appears in various forms – both in its ancient Greek and in ancient Roman manifestations. This is also an internal dialogue, and a dialogue in the form of a dispute, diatribe, as well as Socratic, elenctic

6 Dmytro Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof Hryhorii Skovoroda [Ukrainian Travelling Philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda]* (Kyiv: Obrii, 1992), 26.

7 Dmytro Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof*, 3.

8 I. Tabacnikov, *Skovoroda i Sokrat [Skovoroda and Socrates]* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1972), 134–42.

9 Mariia Bartolini, *Piznai samoho sebe. Neoplatonichni dzherela v tvorchosti Skovorody [Know Thyself. Neoplatonic Sources in Skovoroda's Works]* (Kyiv: Akadempriodyka, 2017).

10 Michael Handzel, *Teoria piznannia samoho sebe Hryhoriia Savycha Skovorody [Theory of Knowing Oneself of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda]* (Kyiv: Akadempriodyka, 2020).

11 Elisabeth von Erdmann, *Unähnliche Ähnlichkeit: die Onto-Poetik des ukrainischen Philosophen Hryhorii Skovoroda (1722–1794)* (Köln: Böhlau, 2005).

and maieutic dialogues. In his creative work, the dialogue is manifested in various literary genres – in poetic works, fables, and, of course, philosophy. For Skovoroda, the very concept of dialogue goes through several stages of development, which is reflected in the studies by the researchers of Socratic dialogue such as I. Ivanio and I. Tabachnikov. For instance, Ivanio, in his introductory article¹² for Hryhorii Skovoroda collection, describes Skovoroda's way to dialogical philosophy. He mentions that during the early period (the 1950-1960s), Skovoroda was writing mainly in the genres of poetry (songs, epigrams, and fables) and letters. It can be argued that this stage was, to a certain extent, limited by the monologue nature of his creative work. Later, Skovoroda began to write dialogue-parables and philosophical dialogues.

The participants of the dialogues written in the late 1960s-early 1970s are several – five or more – people who jointly seek answers to the question asked by the author. The author's position here can also be expressed by some interlocutors while others help to develop it or to highlight individual parts of it with possible doubts and objections. This is a kind of a polylogue, as it would be called in the late 20th century, in particular by Julia Kristeva.¹³ One can say that, using the method of philosophical elenctics, the author takes an asymmetric position, according to which the discussion of a thought was one of the means for the author to unfold his own position.

According to Ivanio, the dialogues of the 1980s differ from the earlier ones not only formally, in particular in terms of reducing the number of interlocutors to two participants based on polarization of their views. The point is that, despite the fact that the question about the truth was already answered for the author, it was important to bring the interlocutors to the answer through argumentation, and the elenctic method was applied here whereby the interlocutors argue to bring their position to the point when the statement contradicts itself, that is, in the language of modern transcendental pragmatics, to performative contradiction. As Ivanio points out, it caused the emergence of internal tension in them, sharpness of debate, and pathos of the author's reflexivity.¹⁴

However, it is important to note that such a dialogical nature of Skovoroda's method consisted in seeking the truth *together* with other people through argumentation – the truth that was also presented as a moral category. It is also necessary to emphasize the dialogical (communicative) nature of Skovoroda's habitus connected with his idea of *affinity* of the philosopher-disputant and the *affinity* of the philosopher-wanderer. "The nature and affinity means the innate God's favor and His secret law that rules over all creatures. Knowing that there is affinity between the Soul and the cause it is striving for, equivalence between Friend and Friend, and likeness between food and stomach. "The similar flows to the similar."¹⁵

12 I.V. Ivanio, *Hryhorii Skovoroda* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1983), 5–32.

13 Julia Kristeva, *Polilog* (Kyiv: Yunivers, 2005).

14 I. Ivanio, *Hryhorii Skovoroda* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1983), 24.

15 Hryhorii Skovoroda, "Razhovor, nazyvaiemyi alfavit, ili bukvar mira [A Conversation Called the Alphabet or the Book of the World]," in Skovoroda, Hryhorii. *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv [Complete Academic Collection of Works]* (Kharkiv: Vydavez Savchuk O.O., 2016).

Thus, “affinity” is not only related work, but “affinity” is the universal law of nature, the law of the Universe, and the “Kingdom of God and His truth present in the creatures.”¹⁶ In this case, we can talk about the ontological paradigm. A component of such affinity is “equivalence between Friend and Friend” that refers to friendship. Of course, in order to become aware of such affinity, one needs to know oneself. In this regard, the mental paradigm should be noted. However, discovering affinity in oneself is possible only together with other people. Hence, we are also talking about affinity as a category of inter-subjectivity and as a paradigm of dialogue. For Skovoroda, such affinity of the dialogic habitus was manifested in dialogic pedagogy where he followed also the Socratic method of maieutics without imposing his thoughts on people but helping them to think correctly, as well as the Socratic **elenctic reflective** method of thinking when the interlocutor gets into the traps of contradiction of his or her statements. It is also in line with the current trends of the dialogue pedagogy, communicative pedagogy, and discourse pedagogy.

I will note furthermore that the relevance of Skovoroda’s philosophy becomes especially obvious today, under the conditions of modern technological civilization. The fact remains that a very important aspect of his legacy (he was only inspired by ancient examples in this area) is that he has really challenged the consumption society, and the path of self-knowledge implied distinguishing between the true and seeming value of human life, refusal from everything that is superfluous and unimportant, harmonious relations with other people and the nature. And this is also a sign (an “indication”) of *affinity* that ultimately enables the true existence of the society in accordance with the laws of affinity, the “kingdom of God and His truth”: “It is evident that assiduous serving to God is the sweetest source of Peace, Happiness, and Wisdom. Let everyone know his Nature and try it, ‘Which is peasant to God.’ The society is the same as the Machine. In it, confusion happens when its parts fail to do what they were created for by their Craftsman.”¹⁷ Therefore, affinity is not only a category of inter-subjectivity, but also a category of sociality; affinity also means the principle of organization of the society.

However, special emphasis should be placed not only on the dialogue *per se*, but also on the dialogue related to the wandering nature of Skovoroda’s creative life, which became especially evident during the last decades of his work. This circumstance is connected largely to the fact that Skovoroda’s institutional problems were exacerbated, in particular in relations with the then church and school establishment – with the clergy and with pedagogical institutions, as a result of which he was actually forbidden to teach. Yet the main thing is that Skovoroda himself avoided such institutionalization, and it was manifested in his creative work as a philosopher-wanderer. Wandering was an important element of both his philosophy and his life, and ultimately his habitus, which I would also like to emphasize and which I would like to thematize. The fact is that the wandering nature of Skovoroda’s habitus takes his dialogues beyond the purely

16 Skovoroda, *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv*.

17 Skovoroda, *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv*.

epistemological boundaries, translating the dialogue into a practical, or rather moral-practical, plain.

It should be noted that the concept of habitus has recently become quite common, even trendy. Habitus means certain setting, manifestation, behavior, custom, and readiness. It is connected closely with such concepts as life outlook, life form, lifestyle, mentality, social character, etc., sometimes complementing and sometimes partially overlapping with each other.

One should also note that the word 'habitus' is of ancient Greek origin. It became widely used first in rhetoric in ancient Greece and ancient Rome. In particular, Quintilian was seeking to use his ideal of the "habitus of perfect human existence" to justify the oratorical spirit of the "habitus formation through knowledge."

Moreover, although this concept was used to some extent in the history of philosophy, it was not among the leading categories of philosophy and culture, moving gradually to the periphery of philosophical knowledge. Its reconstruction should be associated with the 20th century because only recently have the study of *topos* and symbolism of habitus regained the theoretical and practical significance.

The starting point in these studies is the thesis by an art historian, Erwin Panofsky, according to which certain elements of style, such as Gothic architecture, can be explained by the "mental habitus" of the epoch as they appear in other disciplines of the same epoch and are spread through schooling.¹⁸ Hence, the concept of habitus as a set of "symbolic forms" came to the forefront of research in the field of art history and cultural studies.

We attribute the philosophical and sociological reconstruction, interpretation, and application of this concept primarily to Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu. According to Elias, the concept of "social habitus" means certain habits and customs in the thoughts, feelings and actions that are common to a particular group, also forming a certain social structure of the individual.¹⁹ In *Sociology of Symbolic Forms*, Bourdieu defines habitus as a "system of internalized patterns' that make it possible to form all typical thoughts, perceptions, and actions of a particular culture, and only such."²⁰

It is furthermore important to mention that both Elias and Bourdieu did not view habitus as a specific project, conscious construction, or a result of target-rational action. Habitus is formed in the *topos* of inter-subjectivity, in the *topos* of communicative action. Therefore, we should once again emphasize the original meaning of this concept, according to Quintilian, who associated it with speech, in particular, with the art of rhetoric.

18 Erwin Panofsky, *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* (Latrobe, Pennsylvania: Archabbey Press, 1951), 35.

19 Norbert Elias, *Protses Tsyvilizatsii. Sotsiohenetychni i Psykhohenetychni Doslidzhennia [Process of Civilization. Socio-Genetic and Psycho-Genetic Research]* (Kyiv: Alternatyvy, 2003), 48.

20 Pierre Bourdieu, *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), 27.

In his *Topik*, Lothar Bornscheuer returned the habitus to its place, i.e. to the place of “rhetoric, where it came from.” The topic is interpreted as having the “habitus of argumentation” or “habitus of dispute.” *Topos* is a standard of the society’s internalized habitus of consciousness, language and/or behavior, a structural element of linguistic and social communication, a determinant of self-evidence dominating in the society, and a system of learning that is reproduced through traditions and conventions.²¹ In the *Sociology of Symbolic Forms*, Bourdieu – together with Bornscheuer’s *Topik* – also went from the history of art through the sociology of symbolic forms to the “habit of dispute.”

Such a dialogical nature formed the basis of both the wandering nature and the “habitus of dispute” of Skovoroda as a philosopher-wanderer and a philosopher-disputant. Therefore, Skovoroda as a philosopher was a supporter of not only the Socratic principle of self-knowledge, but also the principle of self-knowledge together and jointly with other people through a dialogue, which is philosophizing through dialogue. And this fact is also common for both Socrates and Skovoroda.

It should be mentioned that along with Hamlet, Faust, Don Quixote, and Don Juan, the image of the wanderer is perhaps one of the most striking images in the European culture – one can recall, first of all, Homer’s *Odyssey*. After all, journey is not only about discovering other horizons and self-affirmation, but it also means going beyond the banal reality of existence; it forms the basis of imagination, which, according to Arnold Gehlen, along with reason, creates the basis for formation of a human being, and it is also an important factor in anthropogenesis. An imaginary journey, a “journey of the mind”, gives rise to utopias, first – island, then – temporal, and finally, the “gestalts of spirit” in Hegel’s philosophy of history. Therefore, without utopias, there would be no European transcendentalism, which became one of the factors in European culture, especially the moral sphere – one can recall *Philosophie als ob* by Hans Vaihinger. Hence, we can talk about the emergence of “the moral in the spirit of imagination,” a component of which is the “spirit of wandering.”

This image appears both in *Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Travel* by Goethe, and in Thomas Mann’s *Adventures of Impostor Krull*. However, more interesting for our topic is the image of Knulp, depicted by Hermann Hesse in his book with the same title, *Knulp*. Knulp is a kind of rural philosopher-wanderer or sage-wanderer opposed by Hesse to a settled petty bourgeois who is mercenary-minded, purely practical, and rational. Knulp goes from house to house, plays musical instruments at village festivals, and talks to Bauer-peasants about life and being.

Peasants are happy to offer shelter to Knulp, warm and feed him. Hesse emphasized that none of them showed any dissatisfaction or even irritation caused by the feeling that from time to time they were visited by a freeloader who did not want to work, “hanging out here, preventing them from working with his idle talk.” On the contrary, talking to Knulp was a natural need of their lives since Knulp took them out

21 Lothar Bornscheuer, *Topik. Zur Struktur der gesellschaftlichen Einbildungskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976), 98.

of the world of banal, stale petty-bourgeois everyday life, and thus transcended their existence, raising “eternal” (worldview, philosophical) issues in the conversations.

Likewise, Ukrainian culture had a similar tradition. In almost every village, there was a man, a village sage or a philosopher-wanderer who “pestered” peasants with his questions, taking their lives beyond the horizon of everyday life full of hard work and thinking about daily bread. It could be a gray-haired wise old man talking about various topics: not only mundane, but also worldview and philosophical issues. It could be a wandering philosopher, one of the students who did not complete study (clerk or teacher) going from village to village, staying in village houses, and having philosophical conversations. This phenomenon was quite common, and the position of such a wandering philosopher was quite respectable.

This is what Skovoroda was like, both as a wanderer and as a philosopher. We can agree with Volodymyr Shikaruk's statement here that Skovoroda was a “great educator of peasants”²² adding only that he was a highly educated man of the European scale well versed in European philosophy and culture who knew the texts of many European philosophers, commented and translated them while formulating certain principles of translation. In this regard, I would only like to recall one of his remarks – the guidelines for translations into one's native language. More specifically, when referring to August Buchner he wrote, “Hence, when we translate something from Latin, we should always take into account the traditions and properties of the language without being limited to conveying the sense and meaning of a word.”²³ Therefore, we are talking not only about adequate interpretation of the meaning, form and content of some piece of work, but also about their adequate reproduction by means of the language, into which the work is translated.

Being a sage-wanderer, he travelled through different countries and cultures, travelling both physically and mentally. In particular, Mykhailo Kovalynskyy describes this wandering character of Skovoroda as follows:

Under various circumstances, he stayed at different people's places – sometimes, the location appealed to him, and sometimes people invited him to stay for a while because of his Minerva; he did not have permanent dwelling anywhere considering himself to be a stranger on Earth in all senses of this word.²⁴

Of interest is Kovalynskyy's remark that people invited him “because of his *Minerva*” i.e. because of his wisdom, which means they expected not only communication and conversations, but also philosophical comprehension of the

22 V. Shynkaruk, “Velykyi selianskyi prosvitytel [Great Peasant Educator],” *Filosofska Dumka* 5 (1972): 28.

23 Skovoroda, *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv*, 1331.

24 Mykhailo Kovalynskii, “Zhyzn Hryhoriia Skovorody,” in Skovoroda, Hryhorii. *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv [Complete Academic Collection of Works]* (Kharkiv: Vydavez Savchuk O.O., 2016), 1343.

world. Skovoroda walked from one village to another talking to ordinary people in their language without blending into their being. Characterizing the subjects of these conversations, Kovalynskyi added:

Sometimes he lived with some of them or with other absolutely disliking their vices, but only in order, over some time, to talk to them, to address them and to reason for involving them inconspicuously into knowing themselves, into loving the truth and rejecting the evil, and to make them love virtue using the example of life.²⁵

And despite different attitudes to him – “many criticized him, and some praised, while everyone wanted to see him” – all in all, he was loved.

He convinced people that the true happiness of a human being was not in wealth or bodily pleasure, vanity or ambition, but in a harmonious combination of what meets the spiritual requirements of a human, and what serves the interests of the general, common Wellbeing. For this, one needs unity, Divine Companionship, Wisdom, and Benevolence. Wisdom here is presented as a metaphor of “sharply-far-sighted eagle’s eye,” while benevolence is that of “Fortitudinous Hands.” We come across these metaphorical symbols in *The Conversation of Five Travelers about True Happiness in Life*.²⁶ They are also mentioned in the *Kharkiv Fables* and other works.

Of course, such dialogue journeys had nothing to do with entertainment or laziness, but they required considerable physical, psychological, and intellectual effort. Both Knulp and Skovoroda were not always satisfied with their situation often feeling loneliness, depression, and frustration, which was also manifested in the dialogues. However, the important fact is that Skovoroda’s dialogues were not only a literary device, genre, or a philosophical “method,” but they were related to life itself and communication with people, whence the folk wisdom came. Characterizing such a dialogical nature of Skovoroda, Myroslav Popovych noted the following:

However, Skovoroda’s real philosophical activities consisted not so much in the writing of works as in the oral dissemination of his ideas and their promotion through the very chain of his life. Sometimes he wanted to talk so much that he would approach the first person he could see on the road, sometimes a peasant returning from the field or sometimes a young woman walking with buckets to the well, and start some commonplace conversation that ended in a fiery speech with him being surrounded by a crowd.²⁷

25 Skovoroda, *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv*, 1365–1366.

26 Skovoroda, *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv*, 504.

27 Myroslav Popovych, “Prostota istyny’ u Skovorody [Skovoroda’s ‘Simplicity of Truth’],” *Filosofska dumka* 5 (1972): 56.

And this makes him very similar to Socrates.

Skovoroda also spoke the language of ordinary people. After all, not only did he have a good understanding of the folk culture, but he also had the knowledge of folk art, proverbs, sayings, fables, songs, etc. The folk culture formed the habitus, to which Skovoroda himself belonged while transcending this habitus beyond its borders. Therefore, Popovych's assumption, which was confirmed in Makhnovets's research, that Skovoroda's literary and philosophical dialogues were a stylized 'high' reproduction in a refined literary form of real conversations of the philosopher with ordinary interlocutors is extremely important, as the lively intonation of a dispute and a monologue-sermon can be heard in these works²⁸. It should be added here that such dialogues also created new everyday practices, which were based on dialogical practices of truth-seeking.

One more aspect should be mentioned here. It has become a kind of stereotype to call Skovoroda the founder of the Ukrainian *philosophy of heart* and to consider the heart almost the basis of the Ukrainian mentality and habitus contrasting this feature to the Western European rationality. Of course, the philosophy of heart is not a purely Ukrainian "invention." We can recall Max Scheler, not to mention the German mystics, whose works were well known to Skovoroda. Heart is a metaphor that, so to speak, connects in one bundle the intuitions rooted in the outlook on life, or habitus, representing certain interiorization of them. These propose certain self-evidence of our common life experience and do not require thematization and substantiation. One cannot but mention Aristotle's dictum in *Topik* saying that, when someone doubts whether he should love his parents, he needs condemnation, not evidence.

However, these intuitions are not sufficient when it comes to problematizing this experience through new experience that requires communicative rationalization of the living world, or what Habermas calls the "habitus of reason,"²⁹ which intersects with the "habitus of dispute" and the "habitus of argumentation." An important role here is played by philosophy as the "keeper of rationality." And since today the mind appears in such concepts as "communication, argumentation, and discourse," it is a question of the dialogic-discursive mind. From the point of view of this concept, it can be argued that in conversations with people Skovoroda, through his educational activities, completed their daily habitus to the habitus of mind.

To which extent can we talk about such habitus of mind as the habitus of the Ukrainians? It is known that Dmytro Chyzhevskyi considered *emotionalism* and *sentimentalism*, *sensitivity* and *lyricism*, *individualism* and *pursuit of freedom*, etc. to be the features of the Ukrainian national character and, consequently, of the habitus.³⁰

28 Myroslava Popovych, *Skovoroda: filozofia svobody [Skovoroda: Philosophy of Freedom]* (Maisterna Bilezkyh, 2007), 150–51.

29 Jürgen Habermas, *Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

30 Dmytro Chyzhevskyi, "Narysy z istorii filozofii na Ukraini [Essays on the History of Philosophy in Ukraine]," in Chyzhevskyi, Dmytro, *Filosofski tvory: u 4 tomah [Philosophical Works in 4 Volumes]*, vol. 1 (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2005), 15.

However, Chyzhevskiy emphasized that these features were obvious, and yet too general, which was due to a certain incompleteness not only of the science of “characterology” but also of the Ukrainian nation itself, which still had to wait for its “great philosopher.”³¹ Yet, thanks to the Skovoroda, these features are often perceived as pre-determined non-historical features of the Ukrainian national character (mentality) in general, which has become something self-evident and included in textbooks and manuals on the Ukrainian philosophy and culture. It looks like the habitus of mind is not typical for the Ukrainians.

Of course, habitus is a rather conservative and inertial structure of symbolic forms, which changes rather slowly. Moreover, it is not created and does not change purposefully and rationally. However, such features should not be considered to be extra-historical or even trans-historical. They are historical categories of culture formed by the living world and fixed with symbolic forms of the habitus. Such a phenomenon can be seen, for example, in Western neo-European rationality, which developed historically under the influence of Protestant ethos, philosophy of enlightenment, and transcendental idealism having formed the institutional structure of society.

Of course, I am not too optimistic to claim that the “habitus of reason” has already fully developed in the Ukrainian society. After all, the “public use of reason” is not among the main value preferences of Ukrainians that are again habitually fixed.³² It would be sufficient to look at the habitus of various political talk shows, in which the discussion is carried out within the *topos* of striving for power and strategic rationality, which lacks argumentative discourse and respect for the political opponent. Let alone election campaigns and the elections themselves when people vote not with their mind but with their “heart,” and the political sphere is reduced to a “friend-enemy” scheme, in which the political opponent is not a partner in dialogue-discourse, but an enemy to be defeated, at best – the object of manipulation by a political technologist. However, I am not such a pessimist to think that the habitus of mind is as far away as the Moon for the Ukrainians.

After all, such habitus of mind is to some extent rooted in our tradition, in particular in the enlightenment, a bright representative of which Skovoroda was. And just as enlightenment at a certain stage of development can become (or not become) a structural element of any culture or of any society turning into a “sociological enlightenment” (Nikolas Luhmann), so can rationalization of the world, and therefore also formation of the habitus of mind be also carried out at a certain historical stage. And I do not believe that the Ukrainians have no prospects in this respect because they have such a “national character” and such a habitus.

We can say that enlightenment did not complete in Ukraine, nor the “habit of mind” did although they were relatively unfinished in the West as well (K.-M. Mayer-

31 Chyzhevskiy, “Narysy z istorii filosofii na Ukraini,” 11.

32 L. Bevzenko, *Styli zhyzni perehodnogo obshchestva [Lifestyles of Transitional Society]* (Kyiv: Institut soziologii NAN Ukrainy, 2008), 52.

Abih), as an unfinished project of modernism (Habermas). And we come across such habitus of mind in the case of Skovoroda. Let us refer to his fable, *Head and Torso*, where the head shows that it is, to put it mildly, “not the worst part of the body,” retorting wittily the body’s haughtiness: “I am the eye for your light.”³³

In Kant’s philosophy, the “fact of the mind” (*Faktum der Vernunft*) was important, while in Skovoroda’s philosophy it was the “fact of the heart.” And although Skovoroda’s “fact of the heart” takes precedence over the “fact of the mind,” it can hardly be said that there was a radical contradiction between these two “facts” in his philosophy. It was more likely that Skovoroda, being Kant’s contemporary, was a critic of reason in the sense of elucidating its limits. However, Skovoroda criticized reason not from the standpoint of philosophy of consciousness, but from the standpoint of the philosophy of dialogue as a reflexive enlightenment of mind using an elenctic way of thinking through a dialogue. The priority of “heart” indicates that Skovoroda’s philosophy is about the primacy of moral and practical reason over theoretical and technical-practical, which ultimately also makes his practical philosophy similar to that of Kant.

And we have to continue and develop this tradition by reconstructing it taking into account modern trends of practical philosophy and discursive practices existing in the world. Therefore, this is not only our problem, but also an issue and a task for the rest of the world. This is because the humanity still has to master the dialogue at all levels: interpersonal, intercultural, interstate, inter-historical, etc. In the same way, based on the dialogue, we will have to look for means and ways of subordinating technical reason to moral and practical reason.

This process takes place in modern practical philosophy, in particular in discursive ethics, where, in fact, the habitus of mind as a practical or moral-ethical mind should be formed. This process also takes place in modern everyday practices of *neo-Socratic* dialogue as public application of reason reconstructed in the 20th century by Leonard Nelson and used by the representatives of the Berlin transcendental pragmatics.³⁴ The tradition of holding world conferences on neo-Socratic dialogue, where the experience of its application in economics, politics, pedagogy, and even in the penitentiary spheres is highlighted, is also indicative here.

Today, more than ever, we need a dialogue: a dialogue between the government and civil society, a dialogue among political parties, government and business, scientific experts, and public organizations, among citizens, and so on. It can be said that today dialogue is almost the most used concept in practical, social and political philosophy given a huge number of all kinds of public events taking place in the world: conferences, seminars, round tables, public hearings, and other discussions. It is due to the need and demand to discuss various issues that have to be addressed

33 Skovoroda, *Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv*, 158.

34 Horst Gronke, *Sokratychnyi dialog. Dyskursyvna etyka yak suspilna etyka vidpovidalnosti i ii dialogichna praktyka [Socrates Dialogues. Discourse Ethics as Social Ethics of Responsibility and its Dialogical Practice]* (Kyiv: Etna, 2006), 36–51.

urgently. Recently, people have even started talking about a “dialogue of civilization,” and, in particular, it was discussed at the last World Philosophical Congress in Beijing in 2018.

In my article about Lesia Ukrainka, I mentioned the use of Socratic dialogue in her dramatic work, as well as the dialogue of other representatives of the Ukrainian culture. The dialogue tradition is largely related to our culture in general; it is “affined” with it. After all, we have someone to learn dialogue from – Skovoroda, the Ukrainian Socrates.

Thus, we also need to practice and develop neo-Socratic dialogue based on the modern European trend of “rehabilitation of practical philosophy” (the primacy of dialogical-practical reason over monologue-theoretical and technical), and the tradition of Skovoroda’s dialogue *reconstructing* it in the context of modern realities, that is with due regard to the need and necessity of internal dialogue of the individual and dialogue as “public application of reason.” Therefore, we need to initiate and develop a *neo-Skovoroda* dialogue teaching ourselves and all others not only to be able to listen and hear each other, but also to practice the “public use of reason,” i. e. critical thinking in argumentative dialogue to uphold the habitus of reason in the society.

Finally, I would like to mention that the activities organized to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda have not only scientific, cultural, and educational, but also ideological significance in our national liberation struggle. In particular, these activities should be aimed against the attempts to appropriate the legacy of the great philosopher by the ideologists of the so-called “Russian world” (like, for instance, the statement “Skovoroda was the first Russian philosopher”), against using his name for promotion of such quasi-scientific concepts as “fraternal nations” or “same nation,” etc. It should be emphasized once again that Skovoroda is a Ukrainian philosopher who is more contemporary than ever!

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