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# THE MAN IN TECHNOSPHERE

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## Philosophy of Hryhorii Skovoroda: Nature and Humanity

**Purpose.** The article aims to reconstruct the course of Hryhorii Skovoroda's philosophical thought, which will reveal the context in the formation of his idea of a caring attitude toward nature. **Theoretical basis.** The theoretical and methodological background of the article was formed by the basic ideas of researchers on environmental issues, as well as the developments of representatives of the Kyiv worldview-anthropological school, related to the research of the Ukrainian philosopher's teachings. **Originality.** Being a contemporary and witness in forming and implementing the guidelines for the complete transformation of the natural world, H. Skovoroda makes a brilliant attempt to outline its alternative. Its substantive premise is the thesis about the identity of God and nature, and the forms of categorical expression are the concepts of "gratitude" and "ingratitude". For the philosopher, nature as expediency is a model and standard of human behavior, which should imitate nature (a metaphor of a teacher and a doctor as servants of nature). For H. Skovoroda, the thesis about human gratitude to God means a) the priority for a man of higher meanings accessible through self-knowledge, and b) concern for preserving nature as a creation of God. **Conclusions.** The article argues that H. Skovoroda, as a contemporary and witness in the formation of the guideline for the complete subjugation of nature, thinks about its alternative. Addressing the context of its formation allows us to reveal its main principles. On the pages of the dialogue "The Grateful Erodus", he reminds men that as a part of nature, they have certain obligations to it. The fundamental categories from H. Skovoroda here are "gratitude" and "ingratitude". The forms of expressing gratitude include the idea that nature as the embodiment of worthwhileness is the legislator of the human way of life. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, when humanity is looking for that categorical imperative of modernity that will allow us to preserve nature, it is useful and fruitful to turn to the heritage of the Ukrainian philosopher of the 18th century, H. Skovoroda. He is one of those brilliant predecessors whose legacy has significant heuristic potential. The issue is that in the process of sensemaking the history of humanity in the 20th and early 21st centuries, which demonstrates the consequences of overestimating human activity, H. Skovoroda gives us the key to a deeper understanding of modernity.

*Keywords:* Skovoroda; nature; man; God; philosophical anthropology; gratitude; ingratitude

### Introduction

Today, humanity is faced with the need for deep socio-economic, political, cultural, and humanitarian reforms caused by large-scale globalization processes. The singularity of the latter is associated with fundamental changes in the ways of existence of nature and men. The rooting of the acute contradictions of the modern civilization space in excessive human activity is becoming increasingly obvious. Therefore, humanity must reconsider its consumer-utilitarian attitude to the natural environment and change the character of the interaction between nature and man. The negative consequences of the humanitarian crisis, the decline of universal human moral values, the prevalence of mass culture, advertising and propaganda of a comfortable lifestyle, the transformation of education into a service sector, the increase in the complex of environmental threats and natural disasters generate a sense of anxiety and confusion in the public consciousness of our contemporaries. Simultaneously, the acuteness of this problem

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awakens and heightens interest in understanding alternative forms of interaction between nature and man. The task of critical re-evaluation of that approach to transform the world, which is associated with the philosophy of the New Age, comes to the fore. Although, in the time of H. Skovoroda the negative consequences of this guideline were not yet as obvious as today, his enquiring mind offered its alternative to the man's peremptory intervention in the natural environment.

In this regard, addressing sources of the national historical and philosophical heritage is becoming extremely relevant. The works of the classics of Ukrainian philosophy, in particular H. Skovoroda, are essential to us in the context of the development of natural sciences and humanities. It is about rethinking the national historical and philosophical achievements, which for a long time were out of sight and were not included in solving modern problems of Ukrainian existence. It is obvious that each generation must give its answers and offer new solutions to the "eternal questions" that history, civilization, and era pose to it. Only relying on historical experience and philosophical wisdom of previous generations, we can offer adequate approaches to solving the problem of the relationship between nature and men. It is undeniable that the present situation requires the expansion of the historical and philosophical methodological arsenal, the addition of the dehumanized scientific picture of the world with modern spiritual and practical forms of knowledge that will give us the opportunity to more deeply understand the contradictions that occur in the relations between nature and men in the current civilizational context.

Modern methodological approaches to the philosophical heritage of H. Skovoroda are considered in the works of famous domestic philosophers and researchers: D. Bahalii (1992), V. Bova and L. Levchenko (2022), E. Hlywa (2006), V. Horskyi (1996), O. B. Kiz, O. M. Kikinezhdii, and Y. Z. Vasylykevych (2022), O. Kravchenko (2007), I. Ohorodnyk and V. Ohorodnyk (1999), M. Popovych (2007), Y. Stratii (1997), L. Ushkalov (2017), N. Fedorak (2020), D. Chyzhevskiy (1992), T. Shevchuk (2021), etc.

The research of Michal-Tadeusz Handzel (2019) (Lodz, Poland), who studies the features of the Christian philosophy of H. Skovoroda and its influence on European natural philosophical thought, deserves special attention. The works of Maria Grazia Bartolini (2017) (Milan, Italy) are of great importance, who studies the formation and development of Skovorodynology in Italy and France, its connection with certain trends in European philosophy, and conducts a comparative analysis of the philosophical and educational heritage of H. Skovoroda with the teachings of representatives in the French and Italian Enlightenment.

The prerequisite for a modern assessing potential of H. Skovoroda's teachings on the problem of nature conservation is a schematic familiarizing with the methods of interpreting the origins of the ecological crisis in philosophical literature today. We are talking about widespread stereotypes regarding the technocratic orientation of philosophical teachings of the Modern Age, including Rene Descartes. Accordingly, it would seem that the main condition for saving nature is the rejection of R. Descartes and the key provisions in his philosophical teachings. In the philosophical meditations of the 20th and early 21st centuries, several publications have appeared, the authors of which critically rethink the widespread ideas about the legitimacy of excessive human activity. These are thorough studies by Vittorio Hösle (2003) and Hans Jonas (2001). At least today, not all theses of their publications seem convincing. This implies a clearly negative attitude towards the idea about the direction of theoretical searches in modern philosophy, in particular R. Descartes.

However, research in recent decades, including that of domestic historians of philosophy, provides sufficient grounds for an objective analysis of R. Descartes's legacy. This is a profound rethinking of the Cartesian doctrine in the context of the 20th century by Anatolii Malivskiy (2019), entitled "Unknown Descartes: Anthropological Dimension of Rene Descartes' Philosophical Searching". The key ideas of this work include, firstly, the thesis about the importance of the inquiry into the anthropological project for the philosophy of the Modern Age. Here it is worth considering the opinion of modern researchers of the great Frenchman's philosophical heritage, which is that it is not so much a pure philosophy reduced to the functional features of science, but a synthetic combination of science, religion, and art. Secondly, an exceptionally valuable conclusion in A. Malivskiy's monograph is a statement about the importance of the idea concerning the close connection between men and God for the European way of philosophizing. Both of these points let the researcher capture the ambiguity of the basic intention in the philosophy of the Modern Age, which allows us to remove from R. Descartes's invectives regarding his direct involvement in the substantiation and justification of violence against nature (Malivskiy, 2019).

As for the teachings of H. Skovoroda, we also find the above-mentioned idea of the close connection between men and God. Here it is one of the prerequisites for attempting to understand an alternative to the idea of violence against nature.

### **Purpose**

To follow the course of H. Skovoroda's philosophical thought, aimed at substantiating the idea of a careful attitude of men to nature and to identify those methodological principles and concepts that provide a theoretical opportunity to regulate the relationship between nature and men on humanistic principles.

In what context do the main principles of a careful attitude to nature arise in the heritage of H. Skovoroda?

### **Statement of basic materials**

As is known, the main themes of H. Skovoroda's philosophical meditations were problems related to the study of the general laws in the natural world, the cognitive capabilities of the human mind, the moral and ethical content of human life, and the religious-spiritual communication of men with God. He is convinced that exactly his philosophical teaching gives a person the opportunity for self-realization, namely, the human heart to achieve nobility, the spirit – strength, and the will – invincibility. His teaching is rightly called philosophical anthropology because the central categories of the thinker include the concepts of "true man", "real man", and the meaning, goodness, truth, and beauty of his/her being. Hryhorii Skovoroda connects the self-sufficiency of men with their sensual and passionate component, which they disclose with the help of the concept of "heart". He defends the thesis that it is the thought related to the heart that is the main component of human nature:

...eye, ear, tongue, hands, feet, and our entire external body itself does

not act in anything by itself. But all of it is enslaved by our thoughts.

Thought, our mistress, is in continuous excitement day and night. It

thinks, advises, defines, forces. And our foreskin, like domesticated cattle, involuntarily follows it. So, you see that thought is our main point and centre. And that is why it is often called the heart. Therefore, not our outer *flesh*, but our *thought* is our main *person*. We are in it. And it exists through us. (Skovoroda, 2005a, pp. 156-157)

Thus, H. Skovoroda set priorities in interpreting self-knowledge as knowledge of one's own heart as a human essence.

At the center of his philosophical and anthropological concept, H. Skovoroda places the idea of God. It not only gives his theory a holistic appearance but also indicates the root causes of all that exist as the basis for explaining the unity of the world. As is rightly noted in the research literature, H. Skovoroda often refers to biblical plots and dogmas in his texts, offering his own interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. For him, the Bible is the main book of life wisdom, which brings a person closer to the knowledge of the divine essence, helps to understand and find the goal, purpose and true meaning of life, encourages one to find one's own worldview guidelines in the process of comprehending life priorities. In Skovoroda's texts, one can find many vivid quotes that confirm these thoughts. For example, in the dialogue "Narcissus. A word about that: know yourself" one of the interlocutors rhetorically declares to the opponent: "Doesn't God hold everything together? Is he not the head and all in all?..." (Skovoroda, 2005a, p. 161). Emphasizing the key role of the idea of God as the primary cause of nature, the world, and all that exists, all vital and objective forms of being, H. Skovoroda in his work "The Alphabet of Peace" emphasizes the identity in the content of the God and nature concepts. This is discussed in the dialogue "A Conversation Among Five Travelers Concerning Life's True Happiness" where one of the interlocutors in philosophical discourse, having considered all the contexts in which the name of God is used, eloquently remarks: "Why then should He not be called "Nature"? In my own opinion it would be impossible to find a more important and seemlier name for God than this one. *Natura* is a Latin word. We call it nature or essence" (Skovoroda, 2005a, p. 330).

Emphasizing the identity in the content of the God and nature concepts, the philosopher focuses on the absoluteness of their way of existing, that is, they have the status of eternity – having no beginning, no end, they have always been and always will be. A person, as a finite being, can approach them only through self-knowledge as the knowledge of God in her/himself. Hryhorii Skovoroda (2005a) confidently says that "he who has seen the main point inside himself... – the Kingdom of God – he who has known himself, has found the living in the dead, the light in the darkness, like a diamond in a swamp and like the Gospel woman an imperial in household garbage" (p. 415).

And since for the Ukrainian thinker, the concepts of God and nature are identical, he voices ideas about nature that go far beyond the mechanistic understanding of nature widespread in his time. The latter for him is the bearer of expediency, which is convincingly confirmed by the words of H. Skovoroda (2005a): "Nature is the prime cause and impelling force of everything" (p. 419). Realizing the fundamental difference between the concept of nature in a broad sense,

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which is identical to God, and the image of nature that existed in his contemporary natural science, the philosopher distinguishes them as visible and invisible nature, a true and illusory picture of reality.

The most consistent and complete coverage of the theory of "two natures" was made by H. Skovoroda in his later works. He convincingly shows how one nature differs from the other and finds criteria for determining their differences. The essential differences between natures are determined by their relation to time and eternity. The first nature is eternal, therefore it gives life to other objects and phenomena, which by their essence are called to reflect only fleeting, easily disappearing moments of being. "The whole world – according to H. Skovoroda (2005a) – consists of two natures: one – is visible, the other – is invisible. The visible nature is called the creature, and the invisible is called God" (p. 141). The visible nature includes external, material manifestations of being, the invisible – internal, spiritual ones. "This invisible nature, or God, permeates and calls all creatures; it has always been, is, and will be everywhere. For example, the human body is visible, but the penetrating and holding mind is not visible" (Skovoroda, 2005a, pp. 141-142). The physical world has many manifestations of its visibility, each of which has its given name, or more precisely, its own name "for example: substance or matter, earth, flesh, shadow, etc." (Skovoroda, 2005a, p. 142). The internal, true nature of all existence emerges through the objective-material, bodily, external-sensible visibility. For our research, the fact that the above-mentioned essential difference is important for him concerning the person her/himself is of fundamental significance. The assessment of his/her truth for him is based on the characteristics of his/her inner world.

Every man is composed of two principles or natures opposing and fighting each other: one celestial, another low, that is to say one eternal and another decaying. Therefore, in every person there are two demons or angels, that is to say the messengers and ambassadors of their kings: a good angel and an evil angel, a keeper and a destroyer, one peaceful, another rebellious, one of them an angel of light, another – an angel of darkness... (Skovoroda, 2005a, p. 297)

Among the undeniable merits of H. Skovoroda in the process of considering human nature is the idea of the significance of the spiritual dimensions in physical nature. Agreeing with the religious thesis about the one God as the eternal source of the spiritual, he implies the following ways of defining it: Spirit, Lord, King, Father, Mind, Truth. Synonymous philosophical categories such as "universal mind", "absolute", "necessity", and "law" are close to them in meaning. It is difficult to resist the temptation to quote the thinker's own words:

This most indulgent nature, or spirit, keeps the whole world in motion, as if the mechanical dexterity of the clock mechanism on the tower, and,

following the example of a caring father, is itself the being of every creature. He himself inspires, nourishes, commands, fixes, protects, and at his own will, which is called the universal law or statute, again turns it into coarse matter or swamp, and we call it death. (Skovoroda, 2005a, p. 142)

What principles lie at the heart of H. Skovoroda's teachings about nature? What is the alternative nature of his position regarding the approach to transforming the world that was typical of this period?

It is important to note that the above approach is unacceptable for a Ukrainian thinker, since a) the tasks of philosophy are related to self-knowledge and self-realization for him and b) because, as we saw earlier, a person is a part of nature for him. Quite eloquent in this context is the definition by H. Skovoroda of the natural world as a macrocosm, and of a person, who is a part of nature, as a microcosm. And since for the Ukrainian philosopher nature and God are identical, the very intention of an acquisitive attitude towards natural matter and violence against it is unacceptable. It is appropriate to draw attention to the important circumstance for us that H. Skovoroda distanced himself from the position of his contemporaries, who did not see any risks and dangers in the selfish use of nature, and called it ingratitude. His position – the ideal of man's attitude towards the world of nature as towards God – he called gratitude. This means that man can and should perceive the world and treat it as a bearer of the heart, that is, as a passionate being. Concretizing this thesis, H. Skovoroda emphasizes the importance of wonder and reverence for the world of nature as the embodiment of miracles and mystery.

Although, the era of H. Skovoroda did not know the modern acuteness of environmental issues, the brilliant insight of philosophical thought allowed him to feel this problem and outline an alternative to the idea of violence against nature. We mean his idea about the importance of distinguishing two opposite ways of relating to nature, which are designated as "gratitude" and "ingratitude". They are key in one of his dialogues, which has the poetic title "The Grateful Erodus". It is worth noting that in the medieval emblems, Erodus symbolized nobility, gratitude, and love of God. It is important to note that the main idea of this work is expressed in the question – how can and should a person be grateful to God? It is pertinent to mention that nature here is the embodiment of expediency and a role model. The widely known words of H. Skovoroda about the fact that one should not teach an apple tree to bear apples are the forms of manifestation of this idea. Another illustration of the above idea is the thesis that a teacher and a doctor should be servants of nature:

When all is built by the wise and blessed nature, is it not the only one that  
heals and teaches? Everything is successful when nature leads the way.  
Just do not interfere with it, and if you can, remove obstacles, as if clearing  
the way for it: truly, it will do everything cleanly and properly... A teacher

or a doctor is not a teacher and a doctor, they are only servants of nature,

the only true healer and teacher. (Skovoroda, 2005b, pp. 108-109)

There are many more examples of the inquiring mind of the great Ukrainian thinker connected with the denial of the pragmatic orientation in the philosophy of his time. Resorting to the figurative expression of his thoughts, H. Skovoroda writes about it as a philosophy of the stomach and the belly, for which a limit must be set for any unnecessary excess, that cannot be satisfied with anything. After all, the loss of measure never leads to good.

Daily bread is given by the heavenly Father to all living beings. Be content with little. Do not desire unnecessary and superfluous. People sail across the sea not for what is necessary, but for what is superfluous.

From the unnecessary and superfluous – all kinds of difficulties, all kinds of destruction. (Skovoroda, 2005b, p. 113)

A grateful person always knows where to stop and limit his demands.

Thus, being firmly convinced of the importance for a person to express gratitude to God for the creation of the world and humanity itself, the Ukrainian philosopher H. Skovoroda emphasizes the necessity of minimizing one's needs and living under the laws of nature, which serve as the foundation for human self-knowledge.

### **Originality**

The article reveals a humanistic attempt to create an alternative concept of man's attitude to nature, in contrast to the guidelines of the New Age, aimed at complete mastery and subjugation of the natural environment. Hryhorii Skovoroda proceeds from his fundamental postulate about the identity of God and nature and the categorical concepts of human essence – "gratitude" and "ingratitude". The Ukrainian philosopher understands nature as a divine given, and a man as its part, therefore human activity should not contradict the laws of nature and go beyond the limits of a reasonable attitude towards it and cause it harm. In his concept, H. Skovoroda argued the priority of the thesis about the indispensable gratitude of man to God, which was based on the understanding of the higher meanings of human existence, to the realization of which man can rise thanks to self-knowledge and the need to care about the protection of nature as a creation of God.

### **Conclusions**

The article argues that, as a contemporary and an eyewitness to the formation of the orientation towards the complete subjugation of nature, H. Skovoroda is thinking about its alternative. Addressing the context of the formation of H. Skovoroda's position allowed us to identify his basic principles outlined in the pages of the dialogue "The Grateful Erodus". The author of the dialogue reminds us that a person, as a part of nature, has both the ability to

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transform it at one's discretion and to bear certain obligations. The fundamental categories here are "gratitude" and "ingratitude". The philosopher includes the idea that nature, as the embodiment of expediency, is the legislator of the human way of life as a form of gratitude. Today, at the beginning of the 21st century, when humanity is looking for that categorical imperative of modernity that will allow us to preserve nature, it is useful and fruitful to turn to the heritage of the Ukrainian philosopher of the 18th century H. Skovoroda as one of those brilliant predecessors whose legacy has significant heuristic potential. The point is that in the process of understanding the history of humanity in the 20th and early 21st centuries, which demonstrates the consequences of an overestimation of human activity, Hryhorii Skovoroda can be a source of valuable ideas.

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## Філософія Григорія Сковороди: природа і людина

**Мета.** У статті передбачено реконструювати хід філософської думки Г. Сковороди, що дасть можливість виявити контекст становлення його ідеї турботливого ставлення до природи. **Теоретичний базис.** Теоретико-методологічну основу статті склали базові ідеї дослідників екологічної проблематики, а також розробки представників Київської світоглядно-антропологічної школи, пов'язані з дослідженням учення українського філософа. **Наукова новизна.** Будучи сучасником і свідком становлення та реалізації настанови на повне перетворення світу природи, Г. Сковорода здійснив геніальну спробу окреслити її альтернативу. Її змістовною передумовою є теза про тотожність Бога і природи, а формами категоріального вираження – поняття "вдячність" і "невдячність". Для філософа природа як доцільність є взірцем та еталоном поведінки людини, яка має наслідувати природу (метафора вчителя та лікаря як служителів природи). Для Г. Сковороди теза про вдячність людини Богу означає а) пріоритетність для людини вищих смислів, які доступні у формі самопізнання, та б) турботу про збереження природи як творіння Бога. **Висновки.** У статті аргументовано, що Г. Сковорода як сучасник і свідок формування настанови на повне підкорення природи

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задумується над її альтернативою. Звертання до контексту її формування дозволяє нам виявити його основні принципи. На сторінках діалогу "Благодарний Еродій" він нагадує людині про те, що як частина природи вона має перед нею певні зобов'язання. Основоположними категоріями Г. Сковороди тут є "вдячність" і "невдячність". До форм виявлення вдячності належить ідея про те, що природа як втілення доцільності є законодавцем людського способу життя. Сьогодні, на початку XXI ст., коли людство шукає той категоричний імператив сучасності, який дозволить зберегти природу, корисним і плідним є звертання до спадщини українського філософа XVIII ст. Г. Сковороди. Він є одним із тих геніальних попередників, спадщина якого має значний евристичний потенціал. Ідеться про те, що в процесі осмислення історії людства XX – початку XXI ст., яка є демонстрацією наслідків завищеної оцінки людської активності, Г. Сковорода дає нам ключ до більш глибокого розуміння сучасності.

*Ключові слова:* Сковорода; природа; людина; Бог; філософська антропологія; вдячність; невдячність

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