

PHILOSOPHICAL SCIENCES

VIRTUE, SELF-KNOWLEDGE, AND THE GOOD LIFE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HRYHORII SKOVORODA

Yuliia Manuilo¹

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In contemporary academic discourse, increasingly oriented toward interdisciplinary approaches and the search for holistic models of understanding the human being, there is a growing interest in philosophical traditions in which ethics, anthropology, and the practice of life form an integrated whole. In this context, the philosophical worldview of Hryhorii Skovoroda should be regarded not only as a significant phenomenon in the history of eighteenth-century Ukrainian philosophy, but also as an original conception of moral life that remains relevant to contemporary discussions in virtue ethics, philosophical anthropology, psychology, and pedagogy. Despite the historical distance, Skovoroda's ideas reveal a conceptual affinity with modern approaches that emphasize inner motivation, self-realization, and the integrity of personality. For this reason, engagement with his philosophical legacy makes it possible not only to promote Ukrainian philosophy internationally, but also to integrate it into a broader intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue.

Skovoroda's ethical teaching is grounded in a clearly articulated anthropological foundation. A central concept of his philosophical worldview is the doctrine of the "inner person," which determines the specific character of his understanding of morality. According to Skovoroda, the human being possesses a dual structure: an external, bodily and social dimension, and an inner, spiritual one, with the latter constituting the core of genuine human essence [1, p. 560–562]. Moral life, therefore, cannot be reduced to external behavior or conformity to social norms, since it is formed within the inner realm of the heart, where intentions, values, and fundamental orientations of life take shape. In this respect, Skovoroda's ethics has a distinctly personalist character and can be situated within the tradition of virtue ethics, in which morality is understood primarily as a quality of character rather than as a system of prescriptive rules. Virtue thus appears as a stable inner disposition of character, not as a merely situational moral act.

¹ V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine

Self-knowledge plays a decisive role in Skovoroda's moral philosophy and functions as a necessary condition for the formation of a virtuous life. His well-known call to "know oneself" has not so much an epistemological as an ethical meaning, referring to the discovery of one's inner nature and proper measure [2, p. 214–217]. Through self-knowledge, the individual becomes aware of both personal uniqueness and inherent limitations, which in turn provides the foundation for such virtues as moderation, humility, and inner honesty. Importantly, Skovoroda does not propose a universal model of virtue applicable to all individuals; instead, he emphasizes the fundamentally individual character of the moral path. This position resonates with contemporary anthropological and psychological approaches that link moral development to authenticity and fidelity to one's own self.

A practical continuation of the anthropological foundations of Skovoroda's ethics is his doctrine of *srodna pratsia* (congenial or kindred work), which occupies a central place in his moral philosophy. *Srodna pratsia* denotes an activity that corresponds to an individual's inner inclinations and nature, and it is precisely this correspondence that Skovoroda regards as the source of moral harmony [2, p. 298–301]. In this context, work transcends mere economic necessity and acquires ethical significance, since it is through everyday activity that a person actualizes virtues in lived experience. Conversely, uncongenial work, even when accompanied by external success, leads to inner discord, loss of meaning, and moral exhaustion.

Within the framework of virtue ethics, the concept of *srodna pratsia* can be interpreted as a mechanism of character formation. Activity that corresponds to one's inner nature fosters the development of such virtues as perseverance, responsibility, and inner freedom, whereas coercion or blind conformity to social expectations undermines the moral integrity of the person. This dimension of Skovoroda's philosophy reveals considerable interdisciplinary potential, particularly for the philosophy of education, professional ethics, and contemporary studies of human well-being. Although Skovoroda does not formulate a systematic theory of practices in the modern sense, his concept of *srodna pratsia* conceptually anticipates a similar understanding of the relationship between human activity and the formation of virtues. In this respect, his thought may be fruitfully compared with contemporary virtue ethicists such as Alasdair MacIntyre, who emphasizes the constitutive role of practices and forms of life in shaping moral character [4, p. 187–190].

The ultimate goal of the virtuous life in Skovoroda's philosophical worldview is happiness, understood not as pleasure or the possession of external goods, but as a state of inner harmony with oneself and with the world. Such happiness is attainable only through living in accordance with one's own nature, a claim that once again underscores the centrality of virtue ethics in his

philosophy [1, p. 565–567]. Closely related to happiness is the notion of inner freedom, which Skovoroda interprets as independence from external circumstances and imposed values. This freedom does not negate social constraints, but enables the individual to preserve moral resilience and inner autonomy, thereby constituting a space of inner autonomy (*inner autonomy*).

In conclusion, virtue ethics in the philosophy of Hryhorii Skovoroda emerges as a coherent, anthropologically oriented conception in which self-knowledge, congenial work, happiness, and freedom form a unified logic of the virtuous life. The integration of his ideas into contemporary interdisciplinary discourse makes it possible to view Ukrainian philosophy not as a peripheral phenomenon, but as a full participant in global conversations about human nature, morality, and the meaning of human existence. In this sense, Skovoroda's philosophy may be regarded as an early variant of the European tradition of character ethics, capable of enriching contemporary debates on morality, happiness, and human flourishing.

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