THE LIFE AND THOUGHT OF RUSSIA'S
FIRST LAY THEOLOGIAN, GRIGORIJ
SAVVIČ SKOVORODA (1722-94)

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * * *

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There lived in Little Russia more than a hundred years ago a wise man by the name of Skovoroda. Because he was an intelligent and learned man, the clerical and secular leaders offered him profitable and important positions, but he refused them all and lived his whole life as a wanderer.

His only possessions were those which he carried in a sack over his back: a change of linen and some books. Everyone who knew him loved him, and rejoiced when he came to visit. He censured no one, gave advise only when it was asked, and was always satisfied with everything. His favorite saying was: 'I thank God that he made everything necessary easy, and only the unnecessary difficult.'

L. N. Tolstoj, Na Každyj Den'. (For Every Day), Polnoe Sobranie Sočinenij (Complete Works) 90 vols., Moscow & Leningrad: 1928-58, XLIII, p. 239.
PREFACE

The subject of this study is the eighteenth-century Ukrainian sage, Grigorij Savvij č Skovoroda, his life, activities and thought. Skovoroda, though not an original thinker, or even an influential one for later Russian philosophy was the first man in Russia or the Ukraine to speculate freely and in an integrated fashion about the problems of knowledge, man, and God. It is precisely because his thought represents the first free and integrated speculative effort in Russia and the Ukraine, rather than by his originality or later influence on Russian thought that Skovoroda is worthy of study.

The primary sources used in this study are two editions of Skovoroda's collected works: 1) Vladimir Bonč-Bruevič (ed.), Sobranie Sočinenij G. S. Skovorody, St. Petersburg: 1912; 2) D. I. Bileckij, (ed.) G. S. Skovoroda: Tvorì v Dvox Tomax, 2 vols., Kiev: 1961. Both of these collections include the short sketch of Skovoroda's life written by his friend and disciple M. I. Kovalinskij (1751-1807), about which more will be said in the introduction to the chapter on Skovoroda's life. Besides the two editions of Skovoroda's collected works mentioned above there are two others, both of which were published before the editions of Bonč-Bruevič and Bileckij respectively.

111
Neither of the two earlier editions are as complete as the ones consulted by this writer, but the reader my still wish to have them identified. The first is, I. T. Lisenkov (ed.) Sočinenija v Stixax i Proze Grigorija Savviča Skovorody, St. Petersburg: 1861; the second, D. I. Bagalej (ed.) Sočinenija Grigorija Savviča Skovorody: Jubilejnoe Izdanie (1794-1894), Kharkov: 1894.

Though Skovoroda's works and M. I. Kovalinskij's biography of Skovoroda served as the most important sources for this essay, the writer also surveyed much of the available secondary material which touches on Skovoroda, especially the periodical literature. A rather large periodical literature on Skovoroda has developed over the course of the last century and a half, but since some of it is not available in this country the writer was unable to consult it all. What has been consulted appears in the bibliography at the end of the essay.

This essay would not have been completed without the assistance and advice of Professor Michael Curran. His questioning and criticism forced me to rethink many elements of this work, while his patience with my efforts encouraged me to continue. For his criticism and patience I am grateful, and I hope I may demonstrate this gratitude by extending similar consideration to my own students. Finally, I owe an inexpressibly large debt of thanks to my wife, Carol, who has supported and encouraged my entire graduate education including the work on this essay. Along
with this she has spent many difficult hours turning my inelegant and barely legible scrawl into acceptable typed copy. While I am happy to acknowledge my thanks to those who have contributed to the completion of this work I must add that any errors or omissions are my own responsibility.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. THE LIFE OF GRIGORIJ SAVVIČ SKOVORODA</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1722-94)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skovoroda's Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. SKOVORODA AND HIS SOCIETY</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. SKOVORODA'S THOUGHT</strong></td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol and Bible</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Material World</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>IV. CONCLUSION</strong></td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY</strong></td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE LIFE OF GRIGORIJ SAVVIČ SKOVORODA (1722-94)

Introduction

The chief source of information concerning G. S. Skovoroda's life is "Žizn' Grigorija Skovorody" (The Life of Grigorij Skovoroda) which was written in the latter part of 1794 by M. I. Kovalinskij, Skovoroda's student, follower, and intimate friend.1 Besides Kovalinskij's biography, of course, Skovoroda's own writings provide biographical information. Skovoroda, however, intended his works to be instructional not autobiographical and so,

1 This short biography (in printed form it runs to less than fifty pages) has been published five times as follows:

N. F. Sumcov, "Žitie Skovorody opisannoe drugom ego M. I. Kovalinskim," Kievskaja Starina, 1886, #9, pp. 103-50;


V. S. Arsenev, "Nečto o G. S. Skovorode," Russkij Arxiv, 1911, #4, pp. 601-34.

V. Bonč-Bruevič (ed.), Materialy k Istorii i Izušeniju Russkago Sektanstva i Staroobrijadčestva, part 5, Sobranie Sočinenij G. S. Skovorody, St. Petersburg: 1912, pp. 1-42;

while his writings provide assistance in the understanding of his life, they do not present the detailed information which Kovalinskij's biography does.

M. I. Kovalinskij, who gave us the biography of Skovoroda, was born in 1751 in the region which was to become the Kharkov gubernija. In the early 1760's he attended the Kharkov Academy, where he became a pupil, admirer, and close friend of Skovoroda. In the late 1760's Kovalinskij served with the military, and then in 1772 went abroad to complete his education. He spent three years in the West, mainly in France and Switzerland, and while in France studied at the University of Strasbourg. He returned from abroad in 1775 and entered the service of the state. He achieved the rank of general-major, and for a period of years, probably in the 1780's, served as the chief executive of the Riazan vice-regency. Early in 1801, Emperor Paul named him to the post of curator of Moscow University. Kovalinskij remained in this position until 1804 when he retired. He spent several years in retirement, and died in 1807.  

Kovalinskij's biography of Skovoroda, marked as it was by economy and passion demonstrated both Kovalinskij's

high level of education and his love for Skovoroda. There may be disadvantages connected with dependence on a passionate and brief biography for the account of a man's life, e.g., an excessively favorable bias, or brevity to the exclusion of necessary detail. Though bias and brevity could have a negative influence on a biographical account, the balance between generosity and economy apparent in Kovalinskij's biography was just the feature of his narrative which made it a perceptive and vital view of Skovoroda's life and activities. If Kovalinskij's account had been charitable but not brief, it may have become a rambling and pointless panegyric. If it had been economical but dispassionate it may well have deteriorated into a lifeless recitation of facts. But because Kovalinskij wrote with both passion and economy he was able to avoid these pitfalls and to fashion a worthy narrative of Skovoroda's life.

Skovoroda's Life

Grigorij Savvič Skovoroda was born in 1722 in Chernux, a Ukrainian village located between Kiev and Kharkov, in the Lubenskij region which would later become part of the Poltava gubernija. Though both of Skovoroda's parents were of Cossack origin, they had achieved for

themselves, in Kovalinskij's words "a petty bourgeois status. . . and were distinguished in their own district for their honor, uprightness, hospitality, piety and love of peace." It is noteworthy that Kovalinskij remarked on the positive virtues of Skvoroda's parents, particularly on their piety, for Skvoroda himself appeared to share these virtues, and especially their strong religious sentiments.

Already in his youth Skvoroda had demonstrated a steadfast spirit and a reverence for God, and concerning this he himself wrote in late life that "from my earliest years a mysterious power and mania attracted me to moralizing books, and I loved them more than anything else: they doctored and cheered my heart." Skvoroda's youthful piety was further manifested by his love of and frequent attendance at church services, and in particular by his fondness for singing religious hymns. While he was

4 Ibid., p. 488.
5 Ibid.
6 G. S. Skvoroda, "Razgovor družeskij o dushevnom miré (A Friendly Discussion Concerning Peace of Mind) in V. Bonč-Bruevič, Sobranie Sočinenij G. S. Skvorody, St. Petersburg: 1912, p. 245. The works of Skvoroda cited in this paper have appeared in either the one volume edition of V. Bonč-Bruevič, or the two volume edition of D. I. Bileckij (see note #1 on page 1). Hereafter, when Skvoroda's works are cited from the Bonč-Bruevič edition the citation will read, Skvoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, title of work. In similar fashion citations from the Bileckij edition will appear as, Skvoroda, Tvorí, 1961, title of work.
still very young he developed a special liking for St. John Damascene's "Hymn to the Three Youths". This hymn, which celebrates the steadfastness of the three Jewish youths, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, in the face of the threats of the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, filled Skovoroda with joy and awe at the power of God.  

Skovoroda's inclinations toward the "moralizing books" and the Orthodox Church services however were not the only indications of the powerful religious feelings which stirred within him. Along with these propensities he also demonstrated a singular taste for solitude. I. M. Snegirev had reference to this trait when he wrote that Skovoroda, "being foreign to children's play, and loving solitude, ... walked alone through the groves and woods, or, having taken shelter at home, he sat in a corner and committed to memory what he had read or heard." 

Now the liking for solitude, even in a child, should not, of

7 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 488.

8 I. M. Snegirev (1792-1868), Russian ethnographer and archaeologist. He studied classical philology at the University of Moscow, but after graduation turned to the study and teaching of Russian ethnography and archaeology. He became a professor at Moscow University in 1815. Russkij Biografičeskij Slovar', XIX, pp. 7-10.

9 I. M. Snegirev, "Ukrainskij filosof Grigorij Savvič Skovoroda," Otečestvennye Zapiski, 1823, XVI, #42, p. 97. Snegirev's account is probably reliable since much of it was based on personal interviews with friends and acquaintances of Skovoroda. Ibid., p. 96, note.
itself, be considered as in indication of strong religious sentiments. But such a characteristic, in light of Skovoroda's already demonstrated fondnesss for spiritual books and religious services, appears to have been another of the manifestations of his religious consciousness.

The young Skovoroda also demonstrated a remarkable talent and thirst for learning. As a result of his desire to achieve a higher level of learning he persuaded his father to send him, in 1738, to the Kievan Academy. Kovalinskij made clear that it was not Skovoroda's father's idea to send him to the Academy, but rather that his father sent him to the Academy, "as a result of his (Grigorij's) wishes." Skovoroda soon vindicated his own judgment and his father's support for his further education, because, having entered the Kievan Academy, he quickly surpassed his peers in his intellectual accomplishments.

Kovalinskij has left us little information about Skovoroda's studies in the Kievan Academy but a few general words concerning the Academy may help to fill this gap. Peter Mogila founded the Kievan Academy in 1632 as a bulwark against expanding Catholic and Protestant

10 Ibid., p. 97; Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 488.
12 Ibid.
influences in southern Russia. The Academy began to decline in the 1660's as a result of political unrest, and the Russians, who had recently incorporated Kiev, even considered the abolition of the Academy. Russian fear of popular discontent, however, prevented the completion of this plan.\textsuperscript{13} By the beginning of the eighteenth century, however, the Academy had revived, and, during the first half of the century, played a most significant educational role not only in the Ukraine, but in Russia, and White Russia as well.\textsuperscript{14} As a result of the founding and development of the Academy of Sciences (1726) in St. Petersburg, and the University of Moscow (1754), the Kievian Academy declined in educational importance in the second half of the eighteenth century, so much so that the Ukrainian historian, Michael Hrushevsky, referred to the 1730's and 1740's as "the last bright years" of the Academy.\textsuperscript{15} It was precisely during these "last

\textsuperscript{13} Michael Hrushevsky, \textit{A History of the Ukraine}, New Haven: 1941, p. 412.


\textsuperscript{15} Michael Hrushevsky, \textit{A History of the Ukraine}, New Haven: 1941, p. 417. The extent of the decline of the Academy as a vital educational force in Russia during the second half of the eighteenth century may be judged by the fact that, between the 1740's and about 1800, the Academy's student body, which had earlier been primarily secular, became preponderantly clerical. See Makarij Bulgakov, \textit{Istorija Kievskoj Akademii}, St. Petersburg: 1843, p. 108; V. Serebrennikov, \textit{Kievskaja Akademija s polovine XVIII v. do preobrazovaniya v 1819 g.}, Kiev: 1897, pp. 201-02.
bright years" however that Skovoroda studied at Kiev.

The Academy, during Skovoroda's stay there, offered a curriculum which consisted in the main of language, philosophy, and theology. As concerned language the Academy had traditionally emphasized the study of Latin, but in 1738, largely through the efforts of Archbishop Raphael Zaborovskij of Kiev, there were established the chairs of three other languages: German, heretofore unknown at the Academy; Hebrew, which had been introduced a few years earlier but which was almost never taught because of a lack of able instructors; Greek, which, though it had been offered since the inception of the Academy, was limited almost solely to arid grammatical analysis. Philosophy, until the mid-century, was taught under the influence of Aristotle and the scholastics, just as it was in the Latin-Polish schools on which pattern the Kievan Academy was founded. Theology, which was studied during the students' final two years at the Academy was marked by

16 Raphael Zaborovskij was born in 1677 near the Polish city of Lvov. His early education was acquired in the Polish schools, but after the death of his father he entered the Kievan Academy. He became the Archbishop of Kiev in 1731, and devoted much of the remainder of his life to the improvement of the Kievan Academy. In 1743, by the order of Empress Elizabeth, Kiev became the center of a Metropolitanate and Zaborovskij became its Metropolitan. He died in Kiev in 1747. Russkij Biografikiiskej Slovar', XV, p. 504.

both a lack of system and the spirit of orthodoxy. The curriculum, pursued by Skovoroda then was a rigorous course of studies which was directed toward a theological end. The student first learned a form of language and rhetoric, and then a form of thought, and finally he attached to these forms of language and thought a content which was solely theological. It was just this overwhelming emphasis on theology which had persuaded M. V. Lomonosov (1711-65), the Russian Da Vinci, to leave the Kievan Academy after a brief stay there at the end of 1734 and beginning of 1735.

Skovoroda had entered the Kievan Academy in 1738, but after his first four years there, and owing to both his musical talents and the Empress Elizabeth's love for Little Russia, he was called to join the Imperial court choir in St. Petersburg. He remained with the choir from 1742 to 1744, but in the latter year, when the choir accompanied the Empress on her visit to Little Russia, he requested permission to leave the choir so that he could resume his studies at the Kievan Academy. Having received this permission he returned to the Academy and spent the

18 Bulgakov, Istorija Kievskoj Akademii, Kiev: 1843, pp. 138-44.


next six years in Kiev, completing his course of studies in 1750. 

Though Skovoroda voluntarily chose to leave the Imperial choir and St. Petersburg, his two year stay in this most westernized part of Russia developed his taste for travel. In 1750, when a opportunity for travel in the West presented itself he indulged this taste. The occasion for this travel opportunity was the activity of a certain General-major F. S. Višnevskij, who provided the Court with Hungarian wine and enjoyed the personal attention and good will of Empress Elizabeth. The scale of Višnevskij's enterprise was such that he employed many people, including churchmen, and just at this time he was in need of a trained musician who understood the Orthodox music and liturgy. Skovoroda was well known for his musical knowledge, fine voice, and desire to go abroad, and so it is very probably that his superiors at the Kiev Academy used their good offices to arrange his employment with Višnevskij. Having journeyed with Višnevskij to

21 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 289.


Hungary, Skovoroda had the opportunity, with Višnevskij's permission, to leave Hungary and visit such cities as Vienna and Pressburg (Bratislava).\textsuperscript{24}

Kovalinskij has told us little about Skovoroda's travels to the West, other than that, while there, he was able to make the acquaintance of many learned people.\textsuperscript{25} But one can imagine the impact of such a trip on a student who had spent most of his adult years in Kiev at what was essentially a theological academy. His travels in the West surely exposed him, if only in a superficial way, to the scientific currents of thought then circulating in Western Europe. This exposure, while it broadened the scope of his learning, forced him to reconsider his former, largely theological eduction. If Skovoroda's later thoughts give any indication, he was able to reconcile his own theological views with western science, though he always maintained the supremacy of theology over empirical science.\textsuperscript{26} Along with the exposure to some western scientific thought, Skovoroda's visit to the West brought him into contact with a society which was materially richer than his own Little Russian society. This contact

\textsuperscript{24} Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 489.

\textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 490.

\textsuperscript{26} On this question Skovoroda praised the scientific advances of his time but cautioned that the sciences had to remain "handmaidens" of Christian philosophy. Skovoroda, \textit{Sobranie Sočinenij}, 1912, "Razgovor družeskij o duševnom mirë." pp. 225-26.
however did not persuade him, then or in later life, to seek material comforts; rather it made clearer to Skovoroda the need to bridle his sensual appetites lest they become ungovernable. Finally, Skovoroda's western journey most probably gave him an opportunity to imbibe, either directly or indirectly, the ideas of German pietism and mysticism. This contact with such ideas was not however Skovoroda's first, for it is known that the thought of Jacob Boehme was influential in the Kievan Academy during the 1730's and 1740's as a result of the activities of Simon Todorskij. Skovoroda's strong religious sentiments, as well as his earlier exposure to some of the German mystical thought, made him particularly susceptible to the mystical thought which he encountered in the West, and which influenced his later work. Skovoroda's travels, then brought him into contact with some of the scientific, material, and religious riches of the West. His encounters with these

27 Zdenek David, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious thought," Slavic Review, 1962, #1, pp. 48-49. Simon Todorskij was born in 1700 near Kiev and educated at the Kievan Academy. In 1727 he left Russia and spent the next ten years abroad. During this period he studied at various universities including the University of Halle, which was a center of German pietistic thought. In 1735, while at Halle he published a Russian translation of Johann Arndt's True Christian. In 1738, having returned to Russia, he became an instructor at the Kievan Academy. In 1743, he became a member of the Holy Synod, and in 1745 Bishop of Pskov. He remained in the latter post until his death in 1754. P. Pekarskii, "O Russkix Khiog: Napechatannyx v Galle v 1735 godu," Bibliograficheskija Zapiski, 1861, #2, cols. 35-36; Russkij Biograficheskij Slovar', XVIII, p. 498.
aspects of West European culture forced him to re-evaluate his earlier education and experiences and so ultimately facilitated the creation of his mature body of thought.

There also exists a brief description of Skovoroda's foreign travels which is not fully in agreement with the above version. According to this account, which was written by F. P. Lubjanovskij,²⁸ Skovoroda, having completed his studies at Kiev, "undertook a journey to the Holy Places; he went to Jerusalem, Mount Athos and Constantinople. Whether or not he went to the West," the reporter continues, "I really do not know."²⁹ By the admission of his ignorance concerning Skovoroda's western travels, Lubjanovskij also indicated his own ignorance of Kovalinskij's biography which, though it remained unpublished until 1886, was used in manuscript form as a source of information for articles on Skovoroda even before Lubjanovskij wrote his memoirs.³⁰ This fact alone however

²⁸ F. P. Lubjanovskij (1777-1869) was born near Poltava and educated at the Kharkov Collegium and Moscow University. He had a distinguished official career, serving as governor of the Podol gubernija from 1831 to 1833, when he became a member of the Senate. He served in the Senate until his death. G. N. Gennadi, Spravočnyj Slovar' o Russkix Pisatel'jax i Učenyx, Umaršiš v XVIII i XIX stoletijax i Spisok Russkich Knig s 1725 do 1825 II, Berlin: 1880, p. 260; Russkij Biograficeskij Slovar', X, p. 710.

²⁹ F. P. Lubjanovskij, "Vospominanija Fedora Petroviča Lubjanovskago," Russkij Arxiv, 1872, col. 106.

should not prejudice one altogether against Lubjanovskij's version. There are three reasons for this: firstly, Lubjanovskij, was a contemporary of Skovoroda's, a rather young one but a contemporary nonetheless;31 secondly, his account did not contradict Kovalinskij's, but rather added to it; thirdly, Kovalinskij's account, though it is the most complete first-hand source for Skovoroda's life, is not a definitive account of all his activities. From all of this it is fair to conclude that Skovoroda, in the first years after he left the Kievian Academy, traveled abroad, that he spent some time in the West, and that he may even have taken a trip to the Holy Land, Mount Athos and Constantinople.

In 1753, after three years abroad, Skovoroda returned to Little Russia. One might view Skovoroda's activities, until this return, as the opening period of his life. This was the period of his youth, his formal education and his first taste of the world. It was also a time during which Skovoroda had been exposed to the kinds of ideas and experiences which would become supports for his later teachings. He had, for instance, through his study of Greek and Latin at the Kievian Academy and his own independent efforts become acquainted with the classical thinkers of antiquity, with Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato.

31 F. P. Lubjanovskij, "Vospominanija Fedora Petroviča Lubjanovskago," Russkij Arxiv, 1872, col. 106.
Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Greek and Roman Stoics. He admired these men for their particular contributions, i.e. Pythagoras' suggestion of the trinity,\textsuperscript{32} Plato's concern with the Idea,\textsuperscript{33} and the Epicureans and Stoics' moral vision.\textsuperscript{34} But beyond this he esteemed these men because he found in their efforts ample testimony to the efficacy of thought and the universality of truth. It is also almost certain that Skovoroda by 1753 had met with the teachings of the German mystics. This contact with German mystical thought, as indicated above, was to have an influence on his mature work.

Another aspect of Skovoroda's outlook which dated back to this early phase of his life was his dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the increasingly scientific and secular thought of the eighteenth century in both Western Europe and Russia. "We have fathomed the sea, the earth, the air the heavens... what is it we have not learned to accomplish? But there is sorrow that in all of this there is nothing of greatness."\textsuperscript{35} Skovoroda, however, did not intend by his criticism of scientific thought to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Dialog. Imja emu: Potop Zmiin," (A Dialogue entitled, the Serpent's Deluge) p. 496.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 511.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Pismo k S. I. Tevjašovu," (Letter to S. I. Tevjašovu) p. 360.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Razgovor družeskij o duševnom mirě," p. 224.
\end{itemize}
condemn it thoroughly. "I do not censure science," he wrote, "I commend its latest achievements." But Skovoroda considered an exclusive concern with science, to be inevitably ruinous. "Mathematics, medicine, physics, mechanics, music. . . . the more copiously we partake of them the more does our heart burn with hunger and thirst, but our rough ignorance can not guess that they [the sciences] are all handmaidens for the mistress." This mistress of the sciences for Skovoroda was "Christian philosophy," and it was just this mistress which was, according to Skovoroda, ignored by eighteenth-century scientific thought.

Finally, and in connection with his disillusionment with scientific thought, Skovoroda, at least by 1753, had begun to view the Bible as one of the most important crucibles of truth available to man. Kovalinskij, evaluating the influences on Skovoroda's thought, wrote that, "the leader of all of them is the Bible." Skovoroda himself contended, "I began to read the Bible at about age thirty, and it is, above all, the most magnificent book for me."  

36 Ibid., p. 226.  
37 Ibid., p. 225.  
38 Ibid., p. 227.  
40 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Razgovor družeskih o duševnom miru," p. 245.
When Skovoroda wrote that he began to read the Bible he meant that he began to interpret it allegorically rather than literally, and that this allegorical interpretation made it possible for him to consider the Bible as central to his thought. Also, by admitting that he was about thirty years old when the Bible began to assume this central importance for him, Skovoroda put his conversion to this allegorical view of the Bible sometime around 1752, or about a year before he returned from abroad. All four of these developments which occurred in Skovoroda's life by 1753; his acquaintance with the ancient thinkers, his introduction to the thought of the German mystics, his growing distaste for the emphasis on purely scientific thought, and his increasing dependence on the Bible, justify Kovalinskij's contention that Skovoroda, on his return home in 1753, was "full of learning, intelligence and knowledge." 

Skovoroda's intellectual resources at this juncture in his life were not matched by his material wealth. Kovalinskij in fact contrasted his intellectual riches with his "empty pockets," and argued that he was then "in extreme want of every necessity." This poverty compelled Skovoroda to live temporarily with his friends, but as they

41 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 490.
42 Ibid.
were not wealthy, both he and they sought some suitable job for him. A position teaching poetry at the Perejaslav Seminary was soon open, and the bishop of Perejaslav invited Skovoroda to take it.\textsuperscript{43} Though Kovalinskij has not given us the name of this bishop it was most probably Ioann Kozlovič, bishop of Perejaslav from March 1753 until March 1757,\textsuperscript{44} to whom Skovoroda later dedicated one of his poems.\textsuperscript{45} Skovoroda accepted this employment but very soon put his position in jeopardy as a result of a disagreement which developed between himself and Bishop Kozlovič. The dispute arose over Skovoroda's intention to teach syllabotonic verse rather than the traditional syllabic.\textsuperscript{46} This intention to teach the more modern form of prosody was a result of his exposure, while at the Kievan Academy, to the

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Sbornik Imperatorskago Russkago Istoričeskago Obščestva, LX, pt. 1, St. Petersburg: 1887, p. 316. Ioann Kozlovič was educated at the Kievan Academy, and, having completed his course of studies, he taught there for a number of years. In 1742 he became prefect and teacher of philosophy at the Slavonic-Greek-Latin Academy in Moscow. He was consecrated Bishop of Perejaslav in 1753, and, in the four years until he died, in 1757, he was particularly concerned with the education of the young. As witness to this interest, he built the stone structure which housed the Perejaslav seminary for more than one hundred years. \textit{Russkij Biografičeskij Slovar'\textsuperscript{1}}, VIII, p. 278.

\textsuperscript{45} Skovoroda, \textit{Tvori}, 1961, Sad Božestvennyx Pesnej: Pesni 26-ia (A Garden of Divine Songs; Song #26), II, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{46} A. Kirjakov, "Ukrainskij Sokrat," \textit{Obrazovanie}, 1897, #9, p. 130.
work of Antioch Kantemir, and Mихail Lomonosov. The Bishop's opposition to this teaching may have been based on his fears that such poetic form would more readily lend itself to secular topics and vernacular speech. Whatever the reason for his opposition, Skovoroda's refusal to abide by the Bishop's dictates led to his exit, at the Bishop's request, from the seminary. This disagreement and its outcome severely tested Skovoroda's spirit, for he knew that if he did not bow to the bishop's demands he would be driven from the seminary. But in such a situation he remained firm, and accepted, without rancor, the consequences of his resolve.

Skovoroda having left the seminary was again dependent upon the kindness of his friends, but these friends while they knew Skovoroda's worth, were ignorant of his pressing need. Skovoroda did not want to ask for too much assistance, and his friends did not think to inquire about his wants, so he endured his position, "quietly, patiently, humbly, having then two thin shirts, one woolen kaftan, one pair of shoes, and a pair of black worsted stockings." This dependent and poverty-stricken state,

49 Ibid., p. 491.
which was to become eventually his style of life lasted only briefly at this time. The reason for this was that Stepan Tamara, a prominent landowner who lived not far from Perejaslavl, hired Skovoroda to tutor his son, Vasilij Stepanovič. It is evident from an account of Vasilij Stepanovič, that the elder Tamara, being a friend of the Kievan Metropolitan, asked him to suggest the very best instructor for his spoiled son, and that the Metropolitan, faced with this request, suggested Skovoroda.

Kovalinskij's account of Skovoroda's stay at Tamara's sheds light upon both his pedagogic views and his approach to personal relationships. Skovoroda, in what was a reaction against his own rigorous and formalistic education at the Kievan Academy, rather than filling the young Tamara's head with useless rote, sought "to cultivate the heart of his pupil, and, seeing his inclinations, to help only naturally in his development with mild and tender direction, not overburdening his reason inconveniently with learning." One can not facilely ascribe Skovoroda's

50 Ibid.

51 A. Lazarevskij, "K pominkam po Skovorode," Kievskaja Starina, 1894, #12, pp. 96-97. Vasilij Stepanovič Tamara (1746-1819) had a long and distinguished official career, becoming Extraordinary Agent and Minister Plenipotentiary to Constantinople in 1799. He retired from this post with the rank of Acting Privy Counsellor in 1809. He appeared later as one of the discussants in Joseph DeMaistre's Evenings in St. Petersburg. Russkij Biografičeskij Slovar', XX, p. 284.

52 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'", Bileckij, II, p. 491.
pedagogic approach to indifference, for he himself valued education highly and even argued that, "Nothing is better than a good education: neither rank, nor wealth, nor family, nor the tenderness of landlords, nor good birth." But as much as he esteemed education, he emphasized the natural approach to it which he defended figuratively as follows:

From nature, as from a mother, learning easily matures herself. This is the universal, true academy, and the only one. You can rapidly teach the falcon to fly, but not the turtle. You can accustom the eagle in an instant to gaze at the sun and to enjoy it, but not the owl.

While Skovoroda was enjoying the chance to teach in accordance with his own educational views, he was also experiencing a most difficult and humiliating time trying to become acquainted with his employer, the elder Tamara. Though Stepan Tamara employed Skovoroda for almost a year, and ate daily with him he rarely spoke to him. Skovoroda was insulted by this inconsiderate treatment, but continued to discharge his tutorial duties. Toward the end of his first year at Tamara's Skovoroda and his young pupil had a brief argument, which, given their friendship, would have soon been forgotten. Some servants overheard the exchange,

54 Ibid., p. 464.
however, and reported it to the master's wife, who demanded that her husband relieve Skovoroda of his duties. Tamara bowed to his wife's demand, but by this time he realized Skovoroda's worth, and his own boorishness, and so, on dismissing Skovoroda, he asked his forgiveness.  

Skovoroda's patience in the face of humiliation had won the friendship of the heretofore intractable landlord.

Not long after this dismissal, which occurred in the first half of 1755, Skovoroda had the opportunity to travel to Moscow with a friend, Vladimir Kaligraf, who had been called to the Moscow Academy as prefect and teacher of theology. While on this journey Skovoroda visited the Monastery of St. Sergius and the Holy Trinity, where at that time the superior was the very learned Kirill Ljaševckij, who later became the bishop of Chernigov. Kirill, who knew of Skovoroda by hearsay and found him to be a man of talent, tried to persuade him to remain at the monastery. Skovoroda refused this offer however, and,

56 Ibid., pp. 491-92.
57 Ibid., p. 492.
according to Kovalinskij, "his love for his native land drew him back to Little Russia." 59

Skovoroda apparently intended to return to Perejaslavl, where he had friends. Before he could settle in this city, however, an agent of Stepan Tamara, the landlord who had recently discharged Skovoroda, brought him by a ruse and under cover of night to his former employer. Tamara, who had been so vain and intractable in most of his earlier dealings with Skovoroda, now seemed to be an affectionate and considerate помашник who wanted to evaluate people on the basis of their inner worth. 60 Tamara's candor and affection influenced Skovoroda and he agreed to remain with Tamara as tutor to his son.

Skovoroda's second stay with Tamara continued for three years, 1756-59, and was a most productive period of his life. Skovoroda has provided an account of one of the dreams which he experienced during this sojourn at Tamara's estate. In this dream, which occurred in November, 1758, Skovoroda saw in turn "the various desires of human life in different places." 61 He witnessed the splendor of an imperial ball, looked on at the ribald merriment of a village celebration, and experienced the ineffable

59 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 492.
60 Ibid., pp. 492-93.
61 Skovoroda, Tvorì, 1961, "Son" (Dream), II, p. 474.
sweetness of serving the liturgy with a deacon. This
dream, which Skovoroda said, "delighted me no less than it
terrified me," gives an indication of how his concern
about his future mode of life was growing. Further,
Skovoroda's only duties at this time were tutorial ones,
and this left him much free time, some of which was spent
in wandering through the surrounding fields, groves, and
gardens in meditation. This style of life, with its
manifold opportunities for reflection, began to appeal more
and more to Skovoroda while, "Vanity and worldly care now
appeared to him as a sea continually possessed by mundane
waves, which never supplied or inspired peace of mind."  

Skovoroda's search for his own life style, and his
increasingly harsh judgment of a life filled with "mundane
vanities and passions," were manifested in several poems
which he wrote during these years. In the first of these
he questioned what he must have found to be the popular
view of death, death as the inevitable start of suffering:

People fear to enter the grave,
Lest afterwards they have to play a part.

62 Ibid., p. 475.
63 Kovalinskij, "Zizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 493.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid., p. 496.
66 These poems were the first of a series, entitled
Sad Bozhestvennyx Pesnej (A Garden of Divine Songs).
Skovoroda composed this series of poems over a period of
about twenty-five years, from the late 1750's to the mid
1780's.
Where burns an inextinguishable flame;
But death is sacred, it ends our malice,
And exhausts the evil of war in peace,
O sacred death, how glad you come. 67

In another he celebrated the kind of religious experience
which permitted one to soar, if only temporarily, above the
banalities of material existence:

Abandon soon, my soul, all earthly places!
Arise to where true sanctity resides,
Where there is peace, and silence rules
forever,
Where, in an inaccessible light, that region
shines.

.......

Our souls can't be content with the corporeal;
They burn to sate their boredom with the
divine;
As the spring flows to the sea, and the steel
to the magnet,
As the flame must tremble, so for God our
souls must pine. 68

On reading this second poem the elder Tamara, who was now
quite fond of Skovoroda, remarked, "My friend! God has
blessed you with the gift of the spirit and the word."69

In 1759 Skovoroda's stay at Tamara's ended. The
young Tamara was ready to enter the state service and
Skovoroda's instruction was no longer necessary, but a new
position soon became available for him at the Kharkov
Academy. Ioasaf Mitkevič, the bishop of Belgorod, had, at

67 Skovoroda, Tvori. 1961, Sad Božestvennyx Pesnej, Pesn' 1-1a (Song #1), II, p. 7.
68 Ibid., Pesn' 2-1a (Song #2), II, p. 9.
69 Kovalinskij, "Zizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 496.
this time, invited the father-superior of the Perejaslavl seminary, Gervasi\%o Jakubovi\%e, to come to Belgorod as an episcopal assistant. Gervasi\% answered this invitation, and, having seen that Ioasaf was ardently concerned with learning, told him approvingly about Skovoroda. The bishop, now acting through Gervasi\%, who knew Skovoroda, called him to a meeting. Skovoroda appeared before the bishop as soon as possible, and while with him accepted an offer to teach poetry at the Kharkov Academy.\footnote{Ibid., p. 497.}

Skovoroda spent the year 1759-60 in Kharkov, where \"his thoughts, learning, and style of life soon attracted the attention of the local inhabitants.\"\footnote{Ibid.} He dressed and ate simply, but decently and sufficiently, slept four hours per night, completely abstained from meat and fish, and continued to take the long meditative walks of which he had grown so fond with the passage of time.\footnote{Ibid.} Kovalinskij pointed out that Skovoroda's abstention from meat and fish was not the result of any superstition, but was rather the dictate of \"his own inner economy,\"\footnote{Ibid.} and further quoted Skovoroda as saying that, \"every kind of food and drink is useful and good, but one ought to bring the time, place,
measure, and person into the consideration of his eating and drinking habits." 74

Bishop Ioasaf approached Skovoroda at the end of his first year at the Kharkov Academy with an invitation to accept the monastic life. Further he promised him that if he should become a monk he would be assured of elevation to the higher clergy. At the same time, Gervasij, Ioasaf's assistant, counseled Skovoroda concerning the honors and glory which awaited him in this life. Skovoroda, having listened to these offers, promises and advice, spoke to Gervasij as follows:

Do you really wish that I should increase the number of the Pharisees? Eat richly, sing sweetly, dress softly, and monastisize! But I believe monkhood to consist of a non-acquisitive life, little satisfaction, abstinence, the deprivation of the unnecessary in order to acquire the most necessary, the renunciation of all whims in order to protect one's own integrity, the bridling of self-love in order to fulfill more conveniently the commandment of love for our neighbor, and the searching for divine rather than human glory. 75

This outburst typified Skovoroda's attitude toward the monasticism of his day. 76 He saw that monasticism, like the official church, had declined spiritually, and he rejected all efforts to bring him into the monastic fold.

74 Ibid., p. 515.
75 Ibid., p. 498.
76 See also his reference to the "monkish masquerade," Skovoroda, Sobranie Sošinenij, 1912, "Beseda narschennaja Dvoe" (A Conversation entitled Two), p. 206.
In fact, the monastic offers of clerical rank and honor to Skovoroda give a good indication of just how far advanced was the spiritual malaise of the monasteries.

A few days after this anti-monastic outburst, Skovoroda went to live with friends in the environs of Belgorod. Bishop Ioasaf on learning of Skovoroda’s rejection of his offer was sorry rather than vexed, and the good relationship between Skovoroda and Ioasaf continued despite the manner of their separation. It is worth noting that Skovoroda, no matter how sharply he disagreed with people, could not from his own side sever relations with them. This personal magnanimity was particularly evident in his dealings with Stepan Tamara and Bishop Ioasaf, but it marked his relations with all the people he met.

Bishop Ioasaf, "the good pastor" as Kovalinskij called him, still recognized Skovoroda’s worth and wanted him to teach at the Kharkov Academy. To this end he once more invited him to an interview and offered him a teaching position at the Academy. Skovoroda accepted and returned


to Kharkov to teach Greek. His return at this time was fortuitous, because shortly afterwards he met M. I. Kovalinskij his biographer and lifelong friend.

Kovalinskij did not think that, "he was worthy of his friendship, but he loved and was amazed by his philosophy of life and secretly esteemed him." These initial feelings toward Skovoroda were buttressed by a dream episode which Kovalinskij experienced in 1763. Skovoroda and Kovalinskij appeared together in this dream and as a consequence wrote Kovalinskij, "I was filled with the sweetest of sensations." He reported this dream sequence to a Father Boris, the local starets. The starets counseled him in the following manner; "Oh young man, obey this man; he has been sent to you from God to be a guiding angel and teacher." Kovalinskij has written that at this

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Both Skovoroda (see pp. 23-24) and Kovalinskij were preoccupied with dreams, and the latter gave an explanation for this preoccupation in a note which accompanied the text of his biography of Skovoroda. In this note, Kovalinskij, by citing On Dreams by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Philo Judaeus (30 B. C. - 50 A. C.), as well as two Biblical passages which were concerned with dreams (2 Corinthians, 12:1, Job, 33:15-17), indicated that both he and Skovoroda considered the dream as a communication with God which must be heeded. Kovalinskij, "Žizn'", Bileckij, II, pp. 502-03; Harry A. Wolfson, Philo, II vols. Cambridge: Harvard University, 1947, II, pp. 55-59.
83 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'", Bileckij, II, p. 503.
84 Ibid.
time he, "devoted himself wholeheartedly to the friendship of Grigoriij." 85

Although he felt unworthy of Skovoroda's friendship, Kovalinskij's love and esteem for him did not go unre-
turned. At first Skovoroda visited him, and, "according to the young man's inclinations entertained him with music and the reading of books, which served as the occasion for conversations and moral admonitions." 86 But with the passage of time, Skovoroda, "having uncovered in the young man a heart which he desired and the natural appitudes which he loved, turned his attention to the fertilization of his reason and his spirit." 87 The depth of Skovoroda's feeling for Kovalinskij is manifest in several of the letters which he wrote to him during the first years of their friendship. In one of the earliest letters Skovoroda declared, "There is nothing sweeter or dearer to me than the soul which loves me, I need nothing else. . . . It is more desirable for me than a pyramid, a mausoleum, or any monument to the tsar." 88 In another letter Skovoroda exclaimed, apparently in reply to a letter from Kovalinskij, "So you are straining toward the Lord! Oh, if

85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p. 500.
87 Ibid.
I could only more often hear such words from you! I would refuse all ambrosia."^{89} In a third correspondence Skovoroda argued, "I would love you, even if you were a simple peasant, for the purity of your soul and your worthy aspirations."^{90} It is to this profound friendship, that the historian owes, in the words of the Russian philosopher V. Ern:

1) the beautiful life of Skovoroda written by Kovalinskij after Skovoroda's death,
2) the character of all the literary production of Skovoroda, both the letters written to Kovalinskij, which were summoned to life by their friendship, and the other works, which though not directly connected to Kovalinskij were written with him secretly in mind. \footnote{91}

While the second part of this opinion may appear exaggerated, there is evidence to support it. In the first years of his friendship with Kovalinskij, Skovoroda, by Kovalinskij's own account, was already discussing with him the duality of man, which was to be central to his later writings. He divided man in these discussions into, "the inner and the outer, calling: the one eternal and the other temporal; the one heavenly, the other earthly; the one spiritual, the other mental; the one creative, the other \footnote{Ibid., pp. 220-21.}{\footnote{Ibid., p. 245.}{\footnote{V. Ern, "Žizn' i ličnost' G. S. Skovorody," Voprosy Filosofii i Psixologii, 1911, #2, pp. 148-49.}}}
created.”92 The first of these, "according to its God-like
genus, he called the ruler, the master, the beginning, the
other by its earthly being he named the slave, the
instrument, the footstool, the creature."93 Besides this,
Skovoroda, in these discussions of man, was already using
some of the characteristic symbols of his mature work.
Kovalinskij has given an account of one such episode in
which Skovoroda declared that the "inner man" was:

Like a good and full ear of wheat. Judge
for yourself: an ear is not the stem with
its branches, nor its straw, nor the outer
skin, which covers the grain, nor the body
of the grain; rather the ear is that very
power, which generates the stem, the straw,
the body of the grain and so on, in which
power all of these are invisibly
contained. 94

In this simile, Skovoroda, using organic symbols, tried to
make clear for his pupil Kovalinskij the contrast between
the essential inner man and his corruptible exterior.
Just as a hidden power sustained the stem, straw and skin
of the wheat, so a hidden power, true man, supported all of
a man's external members. Finally, Skovoroda not only
maintained a love for Kovalinskij to the end of his life,
but even dedicated some of his works to his "dearest friend

93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., p. 506.
As it is clear from Kovalinskij's biography that the theory of man, which appeared in Skovoroda's later writings was developing during his stay in Kharkov, so it is evident that his practical morality was similarly maturing. The latter is apparent from Kovalinskij's account of a conversation between Skovoroda and E. A. Ščerbinin, then the governor-general of Kharkov. The governor, who was not well educated but who had a keen mind and loved learning and music, invited Skovoroda to an interview. During the ensuing exchange he asked him why he did not seek a more distinguished position for himself than teacher at the Kharkov Academy. To this Skovoroda replied:

The world is like a theatre; in order to stage a play successfully one must cast the roles according to the aptitudes of the actors. The actors on the stage are praised not by the distinction of their roles, but by their success in playing them. I determined this long ago, and I have seen by many experiences that I can not play successfully on the world's stage any role besides a low, simple, care free, and solitary one. I

95 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Dialog ili Razglagol o drevnom mirë" (A Dialog or Discussion Concerning the Ancient World), p. 303.
97 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 511.
chose this role, I have taken it and I am satisfied. 98

The governor was edified by this answer, but, continuing the discussion, he tried to determine whether Skovoroda had the aptitudes for other positions which might be more useful to society. Skovoroda interrupted with the following answer:

If I felt today that I could fearlessly slash the Turks, then from this day I would strap on a Hussar's sword, don a shako, and go to serve in the armed forces. Work which is in accord with one's natural inclinations is satisfying. 99

It is significant that this practical morality, with its emphasis on "natural inclinations," was consonant with Skovoroda's pedagogical theory which was mentioned briefly above. 100

Skovoroda probably left the Kharkov Academy in 1769. His leaving followed a disagreement between himself and the bishop of Belgorod, Samuel Mislavskij, over a manual which Skovoroda wrote for a special course in "good conduct". 101 The course was one of several added to the curriculum at this time, and Skovoroda, after requesting the assignment.

98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 See above pp. 20-21.
101 Kovalinskij used the word blagonravie.
became the teacher of this class.  The manual was entitled, "The First Door to Christian Good Conduct for the Young Gentry of the Kharkov Gubernija" and consisted of "simple truths, and brief elementary knowledge of the obligations which concerned society," by which was meant the duties of the individual in society. But because Skovoroda based all of this on the knowledge of God, the bishop of Belgorod saw fit to question what he thought were, "several vague points, and some dubious speech." Skovoroda defended his manual simply but well before the bishop, and probably remained at the Academy until the end of that academic year. It would be an exaggeration to contend that Skovoroda left the Kharkov Academy solely because of this conflict, since his own predilections for the simple and unattached existence, were becoming increasingly strong, and would have impelled him to depart sooner or later. The dispute, however, may have been the catalyst which moved Skovoroda to leave at this time.

One might term the years from 1753 to 1769 the second phase of Skovoroda's life. This period began with

103 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 513.
104 Ibid.
his return from abroad and ended with his final departure from the Kharkov Academy, and included 1) his teaching and tutoring experiences at Perejaslavl, Kharkov, and Stepan Tamara's respectively, 2) his friendship with Kovalinskiy, 3) his gradual disenchantedment with the vanities of secular and monastic life, 4) his growing inclination toward a more simple and perepatic existence, and 5) the development of some of the views central to his later teachings and writings. These years truly appear to have been, "the years of the sensitive inner struggle."106 Skovoroda experimented with teaching in the academies, and tutoring on estates; he made the acquaintance of highly placed people in both the religious and secular spheres of life, who offered him positions which promised both honor and ease. But he rejected all of this and chose instead the simple life of a mendicant teacher.

It is worth noting that Skovoroda's choice of a wandering life was not unique, but was in keeping with a long Russian tradition. Fedor Dostoevsky, in *Diary of a Writer*, and Nicholas Berdiaev, in *The Russian Idea*, commented on this style of life which they saw as a characteristically Russian quest for another world, for the kingdom of God.107 The wanderer or strannik though he was


still of this world signified his rejection of it and search for the other world by his completely unattached and rootless existence. Though the strannik embarked on his wanderings because he rejected this world, his activity was accepted by society and so without any means of support other than the charity of his fellows he was able to continue his quest. This is not to argue that a man of Skovoroda's inclinations could not have become a strannik in some other environment, but only to suggest that such a wandering life was an especially viable alternative for someone in Russia or South Russia who was repelled by this world.

The last period of Skovoroda's life, the quarter-century preceding his death in 1794, was also the time during which he produced most of his literary and philosophical works. Because of this, and also because the subsequent sections of this essay will center on Skovoroda's thought as it appears in those writings, the discussion will not dwell at length now on the last twenty-five years of his life. Certain features of this period of his life, however, need mention. The first of these is his newly adopted style of life. Concerning

this a young contemporary of Skovoroda wrote of him:

He had almost no possessions. . . He had no permanent abode. . . It was his passion to travel from settlement to settlement, from village to village, from farm to farm. . . the inhabitants of the settlements, villages, and farms loved him like a member of the family. He gave them everything he had, not gold and silver, but good advice, admonitions, exhortations, and friendly reproaches for their disputes, falsehoods, drunkenness and lack of scruples. 108

This description correctly identified the poverty, the incessant travel and the cordial teaching which became so prevalent in Skovoroda's later life, but it omitted any mention of the lonely and solitary aspect of his existence. Kovalinskij rectified this omission when he noted: "in all the places where he lived, he always chose a solitary corner, and lived simply, without any ado." 109 He added: "He had the habit of devoting the middle of the night to prayer, which, in the stillness and deep silence of feelings and nature, was accompanied by meditation." 110 Skovoroda's propensity for solitude gave rise occasionally to accusations of misanthropy, against which he had to defend himself. 111 He however, strongly opposed the


109 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 520.

110 Ibid., p. 522.

111 Ibid., pp. 514-15.
inordinate pursuit of solitude and advised Kovalinskij on this question in a letter: "Do you flee from the crowd? In this be moderate, for isn't the man who so avoids others that he will not speak with any one stupid? Such a man is not holy, but insane."112 It seems, then, that though Skovoroda was able to indulge his inclination for solitude and meditation in the later years of his life, he tried to balance these reflective activities with his more social, educational pursuits. Finally, with regard to Skovoroda's later life it is worth noting that he never married, evidently preferring to pursue his vocation in the state of celibacy.113

Skovoroda's wandering and mendicant style of life was accompanied by an increasing dependence upon what he called "the spirit."114 The demands of this "spirit" were not for Skovoroda vague presentiments or intuitions about what to do, but were rather the personal experience of the actions of the Divine in himself. Kovalinskij has recorded


113 There is a legend that Skovoroda, in the course of his wanderings, met and fell in love with a beautiful girl, but left her at the church on their wedding day. This legend was the basis for a story by the 19th century Ukrainian author and scholar, I. I. Sreznevskii, "Maiormaior." It appeared in Moskovskij Nabljudatel', 1836, VI, pp. 205-38, 435-68, 721-39.

114 For instance Skovoroda wrote, "the spirit ordered me...", Skovoroda, Sobranie Sochinenii, 1912, "Pismo k M. I. Kovalinskoum", p. 123.
one of the more vivid examples of the "spirit" acting in Skovoroda. In 1770 Skovoroda and a friend went to visit one of Skovoroda's relatives, a monk named Justin, who was the superior of the Kitaevskij Hermitage near Kiev. They had stayed at the hermitage for three enjoyable months, when Skovoroda "suddenly noticed an incomprehensible inner movement of the spirit, which impelled him to leave Kiev." Following this impulse, as was his custom, Skovoroda asked Justin to give him leave to depart. Justin instead tried to persuade him to stay. Very soon after this Skovoroda went into Kiev, and, while he was there, "smelled an odor of dead corpses so strong that he could not bear it." On the next day he left Kiev, "to the dissatisfaction of Justin, but with the benediction of the spirit." Not long after his departure he learned that, "Kiev was experiencing an epidemic of the plague, about which he had not heard during his stay there, and that the city was already under quarantine."

Skovoroda's sensations of the spirit were at times even more profound than his experience in Kiev in 1770. Kovalinskij has described one such experience which

115 Kovalinskij, "Żizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 517.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., p. 518.
118 Ibid.
occurred in the late 1760's, and which was probably
Skovoroda's first experience of such intensity.

Having various thoughts and sensations of
soul with reverence and gratitude to God,
and having arisen early, I went out into the
garden to take a walk. The first sensation
which I felt with my heart was a certain
familiarity, freedom, cheerfulness, and hope
with fulfillment. Bringing to this dispo-
sition of soul all of my will and desire, I
felt within myself an extreme movement,
which filled me with incomprehensible
strength. Momentarily a certain sweet out-
pouring filled my soul, from which my whole
insides burned with fire, and it seemed that
a fiery current circulated throughout my
surroundings. I began not to walk but to
run, for I was carried by some kind of
delight, not feeling in myself either hands or
feet, but as if I consisted entirely of a
fiery substance which was carried into the
space of the surroundings. The whole world
disappeared before me; a singular feeling of
love, tranquility, and eternity animated my
existence. Tears streamed from my eyes, and
poured a certain tender harmony into my whole
being. I penetrated into myself, and
experienced a still more filial assurance
than love, and from that hour I consecrated
myself in filial service to the divine
spirit. 119

These actions of the Divine, whether they were the firm
proddings of the spirit which Skovoroda sensed in Kiev, or
the mystical type of experience described immediately
above, were the greatest influence on his life. He had had
similar though less intense experiences in his earlier
life, as witness some of his poems,120 but with the

119 Ibid.
120 See above, pp 24-25.
adoption of his more solitary wandering life, these experiences, their intensity and subsequently their impact, multiplied. In spite of his contacts with the "spirit" and the impact of these contacts on his life, however, Skovoroda suffered from periodic fits of depression in which he doubted his ability to live up to this divine promise. Late in his life he lamented:

Oh my Father! It is difficult to sever my heart from the sticky, elemental filth.
Oh, it is difficult! I have seen the image of a winged youth. He yearned to fly into the celestial regions, but his foot, attached by a chain to the earth, impeded him. This image is my own. 121

Skovoroda continued to lead his peripatetic and spiritual existence right up to his death in the autumn of 1794. In the summer of that year he had traveled to the village of Xotetovo, about fifteen miles from Orēl, in order to visit Kovalinskij. After a three week stay he determined to return to the Ukraine; Kovalinskij asked him, in view of his age, and the incessantly damp weather at the time, to remain at Xotetovo. Skovoroda, however, contending that; "the spirit ordered him to leave," prepared for the return journey. 122 On August 26, Skovoroda embraced his friend and said,

Perhaps I will not see you again. Goodbye! Remember always, during all your life's

122 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 530.
adventures, the things we have often
discussed: light and darkness, head and
tail, good and evil, eternity and time.
My spirit has recognized you as most
capable of receiving the truth and loving it. 123

Soon after returning he went to visit a certain
Kovalevskij who was a landowner in Ivanovka, about twenty-
five miles from Kharkov. He stayed there more than a
month, weakened by age, the climate, and his recent trek. 124
Even in this condition, "he had a good influence on the
landowner, subduing his extremely irascible disposition,
which broke like a storm over both his family and his
household." 125 Kovalevskij, remarking Skovoroda's
physical exhaustion, suggested that he prepare for death
with the Orthodox ritual. Skovoroda, though he did not
consider ritual necessary for those who truly believed, did
not want to reject the landowner's sincere offer, and,
having fulfilled everything according to Orthodox regu-
lations, he died on October 29, 1794. 126 Before he died
however he requested that he be buried near a grove of
trees on a rise overlooking a pond, and further that his
epitaph read, "the world chased me, but it did not catch

123 Ibid.
124 Ibid., p. 531.
125 G. P. Danilevskij, "Grigoriij Savviš Skovoroda,"
Sochinenija G. P. Danilevskogo, Vol. XXI, St. Petersburg:
1901, p. 82.
126 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 531.
To this simple but profound epitaph, Kovalinskitj added an epitaph of his own which summed up his sentiments concerning Skovoroda's life and teachings:

Jealous of truth, a zealous God-seeker,
A sage in word, thought and life;
A lover of simplicity, without superstition,
Candid and happy in spite of strife;
Most learned by dint of his knowing nature,
Skovoroda should be an example for life. 128

This account has, perhaps artificially, divided Skovoroda's life into three periods: 1) 1722-53, from his birth until his return from abroad; 2) 1753-69, from his return until his final departure from the Kharkov Academy; 3) 1769-94, from this departure until his death. It is fair to emphasize that this periodization is only a matter of convenience, and that in fact Skovoroda's life made a single whole. The earlier two periods, the first, educational, and the second, occupational and experimental, led coherently to the third, the period of wandering, teaching and writing. But just as the periods of Skovoroda's life formed a single living fabric, so did his life and thought, which were inextricably intertwined. This close connection between his life and thought has not been lost upon the most perceptive authors who have

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127 Ibid.
128 Ibid., p. 535.
written about Skovoroda. More importantly, however, Skovoroda himself was conscious of this connection and he indicated the importance of bringing life and thought into accord when he wrote: "Correct practice is the fruit of all science and art... It is impossible to build with the word if at the same time one destroys with the deed." Skovoroda's consciousness of the interdependence of life and thought, word and practice, made his life simultaneously the basis for and the product of his thought. Before this essay turns to a discussion of his thought, however, it will consider briefly Skovoroda's relationship to his society.


CHAPTER II

SKOVORODA AND HIS SOCIETY

This essay has so far considered Skovoroda's life, activities, and personality, and the manner in which they were interrelated. In this second part of the essay the discussion turns to a consideration of the society in which Skovoroda lived, how he reacted to that society, and how that society influenced his life and thought.

When one speaks of Skovoroda's society he means, naturally, Little Russian or Ukrainian society. Skovoroda consciously identified himself as a member of this society, when, in a letter to Kovalinskij, he referred to Little Russia as "my mother," and the Ukraine as "my aunt." Since Skovoroda lived, and worked in, and consciously identified with the Ukraine, it follows that one wishing to understand his relationship to his society should consider, at least in broad terms, the political, social, economic

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1 Skovoroda, Tvoï, 1961, "Pismo do M. M. Kovalinskogo," II, p. 386. Skovoroda not only identified himself with Little Russia and the Ukraine, but distinguished between them, since he considered the Hetman Ukraine as Little Russia, and the Slobodosko-Ukraine, or Land of Free Communes, which was to the east of the Hetman Ukraine, as the Ukraine. For the purposes of this essay this whole region will be referred to simply as the Ukraine, or the left-bank Ukraine. Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 511.
and religious situation which obtained in the Ukraine during Skovoroda's lifetime (1722-94).

With the Bogdan Khmelnitsky rebellion of 1648, Poland began to lose her political control of the leftbank Ukraine which from that time fell gradually under the political sway of Russia. The decision of Ukrainian leaders to call upon Russia in their struggle against the Poles was of the utmost significance in this development. The treaty of Perejaslavl (1654) made the Ukraine a protectorate of Russia and was followed by the treaty of Andrusovo (1667) which gave Russia control of left-bank Ukraine and the city of Kiev. The development of the Russian political control of the Ukraine which began with the rebellion of 1648 was not completed until the early 1780's when the independent political institutions of the Ukraine were finally abolished. Skovoroda, therefore, witnessed the last episodes in the Russian abolition of Ukrainian political independence, a development to which he referred adversely though obliquely when he wrote that, "you profane when you introduce the slave yoke and heavy labor into a country of perfect peace and freedom."²

Though this criticism was indirect, Skovoroda aimed a more candid remark at the Russian destruction of Ukrainian

political freedom when he exclaimed in a poem entitled "De Libertate" (On Freedom).

What is freedom? Is it any good?
Some say it is a lot like gold.
But freedom is not like gold at all,
For freedom to gold is like wine to gall.
No matter how one embroiders it,
My freedom I shall ne'er forfeit.
Glory forever, oh chosen one
The father of freedom, heroic Bogdan. ³

Skovoroda's remark about the introduction of the "slave yoke" as well as his poem "De Libertate" give one reason to believe that he was aware not only of the Russian encroachments on Ukrainian independence, but also of the Ukrainian social and economic development which accompanied these encroachments, namely, the enserfment of the Ukrainian peasantry. By the late seventeenth century the Cossack elders of the Ukraine as well as the monasteries were becoming the great land owners of the Ukraine. ⁴

In the 1730's the cossack elders were petitioning the hetman to abolish the right of free movement for the

³ Skovoroda, Tvori, 1961, "De Libertate," (On Liberty) II, p. 80. Skovoroda's reference to Bogdan was, of course, to Bogdan Khmelnitsky, the Cossack who led the rebellion of 1648 against the Polish overlords of the Ukraine. Skovoroda, in harking back to Khmelnitsky, did honor not only to the ideal of Ukrainian independence but also to his own Cossack ancestors who surely participated in the struggle for Ukrainian independence.

⁴ D. Doroshenko, History of the Ukraine, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: 1939, pp. 353-63.
peasants. With the passage of time and the waning of Ukrainian political independence these petitions were directed to the Russian ruler. Such petitions did not go unheeded, for by the decrees of December 10, 1763 and May 3, 1783 respectively, Empress Catherine first restricted the free movement of the Ukrainian peasantry and finally abolished it altogether. With the abolition of free movement for the peasantry, Catherine positioned the last legal plank in the structure of Ukrainian serfdom.

Finally, with reference to the political, social and economic developments which Skovoroda witnessed, one must mention the transformation of the Cossack officer class into members of the Russian nobility. This transformation accompanied the Ukraine's loss of political independence and the fastening of serfdom on the Ukrainian peasantry, and, in fact all three of these developments were part of the larger process by which Russia assimilated the Ukraine and made her part of the Empire. The creation of this new nobility of the Ukraine was completed by Catherine's

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6 Polnoe Sobranie Zakonov Rossisskoj Imperii, Ser. I, XVI, #11987.

7 Ibid., XXI, #15724.
"Charter of the Nobility" of 1785.8 Throughout the eighteenth-century, therefore and culminating in the 1780's, the cossack officers of the Ukraine, impelled by both the pressure and the encouragement of the Russians traded the political independence of the Ukraine and the social and economic position of the Ukrainian peasantry for their own social and economic advantage. One can observe that the political, social and economic development of the eighteenth-century Ukraine therefore, "resembles that already observed in the older territories of Muscovy -- a compromise between autocrat and aristocrat, at the cost, in large part, of the ploughman."9

But if Skovoroda was conscious of his society's lack of freedom, he seemed to be even more aware of its low level of spirituality. In the main he viewed the Orthodox church as incapable of spiritual leadership,10 its monasteries as nests of indulgent Pharisees,11 and its membership as a crowd of unreflective and superstitious

louts.\textsuperscript{12} despite his outlook concerning the Church, however, Skovoroda did not abandon his belief in its most crucial dogmas, the trinity of God and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. Still his opposition to the Orthodox Church impelled him to seek a more spiritual and ascetic Christianity removed from a dependence on material forms and comforts. In this personal quest for a more spiritual Christianity Skovoroda resembled the "Protestant" sects which originated in Southern Russia during the mid and late eighteenth century, the Dukhobors and the Molokans. Skovoroda and these "Protestant" sects knew and admired one another,\textsuperscript{13} but despite their affinities and affection Skovoroda never became a sectarian. Two reasons explain Skovoroda's refusal to become a sectarian. Firstly, he was personally opposed to the general concept of sectarianism, i.e. to the identification of a group of people according to their religious and moral ideals. He indicated this

\textsuperscript{12} Skovoroda, \textit{Sobranie So\v{c}inenij}, 1912, "Pismo k S. I. Tevja\v{s}ovu," p. 362.

\textsuperscript{13} There is a marked similarity between Skovoroda's ideas and those advanced by the Ekaterinoslav Dukhobors in their apology of 1791, though it is impossible to prove that Skovoroda directly influenced the Dukhobors. Besides this it is well known that the Molokans admired some of Skovoroda's works and used one of his songs in their services. P. Miliukov, \textit{\O cerki po Istorii Russkoj Kultury}, III vols., Paris: 1931, II, pt. 1, p. 124; F. V. Livianov, Baskolniki i Ostro\v{z}niki, II vols., St. Petersburg: 1872, II, pp. 236-37; F. Kudrinskij, "Filosof bez Sistema," \textit{Kievskaja Starina}, 1898, #3, pp. 436-37.
opposition, when, in answer to a question about the Martinists,\textsuperscript{14} he declared:

Every sect smells of selfishness, and where there are the self-wise there can be neither a meaningful aim nor wisdom. I do not know the Martinists or their teachings; if they are identified by rules and ritual so that they may appear wise then I do not want to know them; If they philosophize in simplicity of heart as useful citizens of society, then I esteem them. . . Love for one's brethren has no sects. \textsuperscript{15}

Secondly, Skovoroda disagreed theologically with the Dukhobors and Molokans, since he firmly believed in the Orthodox dogmas of the trinity of God and the Divinity of Jesus Christ, and they did not.\textsuperscript{16} The result of Skovoroda's disenchantment with the official church therefore was that while he remained rather Orthodox theologically, and did not openly leave the Church he was inclined to be somewhat sectarian spiritually.

Skovoroda's praise of freedom and attack on the Orthodox Church demonstrated his negative attitude toward both the "official" society and the "official" church. These attitudes, however, did not result in a heightened

\textsuperscript{14} Followers of the French author Claude St. Martin (1743-1803) a theosophsit and himself an adherent of Jacob Boehme.

\textsuperscript{15} Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 524.

political, social, or ecclesiastical activity directed toward the reform of society or the Church. For instance, Skovoroda neither advocated that peasants use mass revolutionary means to ameliorate their existence,\(^{17}\) nor entered an Orthodox monastery to begin the spiritual regeneration of the Church from within. Along with this he maintained cordial relations with many individual members of the gentry and the clergy, which gives cause to conclude that he did not consider these people as the enemy, per se.\(^ {18}\)

Though Skovoroda's negative attitudes toward society and the Orthodox Church did not result in any heightened political, social or ecclesiastical activity, they did have an impact on both his life and his thought.\(^ {19}\) This influence seems to have been threefold: 1) on his choice

\(^{17}\) As far as the question of Skovoroda's stand on the efficacy of a mass movement to change the condition of society, it is worth noting that nowhere in his work did he even mention the Pugačev uprising (1773-75) or the conditions which made it possible.


\(^{19}\) Skovoroda gave some indication of his outlook concerning the relationship between the understanding of a situation and the acting in accord with that understanding when he wrote, "What is the use in knowing how a business is done if you do not become accustomed to doing it. It is not difficult to know, it is difficult to become habituated. Learning and habit are the same. They reside not in knowledge, but in action. Information without action is a torment." Skovoroda, Tvorij, 1961, "Basni Xarkovskija," (Fables of Kharkov), II, p. 113.
of a style of life; 2) on his choice of a vocation; 3) on the content of his thought.

Skovoroda's ultimate rejection of any regular job, official employment, or ecclesiastical activity as well as his refusal to accept the comfortable life which would have accompanied such positions was at least in part attributable to his dissatisfaction with the political, social, economic, and religious development approved by "society." As has been indicated in the discussion of his life, Skovoroda had lucrative offers, both secular and clerical, but refused them all and instead adopted his peripatetic and poverty-stricken style of life. The adoption of this style of life truly reflected Skovoroda's sense of separation from official society, a sense of separation which Alexander Herzen, in characterizing the Russian intelligentsia of the mid-nineteenth century, referred to as "a profound feeling of alienation from official Russia, from the society which surrounded them, and together with this a yearning to leave it."20

Though Skovoroda's choice of a life style was in part a reaction against the society in which he lived, his

choice of a vocation, namely writing and teaching, indicated his optimism concerning the potential for improving that society. Skovoroda was convinced that nothing was more valuable than a good education, and for this reason he admonished that anyone who wanted to teach, must, "study a long time." But the study and teaching with which Skovoroda wanted to improve individual man, and eventually, society, was concerned not with the material world but with the discovery of the Divinity and the Divine law within man, which alone could make man happy. "Is there any empirical discipline," he asked, "which teaches about peace of mind?" The answer to this question was clear for Skovoroda:

I want no new sciences, only a healthy mind, And the wisdom of Christ, which will provide me peace. 23

Partly because he believed that this spiritual regeneration of the individual man could ameliorate the conditions of society, therefore, Skovoroda sought to reach all men in his society with the message of the Divinity of man. This meant that he engaged in his discussion about the Divine essence in man and nature with peasants, landlords,


officials, merchants, priests, monks, bishops, and whom-ever else he may have encountered in his wanderings throughout the left-bank Ukraine. In so teaching all men, Skovoroda evinced a certain rough egalitarianism which, though it was based on spiritual, nor political or social grounds,\textsuperscript{24} nonetheless gave a decidedly democratic caste to his educational activities, and demonstrated his dedication to the spiritual improvement and subsequent political and social tranquility of all men.

If Skovoroda's choice of a life-style and vocation reflected the influence of his environment, the content of his teachings did so even more. Throughout an analysis of Skovoroda's thought, one can note his overwhelming emphasis on the existence of the Divine in man, nature and the Bible and the necessity of the discovery of this Divinity for man's happiness. Now one may attribute this emphasis to Skovoroda's educational background or even to his highly developed religious inclinations. But it would be a mistake not to consider his teachings in light of the political, social and economic turmoil and the religious deterioration of the Ukraine in the eighteenth century.

\textsuperscript{24} Skovoroda's conception of the spiritual equality of all men was best stated in his description of men as so many separate vessels which were filled with the water of Divine nourishment. All the vessels, i.e. men, he argued did not contain the same amount when filled to capacity, but all were equal in so far as they were "equally full." Skovoroda, \textit{Sobranie Sočinenij}, 1912, "Razgovor, nazyvaemyj Alfavit ili Bukvar Mira," pp. 340-41.
Skovoroda, faced with the tumult of his time was impelled to seek something of permanence and stability amid the sea of change. This permanence could not exist, as such, in the physical or apparent world since this world was so obviously transient and corruptible. But neither could it exist altogether outside the physical world, for this would make the world and man's life in it absurd. Faced with a patent impossibility on the one hand and an evident absurdity on the other, Skovoroda sought and found the immutable and eternal, the permanence to which he could always cling, in a Divinity which was both within and without this visible world, in a Divinity which was jointly immanent and transcendent. This is not to maintain, of course, that teachings such as his could develop only during a time and a place marked by such rapid transformations and spiritual decay as the eighteenth-century Ukraine. It is rather to suggest that the content and emphasis of Skovoroda's thought is more comprehensible when viewed against the backdrop of the society in which he lived and his reaction to it.

Even if one admits the influence of Skovoroda's society on his life and thought, he might find its impact to have been inconsistent or contradictory, particularly as concerned, 1) Skovoroda's rejection of "official" society and church coupled with his continued efforts to deal with it in his educational efforts, and, 2) his revulsion with
the world of appearances and resulting preoccupation with the Divinity which underlay this world, vis-a-vis his understanding that the awareness of the Divinity would ultimately improve human society. The first inconsistency may be dispelled by appeal to both Skovoroda's personality and his spiritual egalitarianism. However, bitterly Skovoroda may have felt about the society and the church he found it personally difficult not to treat its individual members with consideration. Besides this, his concept of the spiritual equality of men constrained him to view every man as worthy of attention and potentially capable of finding the Divinity within himself. The second inconsistency can best be explained in terms of Skovoroda's emphasis on the immanence of God. When Skovoroda rejected the world of appearances and discovered the Divinity which sustained it, he concluded that this Divinity, though separate from the world was also immanent to it. Therefore the apparent world, including the individuals which comprised society, possessed a Divine spark. More than this, Skovoroda taught that if man came to understand that this Divinity was within himself, he would also understand the Divine will or law which determined his place in the world. When men acted according to this Divine law, therefore, and played the role determined for them by God, the strife and contentions which marked a society ignorant of the Divine law would cease and social harmony would
prevail. Skovoroda's preoccupation with the Divine, especially with the Divine immanance, therefore, led him directly to the belief that individual spiritual regeneration rather than social or ecclesiastical reform would promote social tranquility.²⁵

A recapitulation of Skovoroda's relation to society makes it clear that he witnessed the abolition of the independent political institutions of the left-bank Ukraine, the enserfment of the Ukrainian peasantry, and the ennoblement of the Cossack officer class, and commented adversely on these developments. Along with this he was appalled by the low level of his society's spiritual life, as evidenced by the condition of the Orthodox Church, its monastic institutions, and its membership. But these reactions did not lead him to a heightened political, social or ecclesiastical involvement. They did, however, have an impact on his life and thought as concerned, 1) his choice of a wandering and poverty-stricken life, 2) his decision to embark on a lifetime of teaching, and, 3) his preoccupation with the immanent-transcendent Divinity.

²⁵ Skovoroda evidenced his belief concerning the indispensability of a correct individual spiritual vision for the development of social peace when he wrote that the absence of such spiritual vision, "had set Constantinople at odds, disfigured the Parisian streets with fraternal blood, and armed the son against the father." Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Pismo k S. I. Tevjašovu," p. 362.
Finally, while the influences of Skovoroda's society on his life and thought appear contradictory, they make sense when one views them in the light of Skovoroda's optimism concerning individual man's potential for spiritual regeneration, and his allied view that this regeneration would result in social peace.
CHAPTER III
SKOVORODA'S THOUGHT

Introduction

The following pages are devoted to a discussion of Skovoroda's thought, that thought which simultaneously issued from and influenced his life and relation to society. This discussion is divided, arbitrarily, though conveniently into six sections: 1) knowledge, 2) symbol and Bible, 3) man, 4) morality, 5) the material world, and 6) God. In the opening section Skovoroda's dualistic approach to knowledge becomes clear, as does his separation of the realm of appearances into 1) man, 2) the material world, i.e. nature, and 3) the Bible. In the succeeding four sections the discussion considers in a more detailed fashion, Skovoroda's views concerning man, nature, and the Bible respectively, as well as his teaching about what constitutes a moral life for man. In the final section, the topic is Skovoroda's theology, which was consonant with and admirably reflected his other views. At the conclusion of each of the six sections there is appended, for the readers convenience, a short summary.
Knowledge

Skovoroda did not consider knowledge in the scientific and systematic fashion of the empirical and rationalist philosophers of Western Europe. Despite this lack of science and system, however, his view of knowledge was fundamental to his thought, and must be understood if one wishes to comprehend his thought. The impetus for Skovoroda's consideration of knowledge was his despair over the capacity of the physical world to bring man happiness. He gave expression to this despair in numerous verses:¹

Woe unto you world! You display laughter outside,
While you sob secretly from the soul inside.
Your surface is well adorned,
But inside with tears you overflow
Both night and day. ²

Live for three centuries or even for eternity,
Is it any good, or use,
If your heart endures abuse?
When you are not at ease, no material can appease.

¹ Skovoroda's penchant for expressing some of his serious philosophical ideas in verse was probably attributable to three influences: firstly, the contemporary vogue for such expression as in the satires of Antioch Kantemir (1708-44), or the dramas of Georgij Konisskij (1717-95) who taught at the Kievan Academy during Skovoroda's years there; secondly, Skovoroda's didactic aims, which poetry served by disseminating his ideas to many who would never have read his prose; thirdly, his personal religious experiences which were of such a profound, almost ineffable, nature, that he sometimes found it easier to express them in poetry than in prose.

² Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Ubogiĭ Žajvoronok," (The Poor Lark) p. 492.
Conquer the world, rule many lands
Is it any good, or use
If your heart endures abuse?
When you are not at ease, no material can appease. 3

The above verses indicate Skovoroda's lack of confidence in
the material world, but as an observer rather than a par-
ticipant in it. He delivered an even more bitter and
desperate indictment of the insufficiency of the world of
appearances when he wrote in the first person:

The storm's whirlwind rocks my bark,
It plunges into the abyss, up to the heights.
There is no peace for me,
And no protection,
The sea devours me!

A mountain ascends to the sky,
Another descends to the abyss,
Hope wanes in me,
My spirit disappears,
I await - there is no help. 4

One might argue that these verses did not address them-
selves directly to the problem of knowledge and such an
argument would be correct. But though they did not touch
immediately on epistemology, they still indicated
Skovoroda's profound distrust of the physical world, and,
by logical projection, of that knowledge which was solely
concerned with the physical world.

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But if Skovoroda despaired of the material world and its capacity to bring satisfaction to man, he did not doubt man's need and ability to observe and understand the physical world. The reason for this commendation was his opinion that man could rise from knowledge of appearances to a knowledge of whatever it was that underlay the sensible world. Skovoroda did not fully explain how this occurred, but his own concern with both the inability of empirical knowledge to make man happy, and the organization and order in the physical world lead one to conclude that for him knowledge of the physical world, by its insufficiency, impelled man to seek a higher spiritual knowledge, and by its organization, pointed the way toward the spiritual essence which underpinned and ordered the material world. Therefore knowledge of the material world in Skovoroda's view was only a first step towards a greater, spiritual knowledge. "If you want to know something truly," he wrote, "look first at the flesh, i.e. at its externality, and you will see on it traces of God which reveal the unknown and hidden wisdom." Empirical knowledge, however, was not an end in itself. Skovoroda described such purely empirical knowledge as, "mean thought and elemental understanding which concerns itself with base affairs, and does not see through to the Divine element, ... This is

idolatry, the beginning of every evil and malice, and also its end.® Further, Skovoroda likened those people, who sought only this empirical knowledge to caged birds, "which beat themselves against the cage from one side to the other, but nowhere find room to fly."® Just as the birds were restrained by the cage so were the people imprisoned by their attachment to appearances. Such people were according to Skovoroda, "confused and tormented within their walls," and therefore he concluded, "What is so narrow and restraining as appearances?"®

Though Skovoroda based his view of knowledge on his mistrust of the physical world and a concomitant lack of confidence in an exclusive concern with empirical knowledge, he embroidered this outlook in a positive and instructive fashion. He divided the world of appearances into three parts. Of these three parts he argued that,

6 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Kol'co," p. 254. To a large extent Skovoroda's negative attitude toward empirical knowledge was typical of eighteenth-century Russia, for though the influence of Western scientific thought increased in this century, it had little impact on the mass of the population, including the educated clerics whose training excluded any rigorous scientific study.


8 Ibid. Skovoroda's emphasis on essence at the expense of appearances has the ring of oriental transcendentalism about it. There is however no evidence, from his work to suggest that he was familiar with Eastern philosophy.
"the first is the universal, inhabited world where all the creatures which are born live. This world is comprised of numberless worlds, and is the macro-world."\(^9\) This first of the visible worlds then was nature, or as Skovoroda termed it, "the macro-world." The other two worlds Skovoroda claimed were, "micro and personal worlds. The first microcosm, i.e. little world, is man. The second is the symbolic world, i.e. the Bible."\(^10\) Skovoroda's division of the apparent universe into nature, man, and Bible paved the way for his positive approach to knowledge, because, having made this division, he added that, "all three worlds consist of two substances, which are joined together, called matter and form."\(^11\) Skovoroda clearly demonstrated here his familiarity and agreement with Platonic thought, for, he continued that, "These forms are called ideas by Plato."\(^12\) Though Skovoroda seemed to take an uncritically Platonic attitude here on the question of matter and form, some of his other work indicates that he came to concur with Plato because he saw that one of his three categories, man, possessed other than merely physical properties. He argued for this dualistic view of man on the basis of his

\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid., p. 498.
\(^12\) Ibid.
awareness of the eternal and incorruptible aspects of the regular operations of the human mind. He could ask about memory for instance:

What is more amazing than memory, which eternally generates the whole world, protects for all time the seeds of all creatures in their bosoms, and sees with a single eye past and future affairs, as it sees the present? . . . Memory is the heart's eye which, never sleeping, sees all creation; it is the unsetting sun, which illuminates the universe. 13

And along with this he exclaimed over man's capacity to ideate as follows:

Draw a circle. Make one from wood or fashion one from clay. Then erase the first or destroy the others. Now tell me, have you destroyed the circle? . . . You have clearly destroyed the visible circle, but the immaterial and essential circle remains uncorrupted in the recesses of the mind. That which is not created can not be destroyed. 14

But if man's ability to remember and to think supported Skovoroda's claim that man was a microcosm who consisted of something other than physical form then it also forced him to conclude that the physical body itself was nothing, while that which the body concealed was the real man. "How long," questioned Skovoroda, "until you understand that all flesh is nothing, a shadow which


conceals the highest amount of wisdom?" To those who were captivated by man's physical body Skovoroda declared:

You have seen and loved the dolt and the idol in yourself, and not the true body concealed in Christ. You have loved yourself, i.e. the rubbish, but not the hidden Divine truth in yourself, which you have never seen, nor considered as being. 16

And again:

You see in yourself only the earth, and because of this you see nothing, for the earth and nothing are one and the same. It is one thing to see the shadow of the oak tree it is another to see the tree itself. You see your shadow, to put it simply, your waste land and nothing else. But you have never seen yourself. 17

Skovoroda considered that man, having understood that his body was only his outer form, had to seek knowledge within himself. Unless man could first know himself it would be useless and even impossible for him to know anything outside himself. "Not having measured yourself first, what advantage will you gain from knowing the measurements of other creatures? Or is it even possible?" 18

15 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Ubuždšeja videša slavu Ego," (Awakening, They saw His glory) p. 52. Though Skovoroda loved the thought of the ancient philosophers, particularly Socrates and Plato, he thought of wisdom primarily in the Christian sense of the understanding of the will of God and the ordering of one's life in accord with it.


17 Ibid., p. 80.

18 Ibid., p. 87.
Skovoroda therefore never tired of admonishing his audience with the Socratic dictum, "know yourself."\(^{19}\) It is impossible to discover anything outside yourself."\(^{20}\) But what means did Skovoroda advise as the way of achieving this self-knowledge? On this question he spoke forcefully:

> Think without interruption in order to know yourself. This is prayer, i.e. an arousing of your thoughts to self-knowledge. Your cry, the secret cry, this alone enters the ear of the Lord Sabbaoth, and, like the fragrant sacrificial smoke used in Arabia, it arises and delights the Divine sense of smell.\(^{21}\)

Skovoroda counseled then as the means for the attainment of self-knowledge long periods of meditation. From Kovalinskij's account of his life it is evident that Skovoroda followed his own advice, and that the results of his meditations were mystical experiences during which Skovoroda both, "consisted of a fiery substance which was carried into the space of his surroundings," and "penetrated" into himself.\(^{22}\) Skovoroda's mystical experiences recall those of the German mystics, particularly Jacob

\(19\) Ibid., p. 75.

\(20\) Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Asxan," p. 146. Here is a good example of Skovoroda's dependence on both ancient and Christian thought. He used the Socratic dictum "know thyself," but in the Pauline sense of understanding the will of God and submitting to it in one's own life, as expressed in Paul's epistle to the Colossians, (Col. 1:9).

\(21\) Ibid.

\(22\) Kovalinskij, "Żizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 518.
Boehme, whose works Skovoroda knew, whether at first or second-hand. This is not to argue that Skovoroda could not have had his personal experience of God without the influence of the German mystics, but simply to indicate that he was familiar with them and that this familiarity may have influenced his religious experiences which were similar to theirs.

Skovoroda's search for the real, inner man brought him, through his mystical experiences, to a simultaneous meeting with both himself and God, and in fact impelled him to identify them, and to teach that man had to go beyond empirical knowledge if he was to understand himself:

There is a single labor in both knowing oneself and comprehending God, and this labor is knowing and comprehending the real man. The whole difficulty and deception results from our stopping in the shadow. But know that the true man and God are the same.

Skovoroda's identification of the true man and God was not so complete as he made it seem here. In the chapter on Skovoroda's conception of man the ultimate separation of God and true man will be evident. Still, Skovoroda saw an authentically Divine spark in man, and perhaps used the


bold identification of God and "true" man in order to shake the lethargy of his audience, which no doubt had been reared on the old concept of man made in the image and likeness of God.

The encountering of the true self and God in these mystical experiences was ineffable, although Skovoroda sometimes tried to describe them, as he did once to Kovalinskij.\(^{25}\) Besides this description Skovoroda has left behind some verses which detail not his experiences, but rather, in symbolic terms, their impact on him.

The clouds have passed. A rainbow shines
All anguish has fled. The world is aglitter.
When the gloom and noise of the world has passed,
The joy of the heart is an Eden of fine weather. \(^{26}\)

Begone, begone!  
O sorrowful night!  
The sun arises,  
Permitting light.  
The light enters.  
Joy is born.  
O deluging night,  
Begone, begone! \(^{27}\)

The mystical and noetic experiences which led Skovoroda to know the true man and to identify him with God

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\(^{25}\) See above p. 41.


would not, in his opinion be of the same intensity for all.
Notwithstanding these differences however, all men, if they
meditated, could find the true man within themselves.
Skovoroda could justify this contention by arguing that:

God is like a rich fountain which fills
various containers according to their
capacities. Above the fountain is the
inscription, 'equality is not equal for
all.' Various streams of water flow from
various pipes into different vessels which
stand around the fountain. The smaller
vessels contain less than the larger, but
they are equally large in so far as they
are equally full. 28

Every man, therefore, performing up to his capacity for
meditation and self-knowledge and opening himself
completely to Divine nourishment, could come to some under-
standing of himself and the Divinity buried within himself.
Skovoroda therefore advocated no elitism but rather
invited, as he was convinced that God invited, all men to
share in the knowledge of their inner selves.

Finally in explaining this self-knowledge to which
all men must come Skovoroda employed a favorite myth-
ological figure, the youth Narcissus, "whose image noises
abroad the message: 'know thyself'." 29 Narcissus, viewing
his reflection in the water, "burns, being inflamed with

28 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Razgovor

29 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Narkiss,"
p. 75.
the fire of love, and yearns, being jealous."\textsuperscript{30} But Narcissus, pining for his own reflection, truly loved himself, for "whoever has seen the beauty of his own corruptibility in the water falls in love not with his appearances or reflection, but with himself and with his own reality."\textsuperscript{31} This love however could not exist without knowledge according to Skovoroda's scheme. "It is clear," he wrote, "that love is Sofia's daughter. Where wisdom looks, love burns."\textsuperscript{32} Narcissus then loved himself because he knew himself, because he was able to see beyond his appearances to the Divinity within himself. Skovoroda's Narcissus, therefore, when asked what he had seen in the water, answered, "I have seen the supernatural form which flows through my flesh."\textsuperscript{33} Skovoroda used the image of Narcissus to illuminate his own experiences and to incorporate them into his teachings, and this was neither fanciful nor faulty. He used such an image because he could not explain in conceptual terms his profound and ineffable inner experiences. This dependence on symbols, then, sprang from Skovoroda's experiences and became an integral part of his thought.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 76.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 75.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 78.
Skovoroda had advocated that man, the microcosm, find the Divinity within himself, "as if uncovering a spark in his own ashes." But once man had achieved this knowledge of himself he would be able to attain a similar knowledge of Skovoroda's "great world," nature. "Whoever is of pure heart," he argued, "can notice in some kind of matter that very thin ray of the glorious beginning, like an emission of daybreak in the darkness." Skovoroda himself was able to reach such knowledge of nature by observing a particular fish.

Let us look, for example, on the fish called by the Romans, remora, i.e. reduction. This fish, having clung to the hull of a ship, reduces that ship's speed. When you look at the fish, your soul feels no sensation. But when you penetrate with your eye to the Divine Principle hidden in the little fish, then your heart discovers the sweetness of honey.

As the explanation for his contention that the Divine Principle underlay the appearance of the fish Skovoroda offered that, "It would be impossible for the fish, with only the corporeal corruption of its own nature, to hinder the speed of so terrible a machine, if the head, the Divine


36 Ibid.
Principle, were not concealed in its bodily darkness."\textsuperscript{37}
This explanation was only the articulation of Skovoroda's faith that the Divinity in man was also present in nature. Once man had discovered the eternal hidden in himself he would find it everywhere, for; "if your eyes are illuminated by the truth of the spirit . . . then everything is seen doubly . . . all creation is divided into two parts,"\textsuperscript{38} i.e., its corrupt appearance and its Divine essence.

Skovoroda's approach to knowledge in his first two worlds, man and nature, was a consistent one, and he maintained this consistency in his epistemological treatment of his third world, the Bible. In both the natural world and anthropocentric world Skovoroda had considered that the material aspect concealed the Divine essence. He argued similarly concerning the Bible when he wrote that, "In the symbolic or Biblical world the collection of creatures comprises the matter. But Divine nature, to which the creation leads, is the form."\textsuperscript{39} But if the Bible shared the duality of man and nature then its appearances while they could lead to true knowledge were in

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}
themselves worthless and even deceptive. Skovoroda concurred in this precisely when he wrote:

The Bible is a lie and an insult to God not so that it may teach us lies, but rather that it may print in the falsehoods the tracks and paths which lead the slowly creeping mind to the highest truth. 40

If man was to use this third world to achieve knowledge therefore, he had to eschew a literal interpretation in favor of an allegorical one. As a simple example of this Skovoroda used the story of Moses leading the Israelites through the Red Sea (Ex. 14:13-31).

I can not hope to know how and when Moses divided the sea with a rod in space and time, but I can learn how, in my own microcosm, to divide the medley of inclinations of my chaste and corruptible natures, and to lead my will unsinkably along the path of life. 41

If was foolhardy in Skovoroda's opinion to consider the material details of the Bible for their own sake. Such consideration could only lead to atheistic rejection of the Bible on the one hand or its superstitious acceptance on the other. "He who despises the truth hidden in the Biblical lie is drawn to the side of the atheists ... but he who is satisfied by the falsehood is a superstitious person who crawls in the dust." 42 In either case man

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41 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 526.

failed to find true knowledge in the Bible because he could not penetrate its externality and find the Divine truth hidden within. Further, by the Divine truth concealed in the Bible, the Bible itself was God.

If you have chewed and tasted this: 'the Word was with God and the Word was God' (John, 1:1), then understand that the Bible . . . has itself become God; 'and the Word was God,' like a draft for gold money has itself become gold. 43

Skovoroda's claim concerning the Divinity of the Bible, which appears very bold at first glance, appears much less so if viewed in the context of his conceptions concerning man and nature. In his consideration of both man and nature Skovoroda argued that a Divine essence lay beneath and supported physical matter, and in his discussion of the Bible, his symbolic world, he simply repeated this same general argument, namely that a Divine essence was hidden beneath the appearances, in this case beneath the Biblical images.

All three of Skovoroda's worlds, therefore, man, nature, and the Bible, were composed of corrupt appearance and Divine essence, and true knowledge consisted in understanding the Divine principle hidden within the deceptive externality. Skovoroda counseled that this knowledge could be achieved ultimately through meditation. But meditation

itself without faith in its potential results would be fruitless. That Skovoroda understood this was indicated by his praise of faith in the following passage:

Faith is the perspicacious eye, the pure heart, and the open mouth. It alone sees the light which shines in the eternal darkness. It sees, loves, and disseminates its good news. Not to see it is blindness; not to hear it is to be an asp; not to speak about it is to be dumb. 44

Skovoroda's approach to knowledge demanded faith, whether it was his faith in the invisible essence which could not be known through empirical knowledge, or his faith that meditation could lead to knowledge of the inner man and God, and ultimately to the Divine essence in nature and the Bible. The belief in the possibility of discovering God by any means was itself religious faith in the existence of God. Faith or whatever name one gives to the belief in the existence of an invisible Divine principle was the bulwark of Skovoroda's knowledge. He could even connect faith and true knowledge, as when he wrote, "The most important and very beginning point of wisdom is knowledge of God. I do not see Him, but I know and I believe that He is." 45

Because of the indispensability of faith for Skovoroda's knowledge, one could use as the slogan for his approach to

knowledge, not his own humble "I know and I believe," but rather St. Augustine's, "I believe that I may understand."

Summary - Skovoroda had an instinctive distrust of the physical world's capacity to make man happy. As a result of this distrust of the physical world and its ability to produce, of itself, human happiness, Skovoroda adopted a position of epistemological dualism. He argued that there were two kinds of knowledge, one which concerned the physical universe, and another, higher knowledge, which dealt with the Divine essence supporting the physical universe. Skovoroda did not in this approach to knowledge entirely discount empirical knowledge, but rather contended that man, having achieved empirical knowledge, had to rise from this to knowledge of the Divinity. Skovoroda argued that the means of acquiring knowledge of the Divinity was self-knowledge. Further man could achieve self-knowledge only through meditation, which, in Skovoroda's own case led to his mystical experiences and the identification of the true man and God. Having discovered the true man and God within himself, man could find the Divinity in both nature and the Bible. The achievement of this higher, Divine, knowledge however, was impossible without a profound religious faith and so one might conclude that Skovoroda, like St. Augustine, believed in order that he might understand.
Symbol and Bible

An analysis of Skovoroda's epistemology makes clear on two counts why symbols were of significance for him. Firstly, his view of knowledge impelled him to see the material spheres, nature, man and the Bible, as symbols whose appearances concealed the Divine essence. Man, through self-knowledge, could penetrate these symbols and arrive at knowledge of the Divine spark in himself as well as in nature and the Bible. In fact, Skovoroda's view of the material sphere as a symbol which shields the Divine principle is a crucial feature of all mystical thought. Secondly, Skovoroda, who had himself experienced the ineffable and noetic experience of a meeting with the true man and God, found it impossible to describe such an encounter or the insights it produced in any but symbolic terms. Therefore he employed the symbols as a bridge between his "inner" experiences and the "outer" world. This twofold significance of symbols for Skovoroda, compel

46 R. L. Nettleship expressed this most aptly when he wrote that, "true mysticism is the consciousness that everything we experience, every 'fact,' is an element and only an element in 'the fact'; i.e. that in being what it is, it is significant or symbolic of more." R. L. Nettleship, Philosophical Lectures and Remains, 2 vols., London: 1897, I, p. 32. Skovoroda articulated this same sentiment as follows: "all creation is changeable and deceptive, but it is also a field of Divine traces. The radiant truth lies down and arises, hides and is revealed in all of these false terms or restraints." Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Pismo k S. I. Tevjašovu," p. 362.
one interested in his thought to consider his approach to symbols.

Skovoroda contended that the use of symbols of the Divine grew naturally out of the attempts of men to convey the meaning of their most profound religious experiences and insights. It even appears from his attitude toward the origin of symbols that these religious experiences were a sine qua non for the appearance and development of symbols. In support of this view he argued:

... truth, to the sharp gaze of wise men, did not seem vague and distant, as it did to the ignorant, but rather it presented itself clearly as in a mirror, and the wise men, having vividly seen its living form, likened it to various material figures. 47

Skovoroda argued in this passage not only for the indispensability of profound religious experience for the creation of symbols, but also for the natural inclination of man to seek symbolic rather than abstract terms to describe his inner experiences, his encounter with the truth. Skovoroda underlined his antipathy to the use of abstract terms when he declared that, "Colors alone do not describe the rose, the lily, and the narcissus so vividly as the shadow of heavenly and earthly forms creates in them the invisible Divine truth. From this were born

hieroglyphics, emblems, and symbols. Skovoroda therefore argued that symbols were Divinely inspired so that they might compensate for man's inability to abstract his religious experiences.

This view was in accord with his epistemological view that man, having discovered the Divine in himself, could find it in nature as well. And when man became aware of the Divine principle in nature as well as in himself, then he saw the Divine in everything and everything in the Divine: "When you with a new and true eye behold God, you see everything in him as in a mirror, or a spring; everything has always been in Him, but you had never seen it."

It is evident from Skovoroda's conception of Divine symbols that material figures could serve as symbols for the Divine only because matter itself contained a spark of Divinity. In more general terms a symbol, for Skovoroda, had to participate in, or perhaps, be like that which it symbolized. Of course a symbol also had to be different from that which it symbolized or there would have been no need for symbols. Skovoroda, therefore, argued for the use of material figures as symbols of the Divine, because matter was both like and unlike God.

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48 Ibid.

There was, of course, a peril inherent in the use of figures to symbolize the Divine, namely, that those who did not see the figure as symbol would consider the symbol as an end in itself. Skovoroda appreciated this dangerous potential and even pointed out instances of its destructive impact in ancient times. For instance, he argued that the Egyptian sphinx,

Signifies a tie or knot. The fortune-telling of this monster concealed a single moral: know yourself. Not untying this knot was the destruction of the spirit, and the deprivation of the world. The Egyptians built statues of this monster along the streets so that, like numerous mirrors striking the eyes, they would bring to mind this self-sufficient knowledge. 50

The descendants of those Egyptians who conceived this mighty symbol, however,

Were not the same sort of men. They removed the essence of wisdom from this symbol, stripped away the purity of its God-worship, and left only a physical piece of art with its attendant magic and superstition. This monument, suffused with the most useful advice for all, became a temple which had a mouth but did not speak. It only beautified the streets, and was now born as the source of falsehood. 51

Skovoroda, writing of the Persians in like manner, declared that,

Zoroaster depicted the Sun in these words, 'Hear us! Blessed, all-seeing, all possessing, and eternal eye' Hence the

51 Ibid.
ancient Persians worshiped the sun. . . .
The eye however gave cause to depict the
monument as men, beasts, brutes, birds,
fish, and reptiles. And from this came the
occasion for idolatry. Baseness, seeing
the sculpted or painted figures in places
of honor, and not penetrating to the Divine
principle hidden within them . . . seized
upon the insignificant canopy of figures
and wallowed in it. 52

In both of these examples Skovoroda limned the
origin and subsequent deterioration of a symbol, i.e., the
use of a perishable figure to symbolize the Divine by those
who saw the Divine in everything and everything in the
Divine, and the subsequent destruction of the symbol qua
symbol by those who, having lost the ability to "see
doubly," reveled in purely physical appearances, and gave
themselves up to magic and superstition. Because Skovoroda
understood superstition to be precisely the loss of "double
vision" and the resulting destruction of the symbol, he
considered it as the most baneful feature of human life.
He stated that:

Nothing is more harmful than the symbol
which is built for the chief good, but
becomes corrupt. Nothing is more fatal for
society than superstition: it is the cam-
uflage for hypocrites, the mask for
swindlers, the protection for parasites,

52 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Izrailskij
Zmiy," p. 369. Skovoroda's discussion of the deterioration
of symbols was itself a veiled attack on the institutional
church which had placed so much emphasis on exterior forms
at the expense of the spirit of Christianity.
and the spear and the torch for the childish-minded. 53

Because superstition resulted from a failure of personal vision, its first harmful results appeared to be personal:

A superstitious man mourns that another does not pray to the east with him at noon. One is angry that people baptize by immersion, another is infuriated that they baptize by pouring. One damn's kvass, another unleavened bread... It's as if God is a barbarian who quarrels over trifles. 54

Skovoroda saw that the official Church and the schismatics had so stressed the exterior forms of religion that the individual man had lost sight of the Divine in himself and in nature, and had begun to cling only to the world of appearances. Consequently, the appearances, i.e. trifles, had themselves become his God.

But if the first injurious effects of superstition were personal, these effects rapidly increased in scale until they became a social cancer. In support of this contention Skovoroda argued that:

Superstition gave birth to quarrels, arguments, sects, civil and foreign hostilities, and verbal and armed conflicts... Nothing is more bitter and brutal than superstition, and nothing is more impudent than a superstitious rage, which burns with a blind and chauvinistic zeal. This rage,


54 Ibid.
preferring absurd and unstable nonsense to charity and love, and being numb to the feeling of human love, murderously persecutes its own brethren and with this thinks to give service to God. 55

With this gloomy view of superstition, both in its origins and its results, it is easy to understand why Skovoroda could conclude, "It was with good reason that Plutarch believed superstition to be worse than Godlessness."56

Skovoroda's view of symbols and their deterioration, particularly with his emphasis upon historical examples, included a certain aspect of inevitability. He seemed to argue that symbols, however well conceived by some men, would ultimately lose their value as symbols for others and thus become the source of superstition and all of its attendant personal and social ills.57 He articulated this

55 Ibid., p. 361.
56 Ibid., p. 362.
57 Since symbols could lose their symbolic value and since man, nature, and the Bible were, by dint of their Divine spark, Divine symbols, man, nature and the Bible, when viewed incorrectly, could lose their respective Divine symbolic value. When this happened, man considered himself, nature and the Bible as worthy by virtue of their respective phenomenal natures, rather than because of their concealed Divinity. Skovoroda alluded to this loss of symbolic value when, in discussing the phenomenal world as something in itself he compared it to the superstitious golden statue erected by Nebuchadnezzar on the field of Dur: "Every mundane system is an idol on the field of Dur... As long as you are concerned only with the world, so long are you sunk in vanity, and separated from God." Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Knižečka o Čtenii Svjaščennago Fisanija narečenna Žena Lotova," p. 408.
pessimism when he wrote that "all theological mysteries are reduced to ridiculous nonsense and superstitious stories." Skovoroda, however, tempered this pessimism because he understood that the dual aspects of man and nature kept open the possibility of the creation of new, viable symbols or the revitalization of the old ones. Expressing himself on this problem, Skovoroda enthused that:

> Every thought crawls along the earth like a snake. But in it is the eye of a dove, which gazes above the deluging waters upon the beautiful hypostasis of truth. In a word all this rubbish breathes with God and Eternity, and the Divine Spirit soars above all this filth and falsity. 59

Skovoroda, in his general analysis of symbols, tended to view them as a historical or past problem. But his treatment of symbols led him to a more vital, contemporary question, namely, that of the Bible. Kovalinskij wrote that the Bible was for Skovoroda the most influential book in his life, and Skovoroda concurred in this judgment. 60 Just why this was so will be the subject of the remainder of this chapter.

During his travels in the eastern part of the Ukraine Skovoroda often stopped in Kharkov, a city which he truly loved. On one of his visits to the city he had an


60 See above p. 16.
interview with the governor-general of the Kharkov gubernija, who asked him:

'About what does the Bible teach?' Skovoroda answered, 'About the human heart; our cook books teach us how to gratify the stomach; hunting books how to throttle beasts; fashion books how to dress; the Bible teaches us how to ennoble the human heart.' 61

The Bible, however, could not ennoble the human heart if man could not understand that the Bible was a symbolic realm. 62 Skovoroda considered the Bible as a realm of symbols because, "in it are collected the Heavenly, earthly, and chthonic creatures. These creatures are to be the chief monuments of our thought in the conception of the eternal Nature, which is concealed in the perishable as a portrait in its own colors." 63 Skovoroda here compared the language of the Bible to the religious monuments of ancient times. Both were symbols of the Divine, but in order to insure that they maintained their symbolic value, man had to interpret them symbolically and not physically, or literally.

Since the Bible was a realm of symbols, however, it shared the weakness inherent in all symbols, the potential for becoming the base of superstition if it were

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61 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 520.
62 See above pp. 75-77.
interpreted on the basis of appearances. Skovoroda saw this potential and warned against it incessantly, as when he wrote of the story of creation: "Let there be light: (Gen. 1:3). Where did this light come from, when all the celestial bodies appeared only on the fourth day? And how could there be a day without the sun? . . . Such nonsense belches through the entire creation tale." He added, "Know that to read the Bible and to consider it a lie are the same," i.e. understand that to interpret the Bible symbolically and to consider its literal interpretation a deception are the same. One therefore had to consider the Bible a lie, but only in so far as its literal meaning was concerned.

Despite the danger inherent in the use of the Bible, Skovoroda considered its employment and correct understanding necessary for a greater knowledge of God. He quoted the Bible itself to illustrate that man must, "Search the scriptures. . . . It is they who bear witness to me." (John, 5:39). To find the truth hidden in the Bible demanded a great deal of diligence for, "the speech of the Bible is like the Asian river Meander. It is said that this river flows by the most beautiful places, but its

64 Ibid., p. 507.
65 Ibid., p. 508.
current winds like a snake, and even loses its way, like a palace labyrinth." But for the person who was neither repelled by the difficulty of its language nor captivated solely by its aesthetic form the Bible offered a marvelous reward, because, the perceptive reader of the Bible, "between the empty burial mound of an unrestrained atheism and the foul swamp of a servile superstition, inclining neither to the right nor the left, goes straight to the Divine mountain." Skovoroda argued that the Biblical symbols originated, appropriately, in the book of Genesis:

On the first day six figures appeared: darkness, light, night, day, evening, morning. From these six figures come three symbols: Darkness and light; Night and day; Evening and morning. The symbol consists of two or three figures which signify corruption and eternity. ... For instance, evening and morning. ... Evening is the house of corruption, but morning is the city of eternity. If one viewed the Biblical figures symbolically, the inconsistencies and contradictions of a literal interpretation vanished. Why should one worry whether or not there could be in the story of creation a day without the sun? This

worry could trouble a man only if he were the captive of appearances. If he penetrated those appearances he was no longer anxious with their seeming inconsistency. Skovoroda contended that one had to avoid the entanglements of Biblical appearances when he wrote that, "To philosophize about perishability is to worry with the legions of the devil." 70

Skovoroda not only argued for the presence of symbolic figures in the account of the very first day of creation, but he also indicated that this first day of creation produced an archetypical symbolic figure whose copies were spread through the whole Bible. For him this symbolic prototype was the sun:

'Let there be light!' Suddenly the solar light put on the brilliance of the Divine glory and the image of His hypostasis, and the perishability of this luminary became the sun of justice and the eye of truth as soon as Eternity placed its own eye in the sun. This is the direct creation of the Almighty! To make wonders from nothing and reality from appearance, to give an hypostasis to filth, and greatness to foul perishability. 71

The sun, therefore, by dint of its place in the narration of God's entry into materiality was, "the archetyped, namely, the original and main figure, and its copies and


vice-figures which fill the entire Bible are numberless." 72

Skovoroda maintained that each of the copies, or vice-figures, of the sun was a duality in which one part signified the corrupt externality and the other part that of the inner Divine essence, just as the sun in the creation tale was composed of its visible materiality and it invisible Divine reality, without which there could be no sun. Skovoroda provided a list of examples of these vice-figures when he declared that,

Such vice-figures are, for instance, the Dungeon and Joseph; the Basket and Moses; the Den and Daniel; Abraham's tent and his Guests; the Ark and Noah; the Prison and Jeremiah; the Sea and Isreal; Delilah and Sampson; ... the Skin and Job; the Flesh and Christ; ... the Whale and Jonah; the Manger and the Babe; the Tomb and the One who arose; the Chains and Peter; the Cat-o-nine and Paul; ... Goliath and David; Eve and Adam ... All of these are the same as the material sun and the essential sun. 73

Such a list gives a more precise indication of what Skovoroda meant when he called the Bible a "symbolic realm." Each of the Biblical symbols in this list was composed of the juxtaposition of two elements. The elements of these symbols had their respective literal meanings, but these were, as for instance in the case of the Whale and Jonah, or the Sea and Isreal, clearly

73 Ibid., p. 500.
 unacceptable to Skovoroda. Therefore he eschewed them and sought instead their symbolic significance, which he maintained was their communication of God's relationship to His creation.

Skovoroda's approach to the Bible did not stop with his conception of it as a microcosm in which one could find the truth hidden in symbolic figures. He went beyond this stage and declared that the Bible was not only the symbolic revelation of the Divine, but was itself an incarnation of the Divine:

'The same was in the Beginning with God.' It is necessary to read here: the same was

This interpretation of the Bible must have seemed strange and even heretical to many in Skovoroda's audience, since the traditional view of the Bible did not include the teaching of its Divinity. Because Skovoroda understood this difficulty he explained further:

'The same was in the Beginning with God.'
in the Beginning with God. Namely: the Word. Everything created by God was in it and there was nothing which did not pour forth from God. 'Everything was made by him...'. And just as in the worthless draft is hidden the gold coin, so in the corruptible and mortal appearances of these books, and in the flume of their images is concealed purity, light and life. 'In him was life.' 75

One might argue that Skovoroda's assertion of the Bible's divinity which was wholly contrary to the teaching of the official church was only his dramatic fashion of illuminating the importance of the Bible as symbol. But his further statements concerning the Bible as the incarnation of God undermine this argument: "Know my friend, that the Bible is a new world and a Divine person..."; 76 "The Bible is the Divine thoughts, this is the eternal heart, and the eternal heart is the eternal Man." 77 The identification of this Divine person and eternal Man was made clear by Skovoroda when he asked, "Who will take us up the Lord's mountain? Where are you, Jesus Christ, our light? You alone speak the truth in your heart. Your word is truth. Your Gospel is the burning lantern, but You are the

75 Ibid.


77 Ibid., p. 410.
light in it." Skovoroda, then, identified the symbolic Biblical word and the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ. But such an identification meant that the incarnation of the Word in the Bible was as important as the incarnation of the Word in the human form of Jesus Christ. Because of his conception of the Bible, therefore, Skovoroda did not view the Old Testament as merely the introduction to the New, or the narration of the preparation for the appearance of Jesus Christ, but as intrinsically worthy by dint of both its symbolic revelation of God and its divinity.

Skovoroda, having asserted the divinity of the Bible, added, "Now, without a moment's hesitation, I will tell you that the Bible is both God and Serpent." By serpent Skovoroda emphasized once more that the Bible, in spite of its Divinity, shared in the word of appearances or perishable figures:

The Bible is flesh and spirit, violence and wisdom, Sea and Haven, Deluge and Ark. You have already heard that all realms consist of two natures: evil and good. Why is this serpent so terrifying to you? He does not always do harm and make foolish, but is sometimes good and useful.

80 Ibid.
This view of the Bible was consistent with Skovoroda's dualistic approach to both knowledge and symbols, and he underlined this when he warned against permitting the Bible to remain only appearances or figures: "When it is only figures, then the while Bible is a serpent." But if man appreciated the dual nature of the Bible, if he understood that it was "both God and Serpent," both Divinity and the symbolic revelation of the Divinity, then the serpent, i.e. the material element of the symbol, would not prevent man from knowing God but would rather assist him in his pursuit of such knowledge, and so make it possible for the Bible to fulfill its Divine purpose.

Summary - Skovoroda argued that man's use of material figures as symbols of the Divine grew out of his efforts to convey his most profound religious experiences and insights. He also saw, however, that there was a peril inherent in the use of these material figures as symbols of the Divine, namely, that the symbols, however well conceived, could lose their symbolic value and become the base of superstition with all of its concomitant personal and social ills. Skovoroda balanced this rather pessimistic view of the inevitable deterioration of Divine symbols, with the confidence that the duality of both man and

nature held open the possibility of the creation of new symbols, or the revitalization of the old. Using this general conception of symbols as a base, Skovoroda turned to a discussion of the Bible, which he considered as a realm of symbols. Because he viewed the Bible as a symbolic world, Skovoroda contended that man must not interpret it literally, i.e. according to its appearances, but rather symbolically, according to its essence. Since the Bible as a symbolic realm, was analogous to the ancient symbolic monuments, man could only understand the Bible if he penetrated its appearances and reached the revelation of the Divine which was concealed in symbolic Biblical figures. But the Bible was not only the symbolic revelation of the Divine it was itself God, the second person of the Divine Trinity, Jesus Christ. Though this conception was contrary to the traditional teaching of the Orthodox church, it was in accord with Skovoroda's outlook, which stressed the Divine essence as the sustaining and energizing presence in all phenomena. Having emphasized the Bible's Divinity, Skovoroda quickly added that the Bible, because it shared in the world of appearances, was also the "serpent." But if man realized that the Bible was both God and serpent, both Divine essence and the symbolic revelation of the Divine, then the material figures or symbols which revealed the Divinity would help rather than hinder man in his search for God.
Man

It is evident from Skovoroda's concept of self-knowledge that man played a crucial part in his thought. "If we want to fathom the sky, the earth, and the sea," he admonished, "we must first fathom ourselves. . . . And if we do not find the measures within ourselves, then with what can we measure?" This emphasis upon self-knowledge was tied to Skovoroda's conception that since man was a microcosm, knowledge of man was essential to a knowledge of what was outside of man. Skovoroda, on this question, believed that, "Man is a little world and it is as difficult to know his strength as it is to know the principle in the world making." Everything which occurs in the great world occurs in the small," he stated "and what is possible in the small world is possible in the great." Skovoroda did not investigate the assumption that man was a microcosm; he simply adopted this ancient idea and used it as part of his approach to the question of self-knowledge. Almost certainly his awareness of the eternal qualities of man's normal thought processes played some role in his

83 Ibid., p. 95.
84 Kovalinskiy, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 525.
85 See above pp. 66-67.
microcosmic view of man, though he did not argue at length or explicitly along these lines. Still, his experiences with self-knowledge, as well as his allied assumption that man was a microcosm, led him to an analysis of man which is central to an understanding of Skovoroda.

Skovoroda believed that the starting point for the study of man was man's ignorance of himself. "Tell me," he wrote,

If an inhabitant of the moon visited our earthly globe wouldn't he be surprised at our wisdom, seeing how well we interpret the heavenly signs; but at the same time the moon-man would be appalled when he saw how we, in treating our own microcosm, are blind, stupid and lazy, knowing no more about it than about an English watch. We neither notice nor understand the most astonishing of all systems, the system of our own microcosm. 86

Skovoroda sought Biblical support for this belief, and thought that he had found it in a verse from St. John which read, "'Lord, I have no man..." (John, 5:7)" 87 Many in his audience, landowners, peasants, clerics, officials, opposed this assertion, arguing that they did indeed have men around them. But Skovoroda countered this argument and simultaneously explained his understanding of St. John's verse when he answered,

87 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Narkiss," p. 79.
What is the use of having and not understanding? Of eating but not tasting? But if you want to know what this means; it is this. We see people as if someone showed to us a single human foot or heel, having covered the remainder of the body and the head; in such a case it would be impossible to identify a man. You see yourself, but you do not understand yourself. But not understanding yourself is the same as losing yourself. If a treasure were buried under your house and you did not know it, then it would be the same as if it were not there. 88

The basis of man's ignorance about himself therefore lay in his tendency to become captivated by his appearances: "You have seen and loved the dolt and idol in yourself, but not the true body . . . ." 89 "Who has fallen in love with his fleshly appearance is unable to pursue beyond this appearance. . . . ." 90 Man, enamoured with his externality, had become unaware of his own duality, ignorant of the two natures which Skovoroda claimed were present in man, as they were present in all the visible world: "The whole world consists of two natures, one seen, the other unseen." 91 Now, this contention concerning man's unawareness of his dual nature raised the possibility that perhaps some men could not become conscious of their "unseen" nature. Though Skovoroda considered this

88 Ibid., p. 80.
89 Ibid., p. 96.
90 Ibid., p. 91.
91 Ibid., p. 100.
possibility, he emphasized every man's potential for
discovering his true self, while admitting that different
men would have different capacities for this sort of
discovery. Further, Skovoroda was convinced that man's
visible nature was deceptive. He articulated his mistrust
of the visible nature often but nowhere more forcefully
than in the following passage which treated man's duality:

You are the shadow, gloom and decay! You
are a dream of your true self. You are
the cloak, but it is the body. You are an
apparition but it is the truth in you.
You are nothing, while it is your essence.
You are dirt, but it is your beauty, form,
and plan; neither your form nor your
beauty issues from your physical ap-
pearance, rather it is in you and sustains
you. 0, Filth and nothingness! You
won't know the true man unless you
acknowledge along with Abraham that you
are only dirt and ashes. 93

Skovoroda, however, understood that the concept of
an essential man sustaining the visible one was difficult
for his listeners and readers to accept and so he employed
a striking and persuasive illustration to make his point:

A clever painter drew very vividly on the
wall a stag and a peacock. His young son
was unspeakably cheered by these pictures.
His older son viewed them with amazement.
The painter presently erased the colors and
the creatures disappeared from view. At
this the young boy wept inconsolably, but
the older one laughed . . . the young boy
thinks the creatures have been destroyed

92 See above pp. 71-72.
93 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinanič, 1912, "Narkiss,"
p. 84.
and he cries for their sake... but the strength and the heart in the images is
the design, namely, the immaterial thought
and secret tracing to which the color
adheres... The elder son understands
this and laughs. The figures themselves
even before their appearance on the wall
were always in the mind of the painter.
They were not born and would not perish. 94

The true man who sustained the apparent man; then, was
immortal and eternal like the thought of artist in the
above story. Skovoroda again supported this view when he
wrote, "Not our outer flesh but our thought is the prin-
ciple man." 95 Despite Skovoroda's contention that it was
the true, unseen man who sustained the false, visible one,
he did not completely discount the latter. In fact he
could exclaim: "Can there be a man without flesh, blood,
and bones? Ridiculous!" 96 But this visible man could
never become an end in itself, for when it did the true man
was lost and man became only, "a lie, vanity, and
emptiness." 97

In his discussion of the true man Skovoroda fre-
quently turned to the consideration of heart. He used

94 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Dialog.

95 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Narkiss,"
p. 82.

96 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Da lobžet
mja ot lobzanių ust svoix..." (Let him kiss me with the
kiss of his lips) p. 59.

97 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Dialog.
this word to designate not the bodily organ, but rather the immaterial essence of man, which stood in somewhat the same relation to material man as did the hidden bodily organ to the visible body. "Your heart," wrote Skovoroda, "is the ruler of your appearances. But while it is the ruler, you yourself are your heart. If you don't come near to and accompany this which is your ruler then you will remain a dead shadow and a corpse." To this he added, that, "In man the master of everything is the heart. It is the essential man in man, and everything else is peripheral... the profound heart and the true man are one and the same." And finally he argued that, "the externality of your body is nothing but a mask, which conceals all of your members, which are hidden in the heart as in a seed."  

Skovoroda defended his discussion of heart as the essential man on a Biblical basis. "If my opinion is not pleasing to you" he declared, "then know that it is not my invention. Look in Jeremiah, chapter 17, verse 9... 'the human heart is profound, above all things, and is

man; and who can know it?" From this rendering of the verse in question, Skovoroda reached the conclusion that, "the prophet Jeremiah calls the heart man." Though Skovoroda used the term heart to signify the essential man, and did so on the basis of the Bible, he admitted that the term was perforce incomprehensible in certain aspects.

I see your branches but I do not see your roots, your heart, ... I see your outer eye ... but I do not see your essential eye. It has been concealed there [in the heart]. Where is there? Akh, don't ask! How can one say? I do not know. How can I tell you? It is enough to say that it is not here, but there. 103

Skovoroda, however, was not satisfied with this more simple, Biblical use of the word heart, and so he complicated and refined it with consciously mystical overtones. He did this chiefly by his emphasis upon the heart as abyss. "Man's heart is an unlimited abyss. It is like the air (sic) which carries the floating planets." 104 "The abyss, which is concealed by our thought, and the profound

101 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Narkiss," p. 82. He gave the Church Slavonic as, Gluboko serdce čeloveku, pače vsex, i čelovek est; i kto poznat evo?

102 Ibid. Skovoroda's rendering of this particular verse was incorrect, but his general argument from the Bible concerning the heart as man was a sound one.


heart are the same;"105 "What is the heart if not the soul? What is the soul if not an abyss which is unfathomable by thought";106 and finally:

The profound heart, known to God alone, is nothing else but an abyss which is unlimited by our thoughts ... i.e. the true essence and the essential truth, our very essence, kernel, and strength in which solely consists our life, but without its mortal shadow, so that it is evident what a perfect vanity it is to lose oneself, though one possessed the entire Copernican universe. 107

According to Skovoroda, then, the heart was an abyss both limitless and incomprehensible. But since the heart was also the true man which sustained the visible man, visible man was supported by and depended on this infinite abyss. Skovoroda did not shrink from this conclusion and even wrote, "Oh heart! ... How deep you are! You contain and sustain everything, but nothing contains you."108

Skovoroda's emphasis on the mystical aspect of heart, i.e. the infinite and incomprehensible element of the abyss, obscures his analysis of the true man. The reason for this is that with the addition of the concept of the

105 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Narkiss," p. 82.
108 Ibid., p. 88.
abyss it becomes difficult to determine whether true man is universal or individual. On the one hand if an infinite abyss truly sustains man it seems that there can be only one abyss for all men. In this case true man is universal, there is one true man in all men. If this is so there is no individuality beyond the visible man. On the other hand since Skovoroda's approach to the problem of the true man was quite individualistic until he reached the idea of the abyss, there is reason to conclude that he employed the term abyss only metaphorically in order to stress the profundity of the individual true man. Skovoroda himself did not take pains to elucidate this question. Instead he reconciled the universal and the individual true man with an appropriately mystical union of opposites by declaring that the "true man . . . is one in all of us and whole in each."109 Though such a contention may have appeared illogical; it represented the best verbal effort to define the true man by one who had experienced him. Besides this, Skovoroda's reconciliation of the individual and the universal in the true man was consonant with his attitude toward the unity of opposites. He could write concerning this general question, "Hunger and satiety constitute the unity, nourishment; winter and summer the unity, fruits:

109 Ibid., p. 112.
darkness and light the unity, day; death and life the unity, every creature. 110

Skovoroda, having identified the infinite, all-sustaining, and unfathomable heart's abyss as the true man within the visible man, concluded logically that this infinite and unfathomable true man was divine. "There is a single labor in both of these, knowing oneself and comprehending God, knowing and comprehending the actual man . . . know that the true man and God are the same." 111

Skovoroda wrote of the profound heart which was the true man in the same terms, "Oh pure heart! You truly fear neither lightning nor thunder. You are divine and your God is with you. You are friends with God and He with you." 112

Concerning each individual man he even argued, "God is in human flesh. He exists authentically in our visible flesh, the immaterial in the material, the eternal in the finite, one in all and whole in each." 113 In this last statement, of course, Skovoroda once more circumvented the problem of the universal and the individual. On one side he wanted to


affirm the individuality of the true man, on the other he wished to maintain the indivisibility of God. The only way to do both was by the "one in all and whole in each" formula.

Besides identifying the true man as divine, Skovoroda also identified the peculiar Divine hypostasis which shared in this union with the true man. He wrote, "The Divine Word, its counsel and thought, this is the plan which stretches through all the material in the universe and which sustains and fulfills everything."\(^{114}\) Such a contention, with its use of the idea of the Word indicates that the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ underlay and sustained man, and was in fact the true man.

Skovoroda confirmed this when he argued,

> What is the true man? It is the son of man or Christ -- it is all the same. 'Who do men say that I am?' (Matt. 16:13). Listen to Peter! ... 'You are Christ, the Son of the living God.' (Matt. 17:17) ... You will not be transformed, my friend, from earth to heaven, unless you see Christ, unless you know what the true man is. You will not control your eye while your flesh and blood hold your heart.\(^{115}\)

Skovoroda then identified the true man with the second person of the Trinity, just as he had done concerning the

\(^{114}\) Ibid., p. 86.

Divinity in the Bible. This experience of a particular person of the Trinity in matter was of course in accord with orthodox Christian theology. Still, Skvoroda's sensation of the divine incarnation was especially powerful and personal.

Despite his profound personal sense of divinity within man, despite his identification of the true man with God, Skvoroda believed that this true man was also other than the Divine. For, if true man were completely and absolutely God, then he could not be man. Skvoroda dealt with this dilemma as he had with that of the universal and individual true man. In the latter case he had articulated his sensation of these two conflicting aspects of the true man by combining both of the characteristics in one, single, verbally illogical formula. In arguing jointly for the divinity and the "otherness" of true man he did likewise. "You are two, and are one." 116 This imprecision concerning God and "other" in the true man, however, could not restrain Skvoroda from exulting that true man,

Is free. He flies without limit into the heights, the depths, and the expanses. Neither mountains, nor rivers nor seas, nor deserts impede him. He sees into the distance, begins to view what is hidden, sees the past, penetrates into the future, moves over the face of the deep, and enters through closed doors. He has the eyes of a

dove, the wings of an eagle, the speed of a stag, the daring of a lion, the fidelity of a turtle-dove, the gentleness of a lamb, the quickness of a falcon, and the good cheer of a crane.

It was the spirit breathing through this last passage which ultimately both typified and vitalized Skovoroda's anthropology. All men, he taught, whatever their material surroundings, bodily infirmities, or spiritual limitations possessed a divine potential, which, if realized, freed them from slavery to their appearances and delivered them to the bosom of God.

Summary - Skovoroda considered that man was ignorant concerning himself and that this ignorance was rooted in his unawareness of his own duality. Man, according to Skovoroda, possessed two natures, one, visible and corruptible, the other, invisible and incorruptible. Skovoroda called man's invisible nature the true man, and, using the Bible as support, contended that the true man was the same as heart. But Skovoroda gave the Biblical term heart the most mystical significance by discussing it in terms of an infinite and all-sustaining abyss which, was the true man. Now, the identification of the heart's abyss with the true man made it difficult to determine whether the true man was universal or individual, and Skovoroda in fact

contended that it was both by arguing that the true man was, "one in all and whole in each." The infinity and eternity of the heart's abyss, which was the true man, led Skovoroda to conclude that the true man was God, and in particular that the true man participated in the divinity of Jesus Christ. Finally, though Skovoroda argued for the divinity of the true man, he realized that the true man could not be completely divine. The true man, then, though he shared in the Divinity, was separated from It.

Morality

Skovoroda's conception of both self-knowledge and man, which brought him to the conclusion that the true man was God, naturally had serious moral implications. He realized this, and so dealt with the question of morality throughout his writings. His treatment of morality, moreover though it dealt with moral philosophy, was ultimately concerned with the manner in which man should live his daily life. This integral connection of theory and practice ran through all of Skovoroda's work, but nowhere more clearly than in his moral teachings.

The beginning point for Skovoroda's morality was his discussion of happiness. "There is nothing sweeter for man and nothing more necessary than happiness." Most men,

however, were not happy. They were troubled by any number of anxieties:

One is uneasy because he is not of noble birth, handsome face, or good education; another frets because, although he leads a blameless life, many people both distinguished and base heap vituperation upon him, calling him a hopeless and worthless hypocrite; a third is tormented, because he has achieved the rank and place which permit him to serve only six-course rather than ten-course meals. 119

People who worried about such trifles had overlooked the universal necessity and accessibility of happiness for man, and Skovoroda therefore delighted in questioning them;

What would it be like then if happiness, the most necessary and dear thing for everyone, depended on place, time, flesh and blood? I will speak more clearly: what would it be like if God confined happiness to America, or to the Canary Islands, or to Jerusalem, or to the Tsar's court, or to Solomon's age, or to riches, or to the desert, or to rank, or to learning, or to health? 120

But this question was clearly absurd for Skovoroda because, as he contended, if happiness were limited by time, place, rank, learning, riches, etc., "Then very few of us would be happy. Who could be in that place? How could all be born in one certain time? How could so many attain a single rank and status?" 121


121 Ibid.
Happiness therefore did not depend on any one or combination of the transiencies listed above. It sprang rather from a single, immutable source, and this one source of and necessity for happiness was God. "Many bodily needs await you, but happiness is not there. For your heart one thing is needed and there is God and happiness." Even in this search for happiness in God, however, many people want astray. They began by seeking God, but even after a long search they were unsuccessful because they had not sought him in the right place.

Skovoroda, writing about the search for Christ, referred to these people:

Many seek Him in the Empire of Caesar Augustus, in the days of Tiberius, in the reign of Pilate and so on. But they seek Him just so. Where? Here! In this world! In the midst of the dead. . . Please seek Him more wisely. 'He is not here!' (Matt. 28:6) Many run through Jerusalem, along the Jordan, into Bethlehem, . . . to Mt. Sinai, and to Mt. Athos; they sniff around between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Of course, He is just here! They think: Here He is! Here He is! Here is Christ! He is here! They shout to one another: Here is Christ! I know, the angel cries to them, that you seek Jesus who was crucified. 'He is not here! He is gone!' Many seek Him in worldly honors, in grand houses, in ceremonial tables and so on. Many seek him gaping at the vast starry expanse, at the sun, the moon and the whole Copernican universe. . . 'He is not here!' They seek Him in long prayers, fasting and

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122 Ibid., p. 63. When Skovoroda declared that happiness was to be found in God, he meant that man could only be happy through knowledge of the true man and God.
sacred ritual. . . 'He is here where they sermonize so eloquently, recognizing the prophetic mysteries. . . But the dazzling angel only cries to them: 'He is not here!' 123

Man erred in his search for God and happiness because he neglected to seek them within himself: "The kingdom of God is within";124 "It [happiness] is near. It is in your heart and soul."125

Man's happiness consequently depended on his ability to find God within himself. At the same time, however, this was, for Skovoroda, the crucial element of man's moral struggle, and whatever stood between man and the successful conclusion of this search was evil, "which transforms everything into complete ruination."126 Skovoroda considered the problem of evil at three different levels. At the first of these he stressed the reality and the materiality of evil. Concerning the reality of evil for himself he recalled some thoughts which he once had:

Returning to my study, after having left a friend... I began to think how full of evil is the life of mortal man. I do not


125 Ibid., p. 63.

think those absurd who say that a newborn child begins to cry because it already has a presentiment of the series of misfortunes which it must endure. 127

By this estimation of evil Skovoroda indicated his own personal anxiety over the reality of evil as a force in the life of man. But if evil was a reality in the life of man just what was evil? At this first stage of his discussion it was the visible world. "Why is evil obstinate to the Higher One? Concerning this what is there to ask? Flesh by its very nature is hostile to the spirit."128 This view of evil was consistent with Skovoroda's dualistic conception of the universe, the visible, corrupt world, underpinned by the unseen and eternal one. However, such a simple identification of evil with the material world strained Skovoroda's credulity. God, after all had created the physical world and if it alone was evil, then one had to conclude that God created evil. This consideration, though it did not impel Skovoroda to abandon completely his conception that evil was linked with materiality, did lead him to an analysis of evil at another level:

At this second stage Skovoroda approached the problem of evil by stressing not the conflict between good

127 Skovoroda, Tvorì, 1961, "Pismo k M. I. Kovalinskemu," II, pp. 324-25. Here, Skovoroda characteristically employed his own profound personal experience as the basis for making a philosophical point.

and evil, spirit and flesh, but rather their unity. For instance he argued that, "God created good and evil, poverty and riches, and fused them into a unity." This reconciliation of good and evil, a tempering of the earlier dualistic conception of both the world and good and evil, was in accord with some of Skovoroda's more dialectical pronouncements.

You will not find a day without darkness and light, or a year without winter and heat. You will not discover any situation not mixed of misfortune and sweetness. The whole world stands in such a fashion. Things assist or are conducive to their opposites. 130

"Crying leads to laughter, and laughter is concealed in crying. Proper crying is the same as opportune laughter. These two halves constitute a unity." 131 Though one could interpret these statements to mean that man could achieve good only through evil, Skovoroda, at this point, employed them simply to underline the essential unity of apparently unlike elements.

Having emphasized the unity of opposites, Skovoroda turned directly to the problem of good and evil, and used the terms God and serpent respectively to signify good and

129 Ibid., p. 520.


evil. "You know what the serpent is," he wrote, "know that he and God are the same. Falsity but truth; foolishness, but wisdom; evil but good."\(^{132}\) Here there was an identification of evil with good. But Skovoroda could not conclude with such a simple identification of good and evil. Rather he attempted to show how evil could become good. "The serpent," he contended, "only does harm when it crawls along on the earth," and "we, like children, crawl along on the earth and the serpent crawls after us."\(^{133}\) But, he added, "If you raise your head, then you can raise your whole body,"\(^{134}\) and the serpent will become harmless, evil will be overcome. Skovoroda, though he here connected evil with the earth, i.e. the physical world, did not, as in the simpler first stage equate them. He instead argued that however evil was linked to the physical world, it could be overcome by man. Further he now even contended that the material world could assist man in his search for God, happiness, and good, for "darkness was impressed on us in order that the light might be revealed . . . an observer, having recognized black, will suddenly recognize white."\(^{135}\) Skovoroda bridged the apparent gap between

\(^{132}\) Ibid., p. 512.

\(^{133}\) Ibid., p. 513.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., p. 514.

\(^{135}\) Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Kol'co," p. 286. Skovoroda's argument that the evil physical world
these first two views of evil when he reached the third and final stage of his consideration of evil. In fact, he had presented at least the germ of this final argument at the second level of discussion when he declared that if man raised himself from the ground he would render the serpent harmless i.e. overcome evil. This exhortation fore-shadowed his final conception of evil, because it introduced the crucial idea of human action into his idea of evil.

The starting point for Skovoroda's ultimate conception of evil was his argument that there were, "two hearts, one angelic the other satanic, which struggle with one another. These two kingdoms wage an eternal struggle in every man." Evil, therefore, did not rest in the physical world, but within man. Man, however, since he possessed the potential for both good and evil, could overcome evil within himself, and render his evil good. But man could not overcome the evil in himself unless he destroyed his will to evil which was, "chains and fetters . . . and hell and fire . . . and weeping and gnashing."136


Skovoroda again and again identified the weakness of the human will as the enemy of God, and therefore as the only evil; "I tell you incessantly that anyone who worships his own will is an enemy of the Divine will and can not enter the Divine kingdom." Skovoroda articulated this same outlook in verse when he wrote:

Augustine sang the truth: there is no hell and never was,
The will is hell, your very own damnation
Our will is a cave of hell for all of us,
Renounce your will and there is no hell or frustration.

Will! Insatiable hell! To everything you are the noxious air.
Day and night your maw gapes like a well,
You swallow everything without a care;
Kill this spirit, brother, and you abolish hell.

God! Oh living word! Who prospers without you?
You alone are life and joy for everything,
Only you as paradise and sweetness can make do!
Slay our evil will, and let Your voice be king! 139

By the human will here Skovoroda meant, "the pestilential air in the soul . . ." which "Is a dissolute desire for appearances." As long as man exercised his will in the pursuit of appearances he contravened the

138 Ibid.


Divine will and made impossible the successful search for the true man within himself. Skovoroda realized that appearances and their pursuit could deceive man and eventually destroy him unless he employed his will to seek something other than mere appearances. Appearances could have this effect on man because they seemed, at least initially, harmless. But man, having capitulated to inoffensive appearances, could become ultimately helpless before them:

You meet us like a lamb,
And offer us a tender gaze,
But later you ravage like a wolf,
And infect us, like the plague
   You grind like an unremitting worm
   You roar and gnaw like a fierce lion
Oh lion, oh worm, oh hidden moth.

But the sinner, having fallen in love with you,
Can do nothing but harm himself
And having been benighted by you
He does not rejoice, but rather slumbers on the shelf. 141

If man restrained his desire for appearances, he did not truly destroy his will but only brought it into accord with the Divine will, or, as Skovoroda contended at this point, "everything happens according to the will of God, but if I am agreeable to it, then it is already my own will. What is there to be anxious about?"142 Though Skovoroda

141 Skovoroda, Tvoji, 1961, "Xot' Snačala Grez Prijaten," (Though Sin is Pleasant at First) II, pp. 482-83.

did not delve into the problem of free will, he seemed to argue that man had free will, but that knowledge of God and the Divine will would influence man to make the free choice which placed his will in accord with the Divine will, and so freed him from his former slavery to appearances.

One can recapitulate Skovoroda's conception of evil as follows, stage by stage. Firstly, Skovoroda considered evil as a real force in human life and identified it with the material. Secondly, since he correctly saw that the identification of matter and evil called into question the nature of God, he argued that good and evil were a unity. He contended further though obliquely, that evil could be overcome through human action. Thirdly, he reconciled these conflicting notions by defining evil as the weakness of human will, which he explained further as a desire for physical appearances which could be overcome, thus rendering the evil good. Skovoroda, therefore, did not completely abandon his first two views of evil, evil as appearances, and evil as good respectively, but rather fused them with his conception of evil as the human will which desired appearances but which man could restrain once he achieved a knowledge of God and the Divine will.

Having argued that man could render evil good by restraining his desire for the physical world, Skovoroda explained that this was the case because the nature of God would not permit His condemning man to an impossible task.
"Isn't our life a journey? And isn't our journey dependent on God Himself? And isn't God the greatest master? How can he create a difficult journey for us? ... You yourself have made the Divine journey difficult by making it lawless."  

Skovoroda, further, contended that God had placed in man the Divine law which would guide him to an understanding of his place in creation and free him of his attachment to mere appearances. Skovoroda compared this Divine law, "which can place man on the path of peace," to ephemeral human tradition as follows:

The law of God stands forever, but human tradition is neither everywhere nor always. The law of God is the tree of paradise, but tradition is its shadow. The Divine law is God in the human heart, but tradition is the fig leaf which often conceals the viper. The door of the Divine temple is the law of God, but tradition is the porch attached to the temple. Tradition stands as far away from Divine law as the vestibule from the altar and the tail from the head.

Skovoroda here struck against the tradition-ridden institution of the church, which in his estimation had less capacity for moral leadership than each individual man who had found the Divine law within himself. This confidence in the moral capacity of the individual was partially a


reflection of Skovoroda's exposure to Protestantism, especially to the ideas of Protestants like Johann Arndt (1555-1621) and Jacob Boehme which he encountered either directly or indirectly in Western Europe and at the Kievan Academy. The Divine law however did not exist exclusively in man, and in fact it was the universality of the law which Skovoroda employed to support his contention that it did exist in man. In this connection he asked:

Why does the little fish which the Romans call remora have the ability to slow the speed of a ship to which it clings? Why does the dolphin's nature dearly love man but hate the snake: Why does the lion's nature terrify the crowing rooster? Nature and innate power signify the inborn Divine good will and His secret law which rules all creation. 146

To live a moral life, therefore, man had to live according to the will of God. But the will of God was the same as the Divine law, which was in turn nature. The speculative basis of Skovoroda's moral system, then, was nature or naturalness (srodnost'). But, of course, one had to appreciate the true man and God within himself before he could understand the Divine will i.e. the Divine law, or nature. Finally because nature i.e. man's innate capacities, served as the base of Skovoroda's morality, he could claim that finding the Divinity and the Divine law

within oneself, and subsequently living a moral life, was essentially an easy task. "Thanks to blessed God for this," he wrote, "that the necessary is accomplished without difficulty while the difficult is unnecessary."\^147

Skovoroda accompanied his teachings on moral philosophy with instruction on its practical application, in which he included his own personal example. The most striking feature of his practical morality was its kenoticism, or imitation of Christ. Skovoroda stressed this imitation of Christ in a verse which he wrote in the 1760's:

Crucify my body, nail it to the cross,
Let my body suffer, that my spirit may have room.
Let my outer self grow dry,
That my new inner self may bloom. 148

If a man would not restrain his desires for physical comfort, he would never be able to find the true man, or to put his will in accord with the Divine will and the Divine law. Skovoroda, however, emphasized that kenosis was not merely temporal suffering which would be rewarded in eternal life, but was rather a means to control the human will so that man could successfully search for the Divinity within himself. He clearly gave witness to this


\^148 Skovoroda, Tvor\'i, 1961, "Sad Bo\'zestvennyx Pesnej: Pesn' 7-ia," (Song #7) II, p. 16.
positive aspect of kenosis when he declared that it was,
"not the growth of patience with worldly affairs, but
preparation for the achievement of Divine truth: you are
emptied and you comprehend."149

Skovoroda's concern with kenosis as a means of
controlling bodily appetites so that the spirit could grow
led him to conclude that poverty was indispensable to the
leading of a moral life:

Oh poverty! Oh heavenly gift!
Every holy and honest man loves you.
Whoever had abandoned you,
Has been born only to the night,
And he is not a real man. 150

By poverty, however, Skovoroda meant not extreme deprivation
but a mean between absolute want and superfluity, for as he
argued, "Poverty, achieving the necessary, but seeing the
superfluous is the true wealth; it is the blessed means,
like a bridge which passes between two swamps, between
frugality and superfluity."151 In his own life Skovoroda
made this definition of poverty operative, for he ate, and

149 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Razgovor,
nazyvaemyj Alfavit ili Bukvar Mira," p. 351. Skovoroda's
concern with kenosis, particularly as expressed in this
passage once more indicates his powerful inclination toward
mysticism. A man could not achieve the noetic encounter
with his true self and God unless he freed himself from his
devotion to physical comforts, and worldly attachments. In
order to "comprehend," therefore, man had to "empty"
himself.

150 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Ubogiij
Žajvoronok," p. 491.

151 Ibid., p. 488.
clothed himself humbly, but, in the words of his biographer, "sufficiently." Skovoroda further elucidated this attitude toward poverty and the restraint of bodily appetites when, in a letter to Kovalinskii, he wrote,

Are you fasting? But isn't a man witless to give nothing, or only something harmful, to his body? Deprive yourself of excessive food so that the little ass, i.e. the flesh, may not become fierce, but do not kill it with fasting so that it becomes too weak to carry its rider.

While Skovoroda did offer a somewhat tempered definition of poverty, one must not neglect the importance of poverty in his practical moral teaching, for as he argued:

It is not the poor man who is wretched, But he who wants too much.

Bread and water are better for me, Than sugar and misfortune.

But the imitation of Christ for Skovoroda entailed more than a curtailment of sensual pleasures and the adoption of a life and poverty. He also taught by word and deed that man should restrain his will by belittling himself. To this end Skovoroda admonished his readers and listeners, "love misery, . . . be friends with forbearance,

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152 Kovalinskij, "Žizn'," Bileckij, II, p. 497.


abide with humility."155 Skovoroda, in support of his advocacy of personal humility, offered Christ's own teaching:

About those who belittle themselves in heart and deed, the Lord says, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit . . .' (Matt., 5:3) The poor in spirit are those who weep, hunger, and thirst for the kingdom of God and his truth. They are the timid, the deprived, the persecuted, and the abused. . . 156

As Skovoroda himself adopted the poverty which he advocated as a means of controlling one's physical desires, so he practiced the self-abasement which made man "poor in spirit." Throughout his life he had opportunities to take prestigious secular and clerical positions, but he always refused, preferring to follow a humble, peripatetic life.

There are three significant points to be made about Skovoroda's teaching and practice of kenosis, that most crucial aspect of his practical motality. Firstly, kenosis, or the imitation of Christ, had a long tradition in Russia, dating back to the first Russian saints, Boris and Gleb. Skovoroda in his advocacy of kenosis therefore was harking back to one of Russia's oldest religious traditions, the imitation of Christ in order to achieve personal and social redemption. Secondly, Skovoroda taught his listeners and

readers to seek kenosis because of his reaction to the growing secularism which he found around him, not only in the world, but in the church itself. This gave his kenotic admonitions a wonderfully contemporary ring for some of his followers. Thirdly, and connected directly with the first two points, he emphasized, the positive feature of this style of life. Kenosis for Skovoroda was not simply one's endurance of the worst features of this life in order to insure a better future life. Kenosis was part of a positive process to bring the evil will to heel, in order that the true man, the Divinity, might be realized. Kenosis was therefore an integral part of a moral life.

Another feature of Skovoroda's practical moral teaching was its emphasis on a "natural" occupation or enterprise for man. He argued that a man who severed himself from a natural occupation would as a consequence suffer, "mortal anguish."

157 "What is more sorrowful," he inquired, "than to swim in abundance but be mortally tormented without a natural business? There is nothing more anguishing than to be mentally ill, and one is ill in mind when he lacks a natural occupation."

158 A man could not find a natural business for himself unless he understood nature, i.e., the law and will of God, in himself.

157 Ibid., p. 336.

Skovoroda, writing of his own occupation, explained to his audience:

Understand that I would be a hundred times happier if I were making clay pans in accord with God, than if I were writing in opposition to nature. But I feel, until now, that the incorruptible hand of the Eternal supports me in my present occupation. 160

Skovoroda made a like point concerning a natural occupation when he mentioned the case of a former student, who was not born to be a student: "I looked with pity and wonder on his lack of ability. But as soon as he decided to be a mechanic he amazed everyone with his understanding, and all without any guidance." 161 Skovoroda argued for the natural occupation on the basis of its indispensability for the individual moral life, but the social implications of such a teaching are clear. Skovoroda was contending that there was a natural order and that man played a part in it. If each individual man recognized what his part was and played it, society would remain in a state of harmony. But when men, acting in ignorance, sought vocations which were not in accord with God's law, or nature, then personal and social ills were bound to result. Because of the grave

159 Skovoroda here made a play on words since the word for pan was his own name, skovoroda.


161 Ibid., p. 327.
personal and social consequences of a man's occupation then Skovoroda cautioned those who sought a vocation, "Do not consider which occupation is higher or lower, or which is more or less distinguished, or which is richer or poorer, but only consider what is natural for you." 162

Skovoroda also incorporated this natural approach in his pedagogical teachings. "If anyone wants to learn something he must be suited for it. Nothing depends on man, but with God everything is possible. Whoever tries without God to teach or to learn recalls the proverb, 'You can't teach a wolf to plow.'" 163 This emphasis on an education in accord with nature sounds very Rousseau-esque, though it is unlikely that Skovoroda ever read Rousseau. Still, Rousseau's works were known in Russia, and in South Russia, as witness, for instance, the work of Ia. P. Kozel'skij, the eighteenth-century Ukrainian intellectual. 164 Even if

162 Ibid.


164 Ia. P. Kozel'skij was born of cossack stock in a small town near Poltava in 1728. He studied at the Kievan Academy until 1750, and then spent the years 1752-57 at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. He wrote several philosophical tracts between the late 1760's and the middle 1780's. In these he took a rather anti-religious and scientific stance, but was at the same time enamoured of nature and the need for man to understand nature so that he could live in accord with it. Kozel'skij served on the Little Russian Commission at Gluxov in the years 1770-78, and in the early 1790's he taught briefly at an artillery school. He retired from these duties in 1792 and died a
Skovoroda had no knowledge, direct or indirect, of Rousseau's work, his attitude toward education might be partially explained as a reaction against his own formal education at the Kievan Academy. He articulated his attitude toward the rigorous and formalistic education which he experienced in Kiev when he wrote:

As long as a ring hangs in a pig's nose, the pig will not root. Remove the ring and the pig once more defaces the earth. This is neither education nor learning, but rather restraint, which proceeds from man's power and rules over all of the lawless. 165

While Skovoroda counseled that man should learn naturally and eschew harsh teaching methods he admitted that man needed some outside assistance. "Every business succeeds if nature leads it," he wrote, "only don't hinder it, and if you can, remove the obstacles and clear the road for it."166 In regard to education this external assistance i.e. removing of the obstacles, consisted principally of protecting the health of the student and giving him encouragement in his pursuit of knowledge. Skovoroda argued for this view metaphorically as follows: "Don't teach the apple tree to bear apples: nature herself has already done this. Simply protect it from the swine, cut away the

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166 Ibid., p. 464.
weeds, clear away the geese and ward off the unclean water which descends on its roots."167 Finally, Skovoroda summarized his natural approach to practical morality in discussing four dangerous pitfalls, which mentioned not only occupation and education but also personal obligations and relationships. Referring to his four proscriptions as "the avenues to unhappiness," Skovoroda listed them as follows: "a) to enter into an unnatural state, i.e. occupation; b) to bear an obligation contrary to nature; c) to learn something for which one was not born; d) to be friends with those for whom one was not born."168

Skovoroda's stress on the indispensability of following nature if one were to achieve happiness brings this discussion back to the point at which it began, namely, the universal need for and accessibility of happiness, and so prepares for a summary of Skovoroda's moral teaching.

**Summary** - Skovoroda argued that all men both needed and had the capacity to achieve happiness, and that therefore happiness did not depend on accidents of time, place, station, wealth, learning, etc. On the contrary happiness was dependent on a single unchanging source, God. Man could be happy, therefore, only if he achieved knowledge of God. Now, many people sought to achieve this but failed

167 Ibid.

because they sought God outside themselves. If man was to find God, he had to seek Him within. This effort to find God was at the heart of man's moral struggle, and whatever impeded his search was evil. Skovoroda identified evil by turns with a) matter and appearances, b) good, c) the weakness of human will. In identifying evil with the human will, Skovoroda brought together elements of his earlier two definitions, because he still saw that evil was linked to matter, and that evil could be overcome. The overcoming of evil could be accomplished only if man restrained his will for appearances and brought it instead into harmony with the Divine will. While this task may have seemed impossible, Skovoroda contended that all men could accomplish it just because the Divine will, or Divine law, or nature, which was universal, existed in all men. The speculative basis of Skovoroda's morality then was nature. On a practical level, Skovoroda admonished that moral life needed kenosis, or an imitation of Christ, both in terms of physical deprivation and self-abasement. Along with this however he advised, perfectly in accord with his theory, that man had to live in harmony with nature especially as concerned his occupation and education.

The Material World

In his consideration of knowledge Skovoroda identified the material world "where all things which have been
born live"¹⁶⁹ as one of his three worlds. Knowledge of the material world complemented the knowledge of God, which man first achieved when he fathomed the nature of the true man. At the same time that the material world assisted man to a more complete knowledge of God, however, it also acted as an aid in man's pursuit of a moral life. Just as the great world responded to the Divine will or law, so must man if he wanted to lead a moral life. But man had to understand the great world correctly if it was to succor him epistemologically and morally. Concerning the need to understand the world Skovoroda declared,

All men consider it, [the world] but thoughtlessly. They observe its heel, . . . they gaze on its feet, but they do not look on the real world, namely, on its head and heart. Seeing only the heel in this business, but not the head, one, seeing does not see, sensitive of body, but blind of heart. The body is seen by the body, but the heart by the heart. . . . In this fashion all the mindless people read the book of this world. And they do not profit by it, but rather become entangled in its net. ¹⁷⁰

To profit from the world, man clearly had to consider it not as a thing in itself, but as a veil which hid the Divine essence. Skovoroda's consideration of the great world as an identifiable entity, which, when correctly understood, had both epistemological and moral significance


attests to the important role which it played in his thought and gives cause to investigate further his analysis of the great world.

Skovoroda's conception of the world depended on his view of its relationship to God and this view exhibited a notable conflict, one which Skovoroda could never completely overcome. The first of the two conflicting views began with Skovoroda's notion that the world was the willful creation of God. Skovoroda's biographer, M. I. Kovalinskij, reported Skovoroda's contention on this point as follows:

What is the primordial basis of all creation? Nothing. The eternal will, having desired to invest its own perfection in visibility, produced from nothing everything which exists in thought and body. The desires of the Eternal will were clothed in thoughts, the thoughts in aspects, and the aspects in material shapes. 171

Skovoroda argued for this conception of creation in his own work when he wrote, "'Let there be light' . . . (Gen., 1:3) To make wonders from nothing and reality from appearance, this is the direct creation of the Almighty. . ."172 This stress upon the world as a creation of the Divine will, though it initially appeared to be a generous interpretation of the world and God's relationship with it, must

have led Skovoroda to some serious doubts: If God could
will the world, for instance, he could have as easily not
willed it. But if God could have willed the world but did
not do so then a certain Divine potential would have been
unrealized. At the same time that the world as willful
creation called the nature of God into question, however, it
is also reflected on the nature of the world itself. If
God did not need to create the world, then the world was
unnecessary and even illusory. Skovoroda frequently mani-
fested his belief in the world as an unnecessary but
willful Divine creation. According to him the world was,
"physical matter,"173 "nothing,"174 an "idol"175 and some-
thing, "which passes momentarily".176 In this analysis of
the world one may note a parallel with Skovoroda's earlier
identification of evil with appearances. In both his
judgement of the world as a passing phenomenon and physical
appearances as evil Skovoroda surrendered to his own desire
to find simple and idealistic answers to complex and real

173 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Knižečka o
406.

174 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Narkiss,"
p. 80.

175 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Knižečka o
408.

176 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Dialog ili
problems. However, this simple view of the world, which stressed the transcendence of God, was the accepted Orthodox view and concurred with the literal Biblical account. Skovoroda realized this, but still attacked its easy and absolute acceptance. The Biblical account of the world's willful creation by God he even termed a "lie". Therefore just as Skovoroda could not rest with his easy identification of evil with physical appearances, so he was dissatisfied with his analysis of the world as merely a transitory insignificance.

Skovoroda's second and more complex view of the world depended on his notion that the world was a necessary attribute rather than a willful creation of God. According to this view the relationship of God and this world was akin to that of "an apple tree and its shadow." "This world," wrote Skovoroda,

Is the shadow of God. It disappears from view partially, it does not stand constantly, and it is transformed into various shapes. Nevertheless, it never removes itself from its living tree, and as a result those who

177 Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Dialog. Imja emu: Potop Zmiin," p. 507. Skovoroda's attack on the Biblical account of creation must be seen in light of his view of the Bible. Since he eschewed a literal interpretation of the Bible generally, he found it easy to question a literal interpretation of the Biblical story of creation. For this reason he termed the Biblical version of creation a "lie".

are enlightened have been saying for a long time, "Materia aeterna". Matter is eternal. 179

This conception of the world as a necessary attribute of the Divinity also underlay Skovoroda's declaration that this world, "is the smoke of eternity and eternity is the fire which consumes everything." 180 In both of these statements Skovoroda sought to illuminate symbolically his belief that the world was dependent upon God, just as the shadow and the smoke were dependent on the tree and the fire respectively. Skovoroda, therefore, did not maintain that the world had a separate existence, but only that it had a necessary existence.

If the world owed its being to Divine nature not Divine will, then the world, like God, would be unlimited both by time and space. Skovoroda supported this contention when he wrote that, "A shadow signifies the place which is protected from the sun by the apple tree. But the tree of eternity is green forever. Therefore its shadow is not limited by either time or place." 181 In particular Skovoroda was taken by the idea that the


physical world was not only eternal, but spatially infinite. He often referred to the fact that, "this world, which consists of numberless worlds, is the great world." Skovoroda emphasized his own conception of just what spatial infinity entailed, when, comparing the world to God, he argued that its "center is everywhere and its surroundings are nowhere."  

The conception of the universe, the physical world, as a vast or even infinite system was a common idea in eighteenth-century Europe, and so Skovoroda's employment of this notion may have been the result of his exposure to this belief. It is difficult to say precisely when or where Skovoroda met this idea, but it is almost certain that he encountered it either directly or indirectly during his lifetime. It is true that the Kiev Academy, which he attended during the late 1730's and most of the 1740's, was not able, whether for financial or ideological reasons, to keep abreast of Western European scientific advances. Still, during his travels in the West in 1750-53,  

182 Ibid., p. 496.  
or his stay in St. Petersburg in 1742-44 Skovoroda had ample opportunity to grapple with the scientific knowledge which was developing in the West and penetrating rapidly into Russia. Skovoroda's frequent mention of the "Copernican worlds" and the "Copernican systems" indicate that he had some knowledge of the more modern astronomical conceptions, and though the Copernican system was not concerned with the infinity of the universe it was at least a departure from the older geocentric theory, which ruled out the infinity of the universe. Besides this, Skovoroda was probably familiar, again either directly or indirectly, with the ideas in Fontenelle's Discourse on the Plurality of the Worlds, which was written in 1686. This work, which enjoyed a wide reputation in Europe, was translated into Russian in 1730 by the Russian satirist A. Kantemir (1707-44), and published in St. Petersburg in 1740. The Holy Synod, in 1756, declared that the book was anathema so that "no one would dare to write or publish anything . . . about the plurality of the worlds."  

188 K. I. Šafranovskij, "Razgovory o Množestve Mirov' Fontenellja v Rossii" Vestnik Akademii Nauk 1945, # 5-6, p.225.
Despite this proscription however Fontenelle's work was published again in St. Petersburg in 1761. All of this, the popularity of the conception of the world's infinity in Western Europe, Skovoroda's travels to St. Petersburg (1742-44) and the West (1750-53), his apparent understanding of the contributions of Copernicus, and his probable encounter with the ideas expressed in Fontenelle's Discourse on the Plurality of the Worlds lead to the conclusion that Skovoroda was familiar with the notion that the world had an infinite expanse.

Now it may appear contradictory that the theories of the scientific and secular thinkers would influence Skovoroda, but in fact their impact is understandable. Skovoroda himself did not underrate such theorizing or its subsequent empirical proof, he only cautioned that it must not become an end in itself. With regard to the impact of this secular thought on Skovoroda, one must add that his own inclinations toward uninhibited religious thought had prepared him to accept such ideas as an infinitely vast material world. And more than this, his own thought, with its emphasis on the immanence of God in matter, might have led him, even without the influence of secular thought, to the concept of an infinite world.

Skovoroda, as has been mentioned above, could never completely overcome the conflict between the contemporary Orthodox view of the world as the willful creation of a transcendent God, and the more mystically inclined and secularly influenced notion of the world as the necessary and infinite attribute of an immanent Divinity. That this is so is evident from Skovoroda's pronouncements concerning the world. In these declarations Skovoroda continued to maintain God's immanence in the world and therefore the world's necessity, as when he wrote that, "... God penetrates and sustains all creation; He was, is, and will be always and everywhere."\(^{190}\) In this same spirit Skovoroda asked, "Isn't He the being in everything? He is the true tree in the tree, the grass in the grass, the music in the music, the house in the house, ... He is everything in all."\(^{191}\) But at the same time, Skovoroda stressed the difference between God and His world. In a passage in which he used his favorite apple tree and shadow metaphor he stressed this difference when he claimed that:

\begin{quote}
The apple tree has risen high, but the shadow had stretched itself out in the gully. The shadow is in one place and the tree is in another. Here is the difference
\end{quote}


between them . . . To put it briefly, the shadow is located with the apple tree, but does not fuse with it . . . This is why the shadow is only a bagatelle. It is not itself the business, but is only its icon and is adhered to it . . . The shadow changes incessantly: now it emerges, now it disappears, now it diminishes and now it deviates. Aren't there many thousands of shadows in a single apple tree. 192

Skvorodada articulated this same conflicting conception of the world and its relationship with God in a less metaphorical formula when he argued that they were: "... two in one and one in two, indivisible, but unfused:" 193 or again, "... material itself exists, and God is everywhere in it. But it is not Him, nor is He it." 194 Skvorodada's attempt to maintain simultaneously the identification of and the difference between God and the world was characteristic of his thought, and was, for instance, perfectly consistent with his view of the true man, who was both Divine and other than Divine. 195

Skvorodada arrived at his conflicting conception of the world through his speculative considerations of God and his relation to the world. But once he reached this point, Skvorodada sought some practical, even empirical, evidence


195 See above p. 109.
to bolster this speculative conclusion. He appears to have satisfied his desire for such evidence in the continual and dynamic cycle of nature. The great world, according to his view, did not stand idly in this conflicting relationship with God, but constantly manifested the conflict by dying and regenerating itself. In this continuing cycle of nature death marked the insignificance and corruption of the world, and its separation from God, while the world's constant renewal signified the Divine regenerative power which suffused it. Concerning this cycle of nature Skovoroda argued: "The decrepit straw on the ear of grain does not fear destruction. As it sprang from the seed, so again it is concealed in the seed, which, though it decays externally, maintains its strength eternally." 196 Skovoroda pointed out this same empirical support for his view of the world and its relationship with God in the following passage: "When the old seed decays in the field new greenery springs from it, and the death of the old is the birth of the new, so that wherever the fall, here exists the rebirth." 197 Skovoroda's observation of this dynamic and cyclical activity led him to conclude that in the


world, "One thing's decay brings forth another creature."

While this analysis of the world's dynamism gave support to Skovoroda's conception of a world both separate from and suffused by God, it also led him to conclude ultimately that however insignificant the world may have been, it existed necessarily and infinitely:

If you tell me that the external World ends in any time and place, having in itself a determined limit, I say that it ends, namely, it begins. You see, one place's limit is another's door, which opens a field of new spaces, just as a chick begins when the egg is ruined. And so everything always goes to infinity.

Finally, it was just because of his conception of the world's infinity, and the Divine immanance which underlay it, that Skovoroda had advocated the epistemological and moral use of the world, which was mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.

Summary - Skovoroda held two conflicting views of the material world. In the first of these he contended that the material world was the willful creation of a transcendent God. But this analysis, which ultimately called into question the Divine powers, persuaded Skovoroda to view the world also as a necessary attribute of an immanent God. If the World was a necessary attribute of God,

198 Ibid., p. 368.
199 Ibid.
however, it, like God, would know no limits in time or space. Skovoroda did not shrink from this conclusion, but argued vigorously for a material world which was both eternal and infinite. Because Skovoroda was not able to reconcile his two conflicting views of the world and its relationship to God he jointly saw the world as a willful creation and an attribute of God. He even argued that the dynamic cycle of nature manifested these conflicting relationships between God and the world, with death and decay marking the corruption of the world and its separation from God, and the world's renewal signifying the Divine powers of regeneration which suffused it. Still, the cycle of nature led Skovoroda to conclude that, however insignificant the world may have been, it existed necessarily and infinitely. Finally, it was because of the world's infinity and the immanent God which sustained it that the world could give man epistemological and moral assistance.

God

It has by now become apparent that all of Skovoroda's thought revolved around God and his relationship with creation, as witness the following views: 1) God was both the ultimate goal of knowledge, and the means by which such knowledge could be achieved; 2) the Bible was both the symbolic world which revealed God, and God
Himself; 3) the true man and God were the same, although they were simultaneously different; 4) the whole of man's moral struggle consisted of his efforts to realize the true man, or God, within himself, and to do this he had to restrain his own will, while abiding by the Divine will or law; 5) the world was both an insignificant and transitory nothingness, and an attribute of an immanent God which like Him was infinite in time and space. In each of these characteristic mental attitudes Skovoroda manifested not only the central place of God in his own thought, but also his view concerning the mysterious and contradictory nature of God who was both in all and outside of all at the same time. The conflicting views of Skovoroda concerning God's relationship with knowledge, the Bible, man, morality, and the world, were repeated in Skovoroda's discussion of God Himself. His contradictory considerations of God then, while they may not help to explain his earlier conflicts are at least consistent with them.

The question of God, for Skovoroda, was one fraught with uncertainty, not with ontological uncertainty, for he did not express any doubts about the existence of God, but rather with uneasiness about how, or even if, man should approach the subject of God. Because of his qualms concerning the fashion in which man should define or analyze God, Skovoroda was driven to write, "Really, have you not heard that the Highest Essence has no name peculiar
Skorovoda did not believe that man could define God in human terms. For him, all words, being of imperfect human origin, were themselves imperfect and therefore incapable of expressing the ineffable nature of God. In this attitude Skorovoda concurred with the opinion of the Pseudo-Dionysius, whose works became known at the beginning of the sixth century. The author of these writings, whatever his identity and whenever he wrote, argued that, "... the One which is beyond thought surpasses the apprehension of thought, and the Good which is beyond utterance surpasses the reach of words." Skorovoda's agreement with the view of the Pseudo-Dionysius, which stemmed from both his general knowledge of Orthodox theology and his specific acquaintance with the works of the Pseudo-Dionysius, was underlined by his


201 These works, On the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology, were over a long period of time attributed to a disciple of St. Paul, Dionysius the Areopagite. Though modern criticism has shown this identification to have been mistaken, these works have, since the early sixth century, occupied a place of undisputed authority in both Eastern and Western Christianity. Vladimir Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, London: 1957, pp. 23-24.


attitude concerning the heart's abyss, i.e. the true man. "The profound heart . . . ," he wrote, "is nothing but an abyss which is unlimited by our thoughts . . . ."204 The sum of Skovoroda's attitudes as expressed in the above examples of his thought would indicate that neither God nor the Divine element in man was capable of human comprehension or definition. This outlook may seem contradictory when compared with his view of knowledge, but one must understand that Skovoroda's "true knowledge," which was an appreciation of and communion with the Divinity which sustained all appearances, did not mean a complete human comprehension of that essence. According to Skovoroda, therefore, one could come to a realization of the Divine in the "true man," nature, and the Bible, even though he could never fully fathom the essence of that Divinity.

Though Skovoroda advanced this view of God, which was essentially apophatic, he did not emphasize or analyze it exhaustively as had, for instance, the Pseudo-Dionysius. Instead, having made his concession to man's inability to define or comprehend God, he sought to illuminate God, however imperfectly, with human explanations. Skovoroda's refusal to abide with the apophatic approach to God echoed his inability to rest with the conception of an absolutely

transcendent God, altogether beyond man and the world, who was therefore inaccessible to human inquiry. "God, and His world and His man," he wrote concerning this question, "are one."205

Skovoroda began his positive discussion of God by arguing that, "the whole world consists of two natures, one visible, the other invisible. The visible nature is called creation, and the invisible one, God. The invisible nature or God penetrates and sustains all creation."206 Now Skovoroda contended that man for several millenia had been aware of this invisible nature or God, and had attempted to define or name Him in human terms. "The ancients," he noted, "... had various names for Him. For instance, nature. The essence of things. Eternity. Fate. The indispensable fortune and so on."207 The Christians too, he stated, had sought names for the Divinity and some of the more well known ones were, "Spirit, Lord, Ruler, Father, Mind, and Truth."208 Having alluded to the universality of the human effort to define God in human terms Skovoroda himself offered a name for God. "In the Bible," he argued,


207 Ibid., p. 64.

208 Ibid.
God is called fire, water, wind, iron, stone and other names without number; why not call Him Nature (Natura)? In my opinion it is impossible to find a more important and fitting name for God than this. Natura, of course, is the Latin word, for which our equivalent is nature [priroda] or substance [estestvo]. 209

Skovoroda's application of the term Nature to God strongly suggests that he had a pantheistic view of the Divinity. His explanation of just what Nature meant, however, mitigated this pantheism. "Nature," he claimed, "means not only everything which is born and transformed, but also the hidden economy of that everlasting power, which has its center or central and most principal point everywhere, but has its surroundings nowhere..."210 The above explanation of Skovoroda with its emphasis on the idea of the Divine economy, put his pantheism in a new light because it seemed to draw the distinction, however obliquely, between the Divine essence which was unknowable and the Divine economy, which manifested itself in creation. In attempting to identify God on another occasion Skovoroda, quoting St. John, wrote that "God is


210 Ibid.
love (John, 1st Epistle, 4:16)."211 But love he wrote, "is the eternal union between God and man. It is the invisible fire with which the heart is fused to the Divine word or will, and because of this it itself is God."212 This consideration of love as God stressed it as a Divine energy by which the true man was fused to God, rather than as the Divine essence, which was inaccessible to man. In both his discussion of God as Nature and God as love, Skovoroda, then, seemed to distinguish between the unknowable Divine essence, and the Divine economy or energy by which God and creation were inextricably fused. Now these instances of Skovoroda's drawing a distinction between Divine essence and energy do not entirely explain away his inclinations toward a pantheistic interpretation of God, since they were both few in number and marked by imprecision. Still, they indicate that Skovoroda's thought may have been closer to that of traditional Orthodoxy than was formerly believed.

Concerning Skovoroda's opposition to Orthodoxy many commentators have noted, and correctly so, Skovoroda's great emphasis upon the immanence of God in His creation. Archbishop Filaret, for instance, not only mentioned this


aspect of Skovoroda's thought, but even attributed it to the influence of the German mystic, Jacob Boehme. The Bishop of Belgorod, who called into question Skovoroda's "Načal'naja Dver' ko Kristijanskomu Dobronraviju," did so on the basis of what he termed, "several vague points and some dubious speech." One can almost certainly conclude that the allegations about "vague points" and "dubious speech" referred to Skovoroda's allusions to the immanence of God, which appeared already in this work, one of his earliest. Paul Miliukov in a clear reference to Skovoroda's less than Orthodox theology referred to him as a man who, "though he did not belong to any sect, or break openly with the church, was in spirit a sectarian." Each of these men, then, stressed Skovoroda's unorthodox theology, and this emphasis was not altogether unjustified, but as has been shown, a more complete knowledge of Skovoroda's work indicates that his inclination toward a pantheistic interpretation of God was mitigated by his oblique references to the distinction between the Divine essence and the Divine energy.


If Skovoroda's apopthegm and evident, though perhaps blurred, distinction between Divine essence and energy were at least partially in accord with Orthodox theology, so was his further thought concerning God. This further thought originated with Skovoroda's conception of God as the "beginning." "The beginning," he asserted,

is precisely this, that before it nothing could be. And since all creation is born and disappears, naturally something preceded it and will remain after it. Therefore, nothing can be the beginning and the end. The beginning and the end are the same as God or Eternity. And nothing is before or after it. 216

Two explanatory comments must be made about Skovoroda's conception of God as the beginning. First, he intended this explanation to be both an a priori argument for the existence of God, and a rhetorical device which would illuminate the already existing belief in God held by his audience. Secondly, though God as beginning seemed to contradict his conception of the eternity of material, there was no contradiction because by beginning here he meant not precedence in time but rather the priority of essence to attribute. 217 Clearly then, Skovoroda took a traditional Christian view in his conception of God as that


217 The word which Skovoroda used for Beginning, nachalo, also means principle or basis. Therefore, it signifies both temporal and essential precedence.
which eternally precedes all creation, and without which there would be no creation. But he took a less traditional and more pantheistic stance by trying to maintain simultaneously his ideas concerning the eternity of matter.

Having advanced his conception of God as the beginning, Skovoroda continued:

This true Beginning lives everywhere. Because of this It is not a part, nor does It consist of parts. On the contrary, it is whole, steadfast, and therefore indestructible. It does not move from place to place, but is unified, boundless, and constant. And as It is everywhere, so It is eternal. It anticipates and includes everything, and Itself is neither anticipated nor included. 218

This statement concerning God was one of Skovoroda's best, and it should be considered as part of his positive effort to clarify the idea of God for his listeners and readers. Still, with its many negative elements, this statement demonstrates the extent of Skovoroda's dependence on the traditional apophatic approach of Christianity.

In the above approach to the problem of a Divine definition Skovoroda found himself in the usual dilemma of trying to define in human terms what he knew, from his own experiences, to be an ineffable Divinity. In this dilemma he employed what must have been for him the most viable solution, namely, he defined God in essentially negative

terms. God was best explained in terms of what corruptible matter, at least on the surface, was not. God was therefore infinite, eternal, indivisible, unmoving, uncontained, indestructible, unanticipated and incomprehensible.

Notwithstanding this viewpoint, Skovoroda could not abandon the belief that this apparently transcendent Divinity was of necessity, immanent in creation. God, he argued, was, "the eternity in perishability, the life in death, the arising in sleep, the light in darkness, the truth in falsehood, the joy in weeping, the hope in despair;" 219 ". . . He is everything to all;" 220 "Does not God support everything? Is He Himself not the head and all to everything?" 221 Skovoroda realized that there was an apparent conflict here between God's transcendence and immanence, but he was aware also that this conflict was just one more indication of man's incapacity for comprehending God. He often manifested his acceptance of the mystery of God's simultaneous transcendence and immanence, as when he wrote, "Everything is akin to You and You to everything, but nothing is You and You are nothing except Yourself." 222

219 Ibid., p. 368.
221 Ibid.
Now one might explain Skovoroda's view of a God who was jointly transcendent and immanent with that implied distinction which he drew between the Divine essence and the Divine energy.\(^{223}\) According to this distinction the Divine essence was transcendent and absolutely inaccessible to creation, while the Divine energy was the manifestation of the Divinity which underpinned all creation. The difficulty with this explanation is that Skovoroda himself, though he may have implied it, did not discuss it explicitly even in those places were it was clearly in order, for instance, where he referred to the relationship between God and His creation as one which occurred, "without any mixing, but without any division."\(^{224}\)

So far this essay has stressed Skovoroda's consideration of God as the unified Divinity which, despite Its unity, was an incomprehensible entity at once transcendent and immanent; because of Its contradictory and mysterious nature, the Divinity was therefore best understood, if one can say that the Divinity is understood at all, in negative terms. But if Skovoroda admitted the unfathomable nature of the unified, whole Divinity, he was aware of the even greater mystery which attached to the concept of the Divine

\(^{223}\) See above pp. 151-53.

Trinity. Skovoroda believed that the idea of a God who was both a Unity and a Trinity was an old one. He argued that the Pythagorean symbol for God, a point or an eye inside an equilateral triangle which was in turn circumscribed by a circle, presaged the Christian concept of a trinitarian God by proclaiming that, "3, 2 and 1 are the same." 225

Skovoroda also found the anticipation of this Christian concept in the Old Testament. "It is evident," he wrote,

That it is neither nonsense nor foolishness when one says that the Hebrew Bible begins in this style: 'In the beginning the Gods [Bogi] created [sotvoril] heaven and earth.' (Gen. 1:1) Think it over! Gods? This means plural. Created? This means singular... You see that here they mean the same. 226

Skovoroda's remarking of the anticipation of the trinitarian idea in both an ancient thinker and the Old Testament testified not so much to his wide knowledge as to his wide appreciation for the theological contributions of those who did not share his own confessional attachment.

At the same time that Skovoroda alluded to the universality of the Trinitarian ideal, he tried, though with marked brevity, to illuminate it. In his illustration of the relationship of the three persons in the one God vis-a-vis creation Skovoroda employed the reliable figure


226 Ibid.
of the triangle: "A single beginning and an initial unity anticipates all creation. This is a corner! Who has created the flesh and taken up abode in it. This is a corner! Who abides with the disappearing flesh. This is a corner!" Here, Skovoroda identified respectively the three persons of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He also, in a perfectly Orthodox manner, elucidated the relationship of the three persons to the created world, i.e. that the Father created all things, by the Son, in the Spirit. While advancing the concept of Divine unity in Trinity, Skovoroda, also in the Orthodox fashion, clearly supported the idea of the monarchy of the Father, who as he indicated, was the principle of unity in the Trinity. Skovoroda, then, in his view of the Trinity did not appear to have an inclination for the *filioque* formula of Catholicism which was the *bête noire* of Orthodox theologians. An extreme emphasis on the persons of the Trinity, naturally, could have led Skovoroda to a sort of Tritheism, but he was aware of and avoided this heretical stance, as witness his contention that, "Trinity in unity, and unity in Trinity can not exist outside of unity. And no one is a unity, but only the single God." Skovoroda saw the Trinity, then as equally three in person and one in

227 Ibid., p. 512.
228 Ibid.
nature: "I see one and it is three; I see three and it is one." \(^{229}\) This view of the Trinitarian God placed Skovoroda in absolute accord with the Orthodox view as articulated by one of the greatest theologians of the Eastern Church, Gregory Nazianzen, who wrote, "When I speak of God you must be illuminated at once by one flash of light and by three." \(^{230}\) Finally such a view of the Trinity, with its equal emphasis upon God's unity and trinity underlined the profundity of the Divine mystery, and man's inability to comprehend it. Skovoroda, throughout his writings had stressed man's incapacity for understanding God, while, by his own inquiry into the nature and persons of God, emphasizing the need for man to consider God so that he could come to recognize his own inadequacies next to God's staggering magnificence. That Skovoroda used such an apophatic, and Orthodox, approach to the question of God is clear when one recapitulates his teachings concerning the Divinity.

Summary - Skovoroda began his discussion of God by arguing that man could not name or define the transcendent

\(^{229}\) Ibid.

\(^{230}\) Vladimir Lossky, The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church, London: 1957, p. 53. Though Skovoroda himself did not quote this passage from Gregory Nazianzen, he was familiar with Gregory's work and considered him as a great teacher who could say with St. Paul, "We have the mind of Christ. (Phil. 2:5)." Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Knižččka o čtenii Svjaščennago Pisanija narečenna Žena Lotova," p. 393.
God in positive human terms because He was beyond imperfect human comprehension. Despite this apophatic admission, however, Skovoroda, moved by the idea of an immanent God, was impelled to continue his inquiry. In this further investigation he employed two definitions, Nature and Love, which might be classified as incomplete though somewhat Orthodox efforts to distinguish between the unknowable Divine essence and the more accessible Divine energy, and so to reconcile the transcendent-immanent contradiction in the Divinity. Skovoroda did not elaborate on this distinction, though, and continued his positive efforts to illuminate the Divine nature. This further positive effort, however, led him to define God only in negative terms, i.e. in terms of what material was not. All of this notwithstanding, Skovoroda still could not overcome his conception of God as simultaneously transcendent and immanent. Though he was aware of the unfathomable mystery of the transcendent-immanent Divine unity, Skovoroda also asserted the greater mystery of the Trinitarian God. In his consideration of the Divine Trinity, Skovoroda, perfectly in accord with Orthodox tradition, carefully maintained the equality between the single nature and three persons. Thus he indicated the ultimate incomprehensibility of God.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

There is a consensus on Skovoroda's biographical data. Practically all who have considered his life, activities and personality have agreed on the facts of his religious inclinations, his education at the Kievan Academy, his travel abroad, his career as both a private tutor and a seminary instructor, and his ultimate choice of the poverty-stricken life of a wandering teacher. The reason for this consensus is that almost all who have concerned themselves with Skovoroda's life have based their knowledge of it on Kovalinskij's biography. This biography, which reflects both Kovalinskij's talent and his love for Skovoroda, is the only extended discussion of Skovoroda's life by one who knew him personally. The biography does have its shortcomings, particularly with regard to the details of Skovoroda's youth, formal education, and travel abroad. Still, it is the only relatively full, first-hand account of Skovoroda's life, and therefore it is indispensable for a study of the man.

In contrast to this consensus on Skovoroda's biography, however, there is a great deal of disagreement with respect to 1) the evaluation of the content of his thought,
2) his relationship to Orthodoxy; and 3) his significance in the history of the Ukraine and Russia. These conflicts become apparent when one considers some representative opinions on these questions. As concerns Skovoroda's thought, for instance, Vissarion Belinskij, the nineteenth-century Russian literary and social critic exhibited a most negative view when he remarked: "Let everyone judge for himself, but for me the philosopher Xoma is like the philosopher Skovoroda." Belinskij made clear the reason for this negative evaluation of Skovoroda when he wrote sarcastically, "Oh incomparable master Xoma! How magnificent you are in your stoic indifference to everything earthly..." Because he saw in Skovoroda an exclusive concern with spiritual matters, with the other-worldly sphere, therefore, Belinskij rejected his thought out of hand. In contrast to this adverse criticism of Skovoroda's thought N. I. Kostomarov, the nineteenth-century Ukrainian historian and nationalist, was constrained to take a more favorable attitude. While realizing that Skovoroda's

1 Xoma Brut, the central character in Nikolai Gogol's story "Vij". He was a seminarian and philosophy student in Kiev, who, while traveling home for the summer, experienced a series of extraordinary adventures. The last of these was his face to face meeting with the monster, Vijn, which encounter resulted in Xoma Brut's death.


3 Ibid.
thought was not a potent or influential force in the nineteenth century, he attacked the present-mindedness of those who criticized Skovoroda's works "as if he were a new writer just now appearing, when it follows to view his writings as a memorial to the ideas which held sway almost one hundred years ago." Kostomarov not only viewed Skovoroda's work positively in terms of the time and place in which it appeared, but also found in it a remarkable practical morality and freedom of thought.

Later in the nineteenth century one can find attitudes towards Skovoroda's thought, which, though they were the product of a greater knowledge than either Belinskij or Kostomarov possessed, still demonstrated conflict. D. I. Bagalej, for instance, who edited Skovoroda's Collected Works in 1894, perceived in his thought many contemporary ideas:

A straining toward the moral rebirth of the individual, an unflinching search for truth, the principle of a broad religious tolerance, the struggle against superstition, democratism, which was expressed in his desire to give enlightenment to the lower classes of

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5 Ibid., p. 9.

society, and a complete accord between word and deed. 7

Bagalej was also struck by the critical aspect of Skovoroda's thought, a criticism which was directed in the main toward the Bible and religion, but which was critical thought nonetheless. 8 A Russian author, V. Nikolskij, writing at about the same time as Bagalej, discerned in Skovoroda's thought neither contemporary nor critical elements. On the contrary, he concluded that Skovoroda's writings were characterized by nothing so much as confusion and inconsistency. Skovoroda's thought, he wrote,

Is confused and inconsistent. While it is a little pantheistic, a little rationalistic, and a little mystical it is neither the first, the second, nor the third: this is so not because Skovoroda reconciled these world views into some kind of a higher synthesis, but simply because he could not unravel one from the other. 9

With regard to Skovoroda's thought one can find conflicts even in contemporary evaluations of it. V. V. Zenkovsky, for instance emphasizes the "inner wholeness" of Skovoroda's thought, an inner wholeness which, he argued,

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7 "Jubilejnoe Čestovanie Pamjati Grigoriya Savviji Skovorody v Xarkove," Kievskaja Starina, #12, p. 474.


"issues from the steadfast feeling that the essence of being is located beyond the limits of empirical reality."\textsuperscript{10}

On the other hand, one notes in the Soviet attitude toward Skovoroda's thought an inclination to exaggerate his materialism:

In the views of Skovoroda . . . there is a noticeable vacillation between materialism and idealism. He is a materialist when he asserts the eternity of matter . . . he stands as an idealist in his teaching about the two principles which make up the world, the outer-matter, the inner-idea; \textsuperscript{11}

"In the philosophic views of Skovoroda it is characteristic that . . . in the last analysis the decisions of the basic question of philosophy clearly expressed a materialistic tendency."\textsuperscript{12}

The conflicts evident in the above evaluations of Skovoroda's thought are also manifest in various interpretations of Skovoroda's relation to Orthodoxy. This conflict refers not to his relation to the official church, for Kovalinskij's biography has made abundantly clear


Skovoroda's opposition to the hierarchy and refusal to participate in the monastic life of the church. The concurrence or lack of same between Skovoroda's thought and Orthodox dogma is, however, another matter. On this latter question D. Gumilevskij (Archbishop Filaret) demonstrated his opinion that Skovoroda's teachings deviated from Orthodoxy when he wrote that Skovoroda was a Ukrainian thinker, "who, unfortunately, tainted his thought by his familiarity with Jacob Boehme's muddleheaded mysticism". Paul Miliukov supported Gumilevskij's contention concerning Skovoroda's deviation from Orthodoxy when he argued that his writings were almost perfectly in accord with the teachings of the Dukhobors, the sectarians who originated in southern Russia during the middle of the eighteenth century. In opposition to this argument concerning Skovoroda's un-Orthodox stance, A. S. Lebedev, in an article on Skovoroda's theology, contended that his teachings were in full agreement with Orthodox thought.

Finally, as concerns Skovoroda's historical importance, though there is general agreement that he was a


15 A. S. Lebedev, "G. S. Skovoroda kak Bogoslov," Voprosy Filosofii i Psixologii, 1895, #2, pp. 175-76.
precursor rather than an influence in his own right, there is disagreement as to what precisely was his historical significance. Vladimir Ern, the Russian philosopher of the turn of the century who was concerned with combatting the increasingly mechanized structure of life, saw in Skovoroda's thought opposition to the growing emphasis on the object and empirical observation. Because of this he perceived Skovoroda's significance in his decision to reject the world and empirical science. Ern argued that subsequent Russian thinkers remained stubbornly faithful to Skovoroda's decision, even though Skovoroda did not directly influence them. V. V. Zenkovsky perceived Skovoroda's importance in his being the first representative of a free, religious philosophy, which was touched by an unquestioned secularization of thought. In opposition to Ern and Zenkovsky, Soviet critics characterize Skovoroda as: 1) "a writer and philosopher-enlightener, who condemned the exploitative structure of society, addressed himself to the common people, and strained to

17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., p. 332.
arouse them to knowledge, enlightenment and action;"\(^{20}\) 2)
"a Ukrainian thinker, humanist, democrat and enlightener
who brought his anger down against the feudal system, and
who, in his world-view, reflected both the hatred of the
peasants and lower cossacks for their oppressors, and
their yearning for a better society."\(^{21}\)

The divergent opinions listed above certainly bear
witness to the different perspectives from which various
commentators have viewed Skovoroda. But even more these
opinions testify to the many conflicting elements in
Skovoroda's thought and relation to society. Despite these
conflicting elements, and the difficulties they present to
the student of Skovoroda, one can conclude an essay on
Skovoroda by both pointing out the conflicts, and, where
possible, reconciling them.

The central fact of Skovoroda's thought was his
rather Platonic contention that reality lay beyond the
realm of appearances. He found this to be so for man,
nature, and the Bible, and as a result he rejected
empirical knowledge as something to be pursued for its own

\(^{20}\) O. V. Traxtenberg, "Filosofskaja Mysl' na Ukraine
Vtoroj Poloviny XVIII v.: G. S. Skovoroda," Akademija Nauk
SSSR, Istorija Filosofii, 6 vols., Moscow: 1957-65, I,
p. 653.

\(^{21}\) V. E. Evdokimenko and I. A. Tabačnikov,
"Filosofskaja i sociologičeskaja mys'l narodov SSSR s konca
XVI do poslednej treti XVIII v.: Ukraina," Akademija Nauk
SSSR, Istorija Filosofii v SSSR, 5 vols., Moscow: 1968, I,
p. 411.
sake. Though Skovoroda emphasized the reality of the unseen nature, or Divinity, which sustained appearances, he did not conclude that physical matter was illusory or unreal. Instead, basing his argument on the existence of an immanent-transcendent God who was both within and without matter, he contended that matter was a necessary attribute of God and therefore, like God, unlimited in time and space. Skovoroda's argument concerning the eternity and infinity of matter, though it may have been influenced by secular thought, was based on the Divine immanence within matter. Therefore it does not demonstrate Skovoroda's materialistic inclinations but on the contrary, only reaffirms the crucial importance of the invisible Divine essence in his thought.

Skovoroda's insistence on the immanence of God in man, nature and the Bible, which manifested itself in his statements that, "the true man and God are the same," "it is impossible to find a more suitable name for God than Nature," and "understand that the Bible has itself become God," reflected his familiarity with both German mystical and Russian sectarian thought. This familiarity and Skovoroda's emphasis on Divine immanence give cause to consider elements of his thought as contrary to Orthodox dogma. But his efforts to distinguish between the Divine essence and the Divine economy, however incomplete they were, mitigate his apparent deviation from Orthodoxy,
though they do not entirely dispell it. Besides this, his firm belief in the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ witness to his close ties with Orthodox thought.

Skovoroda’s stress upon the Divine in man and nature produced as a consequence a moral philosophy which depended on the ability of man to put his will in harmony with the Divine will, i.e. the Divine law or nature. While this may have appeared quite abstract, Skovoroda by his teaching on practical morality and his own living example demonstrated that living in accord with nature was the only way for man to remain simultaneously detached from and happy in the world. Though this practical morality was primarily the consequence of his teaching on the immanence of God, one can not disregard the influence on it of Skovoroda’s negative attitude toward his society and his church, nor his allied contention that if men lived according to nature social harmony would result.

If one considers the above discussion of Skovoroda’s thought, his emphasis on the Divine reality which sustained man, nature and the Bible, his contention, based on the immanent-transcendent nature of the Divinity, that matter was eternal and infinite, his morality with its dependence jointly on Skovoroda’s speculation and his criticism of church and society, as well as some of the influences on his thought, then he can begin to appreciate Skovoroda’s historical significance. Skovoroda saw himself as
surrounded by men who were living, in the words of Socrates, "the unexamined life," by men who were thoughtlessly in pursuit of fame, riches and pleasure. He reacted strongly against this aimless concern with worldly affairs, and began to question by both his life and thought the values of the "official" church and the "official" society which approved such mundane concerns. In the process of asking such questions, Skovoroda, influenced variously by his own religious inclinations, his education at the Kievan Academy, his trip to the West, and his exposure to Ancient thought, the Bible, Orthodoxy, German mysticism, and sectarian and scientific thought arrived at a philosophy which was eclectic rather than original. Skovoroda's eclecticism and lack of originality, however, should not blind one to three central facts about him: 1) he was, despite the religious content of his thought, the first "secular" philosopher in Russia; 2) he was the creator of a more systematic body of philosophic thought than had heretofore existed in Russia; 3) he was the first of the long line of lay theologians in Russia, a line which included the Slavophiles and Vladimir Solovëv, and which took theology away from its arid ecclesiastical atmosphere and into the world.

22 Skovoroda did not quote this famous Socratic dictum but in the same spirit of criticism, he did note and identify with the Socratic remark that, "Some men live to eat, but I eat to live." Skovoroda, Sobranie Sočinenij, 1912, "Pismo k S. I. Tevjašovu," p. 359.
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