

# **Panteleimon Kulish and the Fusion of Agrarianism, Orthodoxy and Nationalism**

Matthew Raphael Johnson  
Johnstown, PA

Ukraine's agrarian culture placed a huge mark on her intellectual history. Ukrainian nationalism, in general, revolves around the simple, peasant life on the land. Urban life is totally alien to it. Through Ukrainian history, the city has been the source of oppression. Almost always the domain of foreigners, the city was alien culturally, linguistically and morally. As the philosophical image of Ukrainian identity slowly developed in the face of constant occupation, genocide and cold-blooded inequality, the agrarian life took its rightful place. Even the official flag shows the blue sky above the golden wheat below.

Ukrainian nationalism has suffered terribly from its unspeakable and obscene hijacking by the CIA, Mossad and the European Union in the Orange revolution and the CIA-sponsored "Maidan Revolt" of 2014. Universalist and cosmopolitan, centered entirely around the city, these phenomenon are the death throes of a sick society, not the result of a healthy nationalism. These events were little more than a means to drive Russia from the region, permitting the west to liquidate all functioning Ukrainian industry as a means to pay debt. Today, though it almost seems absurd to say, Ukraine has no economy.

This paper is a modest attempt to rescue the best of Ukrainian and Belorussian agrarian thought from the morass of decay and excremental idiocy from the CIA-sponsored "revolutions from above." While newly minted "Ukraine experts" proliferate like flies on a rotting corpse, this article will resurrect, for western readers, a major ethno-agrarian poet these Pentagon-approved "experts" have never heard of, the great Panteleimon Kulish.

Panteleimon Kulish (d. 1897) is the most important philosophical figure on what that life entails in its cultural, political and philosophical context. Kulish is the first well-known Ukrainian writer to make the agrarian life essential to the Ukrainian identity, though that had been long understood as a crucial element. Going further, Kulish extrapolates the nature of agrarian life in moral terms from the historical data of both the Cossack life and the Ukrainian ethnic ideal from Kievan Rus.

Kulish lived at a time where the bare outlines of modern industrialization, positivism and nominalism were being imposed on Russia and the world. It was the breath of demons, the stink of decay; the worship of dead matter. Vladimir Katasonov writes concerning the arcane foundation of capitalism:

In the ancient Greek pantheon, the god of wealth was called Plutus (hence "plutocracy" or the power of wealth). He was not at first separated from the god of the underworld as Pluto was also chief of the earth's interior. One of the inhabitants of the Greek Olympus was Hermes. He was the patron of trade and commerce. In the myths he possessed eloquence, cunning and guile; and was often seen resorting to fraud and theft. The ancient Roman god of trade, profit

and enrichment was Mercury, very similar to Hermes. His name comes from the word for “merchandise” or “goods” and words like “mercenary” or “mercantile” come from him. Under the protection of the temple of Mercury in ancient Rome was the merchant guild. Mercury was the provider of profit and he was always shown with a purse. This god, according to the beliefs of the ancient Romans, also could find hidden treasures. In the pantheon of Roman gods he occupied a special place Juno Moneta (Юнона Монета), the patroness of financial affairs. The temple of the goddess was in the same courtyard as the mint (Katasonov, 2013).

Most famously, Kulish's “Agrarian Philosophy” (1868) lays out his most comprehensive doctrine on the subject. Like contemporary Eurasianists, Kulish saw civilizations as broadly belonging to the mercantile “sea” life or the more communitarian land-based variety.

Petrograd for Kulish was the synthesis of evil: it was Solomon's temple, the Hermetic deception, raw power without principle, deception and mercantilism in one package. This did not harm his views as a Russophile. Muscovite Russia is the antipode to Petrograd. Peter was a self-described revolutionary and the Petersburg idea was imposed on the elite by force.

Kulish began his philosophical and pedagogical speculations with the proposition that humans are essentially good. Any social system that divides people into classes, however, creates an environment of competition and resentment that quickly dissipates this fragile innocence. Like Rousseau, Kulish sees the property fetish of John Locke leading to the wars of Thomas Hobbes. Locke's peaceful state of nature, marked only by occasional disputes over property, will eventually lead to the constant warfare of egocentric, identical and culture-less units found in Hobbes. Both social contract writers, as both Rousseau and Kulish point out, confuse the state of nature with the results of civilization and, as a result, do nothing but import their own views onto the “lawless” world of this hypothetical state. Kulish stressed that property leads to competition, which, in turn, leads to social dissolution, a disintegration marked by nominalism and individualism.

Like Gregorii Skovoroda or Pamphil Yurkevich, Kulish took the human heart as the crucial element. In ethical or theological writing, the “heart” is never an organ – it is a metaphor for that central aspect of the human person that integrates all faculties of man – reason, will, thought, emotion, love and the rest. The heart gets forgotten as urban life invades the landscape. Modernity and urbanization split the man into pieces, classes and castes. It separates the intellect from the will and from the feelings. It separates beauty from utility and utility from right. The world is inverted as the material rules over the spiritual.

It is not modernity specifically that creates this fragmentation. It accelerates what is already present. Civilization itself begins the slow decline of human integrity. The old Greek schema of the Golden Age in a perpetual slide into the barbarism of Iron is not only poetic, but truthful. Civilization requires a division of labor which begins this decline. Yet, because this division is necessary, even in rudimentary form, fragmentation becomes a problem without an obvious solution. Civilization is a contradiction.

In the Ukrainian case, because urban life was so radically alien both in an ethnic and civilizational sense, nationalism was tightly connected to any ruralist revolution. Jews, Russians and Germans ran the Ukrainian city, and viewed their role as deriving from a natural superiority to the “ignorant yokel.” Ruralism, however, unlike Rousseauianism, begins with the family. The individual is not—nor can ever be—the center or purpose of society. The family too cannot be.

Nothing in isolation can be the foundation of society. This is where Rousseau got it wrong, but no less wrong than Hobbes.

The unit of society from which all civilization springs is the family on the land, situated within the small community. No smaller unit is possible. The family is the root of society, and “family” means the extended family, not the truncated “nuclear” family of suburban America. The land is the beginnings of metaphysics, it is the Substance from which all things mundane derive. If anything, then, the true root of society is the land, which makes it possible for the family to exist at all. In his little read poem “Prayer of Nature,” Kulish makes a clear connection between the order of nature and man's fall. Man's arrogant desire to extract more and more resources from the natural order lead to a revolt against the ego. Nature seeks understanding from God as to the reason humanity refuses to see the wisdom in nature and instead, seeks egotistical satisfaction at her expense.

The “dark and foggy mind does not seek the knowledge of the creator” Kulish writes. “I stand” nature says to God, “firmly under your Order, the wise law of the created universe.” Yet, Kulish writes too that the church, “the truth of the creator is locked within formalities, under imperial [lit. Roman] domination” leading to ignorance of creation and the manifestation of God's order on earth. The result is the toleration of “greed and hunger, meaning we are finished.” Later, nature cries that “I am powerless as man drowns in vices.”

Similarly, in “Transmutation,” or “Metamorphoses” Kulish writes from the point of view of a demon who has fooled humanity into believing the order of exploitation is “natural.” Hence leading to the “prayer” above. The human mind was darkened since much of the church was alien to Ukraine and under the secular Petrogradian empire. There was nothing Orthodox about Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, at least at her elite levels. Kulish seems to be implying that under Petrograd, the southern Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox life came to a standstill, with few priests and theological ignorance enforced by the secular and materialist reign of Catherine II. The Old Believers alone maintained theological knowledge, scattered and divided as they were. This, in a way, is a veiled request for the liturgy and theological books in Ukrainian, not the constantly changing idea of Slavonic from the largely western theologians of Petrograd.

Over time, the demon states (loosely), “my creations were seen as that of a god; you thought me a god, and I stand amazed as the mind became blind with alien worlds imposed with force; a child of the father of Lies soon blinded all.”<sup>1</sup>

In both of these significant poems, nature suffers when men refuse to grasp its origin and purpose. The nominalist rule of capital was based on this “blindness” and “alien force” as well as, further, deepening the alienation. That Old Russia was dead through the purges of Peter, “Catherine I,” Biron, Ostermann and Catherine's boyfriends, Ukraine was now called to restore it. Between Peter I and Catherine II, Russian monasteries were closed by the thousands, dozens of bishops imprisoned and the synod placed under a secular head often quite hostile to the church. Peter's torture and death of dozens of abbots and Bishops, and the famed case of St. Arseny Matesvich (murdered by the most brutal torture by Catherine's explicit order), showed that Russia was no longer Orthodox. That the massive purges of Orthodoxy – to the point where few clergy remained in Ukraine – brought Kulish's feelings to a boil in these poems.

While some might think this a radical form of extrapolation, a historian of Kulish's abilities was more than aware of what the church had become in 18<sup>th</sup> century Ukraine. Gogol's “Vyi” is another example of the abandoned and decrepit church.

Like Rousseau, education was the crucial element of social life for Kulish. He writes as a

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<sup>1</sup> From his *Metamorphoses*, found here: [http://www.poetryclub.com.ua/metrs\\_poem.php?poem=8713](http://www.poetryclub.com.ua/metrs_poem.php?poem=8713)

counter-revolutionary, aware of the occult nature of Petrograd and its purpose. In his view, the school should both be under the village and its church. The church, and religion, in general should also derive directly from man in his natural state. Kulish holds to a religion that stresses moral life in union with Logos, or the reason in nature; the law of law – that which holds the cosmos together.

Education for him was the education of the heart, not the mind. The liberal arts or the more practical sciences can never be separated from social life, ethics and theology. The ultimate goal was to integrate outward appearance with inner life. “Education,” of course, meant the holistic approach to nurturing and growth. It is not merely in the institutionalized school setting, but exists at all moments of life, young or old. The formal “school system” only functions when contextualized in an environment that nurtures learning in the true sense. It is not the mere repetition of academic templates, but is about life. The formal system might focus on the more theoretical subjects, but that only matters if it is part of a broader whole.

Social freedom, the freedom in community, does not depend on the state. The state is dependent on it in that it takes its legitimacy from it. The real evil of civilization is the Satanic inversion of values. The material rules the spiritual, the part rules the whole. Soon, both the material and the fragment deny their parents. In politics, evil is when the state exploits the village for its own purposes. Since the village is the origin of the state, this domination is contradictory. Hegel's “master/slave” dialectic holds that, in such a relationship, the domination is only in appearance. In reality, the master is as unfree as the slave, since the former is totally dependent on the latter. As the state exploits the village, taking its produce, sending its sons to die in distant wars, the government becomes malformed and unnatural.

Any Satanic or Nietzschean inversion of values destroys all participants. The state becomes a distorted, Infernal parody of rule when it exploits others for its own wealth and power. The wealthy capitalists who use the state for their own purpose too become less than human as they dehumanize others. As always, all roads lead to Hobbes.

The example of Christ speaks much to social theory, but is rarely drawn out by those professing to follow him. While it is true that Christ's was not primarily a moral view—that had long since been done by the prophets and St. John the Baptist—there were elements of his life that were moral by example. First of all, Christ had no home. Almost to deliberately scandalize the proper Romans and Jews, he was a homeless man with no job. This is not the stuff that heroes are made from.

Bourgeois society today would find Christ repulsive as much as the respectable Jews and Romans did. Second, Christ did not generally deal with the nobles of his time. He lived and worked among the common folk. Again, this is outside the mainstream of both Jewish and Roman culture and almost seems designed to irritate them, and to make himself as odious as possible to the establishment. Finally, Christ clearly did not like intellectuals, and mocked the pretensions of that class largely because, as the prophets said of their “temple prophet” rivals, they were were rationalizing error.

For Kulish, these are very significant moral facts about Christ's life. His was a constant condemnation of “respectable” life. Christ went out of his way to condemn those who worry about money and their careers, demanding that his followers focus on truth, that is Himself, above all else. If there is one thing about Jesus that all agree on, it's that he was either indifferent or hostile to class distinctions. Trying to force class society into a Christian mode is impossible. Making Christianity into a respectable or mainline religion is a contradiction.

It is in the city where class distinctions are sharpest, clearest, the most extreme and the

most institutionalized. While rural life has its economic classes, they never reach the absurd levels of urban life, where, quite literally, the rich flaunt their obscene wealth next to the poor, and hide behind slogans of individualism whenever threatened. Urban life is destitute of all good. Good is accidental to its nature. City life dehumanizes men. Even worse, it takes women and forces them into a form of prostitution: since people are alienated from the land, sex takes on a life of its own. It is a commodity, it is a weapon.

The greatest evil is centralization. In formal terms, it is the continued removal and alienation of the rulers from the ruled; the city center from the hinterland upon which it depends. There is no formal or material distinction between private and “public” forms of power. A instinctual anarchist, Kulish wanted power to be used only when there is no other possible option. It should be as radically decentralized and un-institutionalized as humanly possible. Only when the immediate threat of violent disorder and criminality became too extreme could coercion be justified.

The primary aspect in Kulish's social views is that the people, the nation, are part of the divine expression. As Spinoza spoke of modes attaching to the two attributes, so peoples represent these modes in two respects: the first attribute of their physical life and the second, that of thought and spirit. There is no real separation between God and the nation just as there is none in Spinoza's metaphysics. In an excellent article by Vyacheslav Artyukh, he writes:

The “nation” [as folk – MRJ] is defined as a collection of persons related to each other through communication with the vivifying force of nature and it is this relationship to nature that makes them a whole – the people. Therefore, only the individual through the nation can have this connection with the ultimate reality.

The unit, the folk, is also crafted by the landscape and topography. Nature is rooted in the nature of the people and vice versa. The concept of “landscape” here includes not only the natural environment such as deserts, rivers or soils, but also the sown fields and planted gardens. Those structures and buildings surrounding the sown fields are also part of nature and not radically separated from the topography as such. A crime against the nation is a crime against both nature and God. Landscape also refers to the historical “topography” of a people. Great battles, places, legendary deeds of national heroes, victories and defeats are also part of the “landscape.”

Urban life is the ultimate crime of this type. In works such as “Letters from the Village” (1861), he sees urban life as distorting the soul. Man is made for paradise, but the second best is that of the village. Mercantilism, prostitution and arrogance is the result of this distortion. Money is the abstraction that the city generates. It is the opposite of the integrity and simplicity of agrarian life. Jews, Germans and Russians all gather together in Ukrainian cities because it is the chaos of ethnic groups that serve the interests of the powerful.

Kievan Rus is the archetype for his “Golden Age.” This was interrupted by the “Tartars,” symbols of lower, bestial instincts. It did not take long for the “Tartar” idea, the nomad who can only take from others, to be applied to the Cossacks. Among Ukrainian nationalists, Kulish is one of the few to reject the importance of the Cossacks – he sees them as negative.

“Each of us is aware of his own individuality as subordinate to myriad influences, and therefore, history is not concerned with persons. For each figure of importance is made so by those numberless persons who sought his leadership.” The past determines the future. The

example of the past provides an unconscious template that determines future action. The nature of this continuity suggests that the future and past are closely linked and can be predicted.

Exploring the relationship among urban dwellers, Kulish concluded that buying and selling destroy moral traditions, spiritual life and deprive people of their native language. Since profit comes from charging more for something than what its worth, it is manipulative by definition. It begins to see customers as alien competitors rather than brothers.

The farmer represents that which is immutable. The agrarian was there “a thousand years before us” and will remain rooted in truth. The farmer lives in a closer relationship with God. The agrarian life rejects the constant drive for luxuries that typifies the city.

Kulish sees social and economic categories in symbolic terms. The farmer clears the land of its useless material and retains only that which is good for growing. He purifies and changes that which is inedible for that which nourishes the society.

The farmer also preserves the language. “Great is the power of a simple folk song while the secret of that power is that it derives from the heart not the human mind. The word comes from the heart. The songs of joy and sorrow, the starry sky, beloved of groves and green meadows and all the rest.” This is the origin of language, not logic. It is experience. The “simplicity of natural language purifies the heart.” Artificial language comes from the impersonal and formal life of the city. The city is where the “rich man claims the substance of the poor.”

Kulish's Russophilism and rejection of the Cossacks as a progressive force makes him one of the more controversial Ukrainian nationalists. Primarily, his argument against the Cossacks was that they soon collaborated with Ukraine's oppressors when convenient. They became an establishment with all the hidden vices that institutionalization implies. It was the haidimaks that impressed him the most.

To sum up Kulish is to say that the removal of the family from the land is identical with deracination. His literary war was one against individualism, liberalism, parasitism, institutions and establishments. He was also committed to the creation of a national elite class unfettered by foreign contamination, but Khmelnytsky destroyed this and replaced it with a pseudo-elite in the Cossack officer corps. He saw this as ignorance and rapaciousness, not progress.

The agrarian idea for Kulish is one where the energies of matter synthesize with that of spirit. This is what energizes poets like Shevchenko. It is not entirely alien to the later theory of the “passionary” developed by Lev Gumilev: it is the critical mass of energy that creates a people and sustains them. What is this “energy?” It is a “catch-all” term to deal with the largely unquantifiable mass of previous choices, institutions and lives that have shaped the present national and regional situation. The material world is that of the economy, topography, resources and soils. This itself produces an overall gestalt that cannot be easily changed. Japan's lack of resources is highly significant for its success while Nigeria's abundance of them causes one to pause.

In his *Notes on Southern Rus'* (1856) Kulish writes:

The history of our ancestors inevitably affects our present day life; the deeds of our ancestors, their identity, important or not, shameful or glorious – these irreversibly will dominate the fate of our children and grandchildren, like the mysterious and inevitable symbol. . . The “givens” of our life are not freely

chosen. They are constraints omnipresent and exert an extreme influence on choice; the development of the national idea will certainly have implications as to modern problems (NSR, 2, 183).

Freedom alters the Darwinian condition. Unconscious and unfree matter such as plant and animal life are doomed to live and die according to the edge that strength provides. Human beings, focusing on ideals, can tip the scales regardless of the material situation on opposing sides. What is often sloppily called “pantheism” is the simple notion that there is a single law, the Form of the Good, that manifests differently in different media.

One aspect of this is continuity of historic tradition. There can be no civic life, obviously, without a strong level of agreement among elites on basic and fundamental issues. Myths, folklore, language, folk rites – in addition to legal codes and royal decrees – are guides to the foundations of this accord.

That of the Spirit comprises God, the angels, divine energies (or God's action on earth), culture, literature and all that derives from free choice rather than the brute givens of the material world. The “energies” are that which derive from their interplay and the experience of their constant interaction that is almost always intuited rather than analyzed or understood.

The Golden Age for Kulish is not the Cossack host, but the Russia of Monomakh. The “Tartars” interrupted this, but the term is used symbolically. They are “nomads” in that they do not want to work for a living. He sees the Tartar and Cossack as the same symbolic object: a parasite.

The agrarian idea in Kulish is based on Ukraine as an agricultural society divorced from the corruption of modernity. The living language is rooted in this life, making communication with the cities almost impossible. Harmony and concord of man with nature under a single natural law or Platonic form is the foundational notion. The agrarian mind synthesizes these intuited realities in the concept of the “heart.” The national experience is not primarily an intellectual entity but one that is too large and multifaceted to be grasped using abstract logic.

The heart is holistic in that it can understand everything, see everything and feel everything. Thus, a person in Kulish is a symbol of two significant contrasts deep personality in all its complexity and duality of life. Like in Skovoroda, the “heart” and the “inner man” are the same. When the external mask is taken as reality and the “external” world of appearance is mistaken for the real, misfortune and destruction arise. The symbol of the village is complex: it is the spiritual center; it is the most comprehensive manifestation of substance. The temple is less comprehensive, but it is an essential part of the village, the mir.

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