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# An Attempt in Cooperative Thought

— The Effects of Owenism on Edward Carpenter —

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エドワード・カーペンターにおける協同思想の試み

— オーエニズムの影響をめぐる —

稲田敦子

エドワード・カーペンターは、転換期にあるイギリス社会において、彼独自の疎外意識から思想形成をはじめた。その思想形成過程において見られる協同思想は、コミュニティの実験的制度としての基盤から、人間存在の道徳的・精神的基礎としての協同へと推移した。彼は、構造転換を余儀なくされ、肥大化していく社会における人間の現実的存在の希薄化が進行することに対して、人間相互にある本源的協同性の新たな再生をみすえ、それを現実化しようと試みた。本稿では、協同的關係を対自然との「調和」の場において成立させようとする試みの試行過程におけるオーエニズムの影響を探るとともに、カーペンター独自の「内的自然」との「調和」をめぐる志向を検討する。

The year 1879 marked “the beginning, the dawn of a new life for Edward Carpenter.”<sup>(1)</sup> This was the time in which his thinking changed from the community experimental system to the cooperative as the moral and psychological basis of human existence. That began from a growing realization of the tragedy of the societal and individual isolation of mid-Victorian England and in the criticism of contemporary civilization that would later unfold. He worked to restore harmony through two movements: one toward community in society and the ether toward internal 'nature'. “The truth is that affairs of this kind — like all the great issues of human life, Love, Politics, Religion, and so forth, do not, at their best, admit of final dispatch in definite views and phrases.”<sup>(2)</sup> This paper examines his dual aspects of the cooperative as ethical basis and the effect that Robert Owen had on Carpenter.

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**Key words;** Community, Cooperative Thought, Edward Carpenter, Internal Nature, Owenism

I

Viewed from the perspectives of European literary and artistic thought, the mid-18th century can be seen to be an era of gradual shift from the Age of Reason — which sought esthetics in a harmony and equilibrium that paid respect to classical forms — to an Age of Passion, that adopted daring methods of thought and unbridled freedom of expression, the demonstration of individual passion, an age which gave birth to romanticism. The period was not a denial of harmony, but the grouping for a new harmony. It was a criticism of the rationalism of the ancient regime, at certain times a confusion and a worrying over the arrival of a new era, and at others, as expressed in the arts, one of fresh expectation and surprised, the playing of a more important and direct role. Ruskin and others expanded that into an era of social awareness.

Henry Salt pointed out that Carpenter placed man and humanity in the centre of the universe as 'the sole clue to the unravelling of the labyrinthine secret of life.'<sup>(3)</sup> Carpenter's soaring spirit and passion was moved by the sensitivities of the times, the driving pulsation of passion within Romanticism, which contained a certain commonalty. For example, contained within his method of awareness was a going beyond the world of phenomenon to a direct absolute view of the experience of the self in which resided the possibility of stepping into the world of the numinous. Although he was positioned as a 'prophet', such positioning is not unrelated to that method of awareness. These were times of upheaval, of groping for a new order, with an awareness of danger, but, simultaneously, they were times of hope, with the expectation of a realization, or a dawning of a new era.

The growth of new life modes and urban forms through rapid increases in productivity and dramatic progress in science and technology created the large mechanized factory, but it also produced a new sensitivity in people. The general development of transportation networks, the building of roads and highways, and the inception of journalism, promoted the expansion of intellectual and inter-regional exchange between people. Artists no longer had to depend on the favors of classes with special prerogatives — the court and nobility — they could now depend on the newly forming culture of the ordinary citizen, and, with the development of journalism, and arena was being provided for artistic and intellectual individuality. Development of navigation techniques also stimulated the formation of new sensitivities and currents in thought. Although ships did not especially increase in size at this time, improvements in shipping safety increased the volume of ocean transport. As intercontinental exchange became more active,

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many Europeans found the opportunity to directly, or indirectly, experience contact with the non-European world. A great fascination with new and strange customs and cultures, and with the scenes of exotic lands, helped to open their eyes to new worlds. This expanding of the external world, development of journalism and respect for the individual deepened interest in human conscience, promoted expansion of the internal world, and provided an opportunity to expand the world of dream and illusion.

This age of hope and of crisis in flux is that much more strongly reflected, not just in the area of thought, but in the actions, of Carpenter trapped as it was in the fetters of narrow tradition and set foot on a new continent in his search for a land of experiment. In the new world, he felt a freshness of the unknown that could never have been experienced in Europe and, it is not hard to imagine, he partook directly in the new intellectual climate and moved toward freer thought and bolder methods.

## II

Owen purchased the village of Harmony, Indiana, from the German Lutheran Rappites and found the experimental community of New Harmony, in April 1825, in an attempt to build a community that was hoped to be the model for, and the first step in social reform. At the same time, the social movement which Owen took the initiative in building was the first in which a broad spectrum of the laboring masses took part. That doesn't mean the masses were uninvolved in movements prior to that time. One example was the mill in New Lanark, Scotland, which Owen converted into a model industrial town in 1800, and where he had many opportunities to work and carefully observe the laborers and their families. From the perspective of participation, Owen appealed directly to the laboring masses through lectures and classes held at the Character Formation Academy, the school for educating the workers that was part of operational activities, and they became passively participants as objects of education and enlightenment.

It was a social movement that became possible, therefore by betraying its many followers, the masses, even though their hearts were captured by Owen's philosophy and they held on to vague expectations, empathy or endorsement. While the aspect of relations between leader and follower in the New Harmony experiment is significant and their motives cannot definitely be gleaned from the perspectives of intellectual history, much more attention has been given to the experiment's success or failure. As pointed out, the concept and form of community as cooperative society stands on a straight line extended out from the program of labor force management at

the New Lanark mills, and arises out of the concept of unifying educational facilities with the mill as a place of work, and the home as a place for reproducing the labor force. The reason the mills took a pastoral form is not because of a nostalgic longing for rural cooperative, but because the most important task was aiding a work force unemployed in the serious depression after the Napoleonic wars between Britain and France and bringing them into a self-sufficient and independent structure in which the necessities of life, food most importantly of all, could be self-supplied, thus absorbing the unemployed into an aid facility unified with the farm-village community. This was not a concept arising out of a denial of private property, but out of an amelioration of unemployment, it was a structure that unavoidably reproduced capitalism by housing workers where they worked and absorbing discontent to avoid the situation feared most at that time, and English version of French Revolution. Thus, aid to the unemployed aided the mechanism of capitalistic reproduction, which was directly confronting the crisis of depression. The rise of Owen's idea of pastoral community was not out of reflective nostalgia but out of remote perspectives of managerial rationalism, and not without a substitution of, or dramatic leap from the basic thinking of the New Social View.

In his idea of 'co-operation' Owen aspired to achieving harmony among people every where. It was an alternate principle for regulating production and consumption. 'Socialism' was another name for this 'co-operation' which was proposed as the principle of harmony as well as the formative principle of society. For him, 'co-operation' was just different names for the same thing: the harmony or unity of mankind. This idea had a great effect on Carpenter, and in 1879, he began a new life in Bradway a few miles south of Sheffield. This land belonged to the St George's Guild, which was founded by Ruskin in 1875 so as to put in to practice the leading principle of his own: 'there is no wealth but life' and which had something of the knightly-monastic order in its organisation. When Ruskin authorised the Guild to purchase a farm of about thirteen acres at Totley near Sheffield in March 1876, he did so at the request of a group of 'Mutual Helpers' in Sheffield. Prominent among them were William Harrison Riley, former editor of the *International Herald*, the organ of the British section of the International Working Men's Association, and founder of the Mutual Help Association, who had spent some time in America, and Joseph Sharpe, an old Chartist, a harpist by occupation, who was later to be seen working, in red scarf and old great coat, in a corner of one of Carpenter's own fields. Their original idea was that while continuing their various activities in and around Sheffield they would give their spare time to communal work at the farm, would share its produce in some rational way, and possibly at some future date would start a school there, along Owenite lines.<sup>(4)</sup>

Fearnehough and Fox represented 'a life close to Nature', and Carpenter now decided to live among them. Accordingly a plan was worked out by which Fearnehough moved to another cottage at Totlely and Carpenter joined him. From this time on, the life he led there was 'so native, so unrestrained' and seemed to liberate 'the pent-up emotionality of years'. In pursuit of these aims he hit upon the ideas of community, democracy, and simplicity by throwing Whitman, Ruskin and Owen in the melting pot of his own 'co-operation'. *Toward Democracy*, his major work, has been aptly described as 'a book which seeks less to establish a point of view than to find personal contacts.'<sup>(5)</sup> The kernel of such contacts was what he called 'the common life' in each man, the demos, or 'cosmic' consciousness. Thus his hymn to democracy not only extolled its egalitarian basis but its instinctive and spontaneous features.

### III

Carpenter was not reticent about his philosophy or about the image of human nature derived from it. Quite explicitly Carpenter refused to separate the human race from the rest of nature. Rather the whole universe was an expression of a purposive mystical entity. Humanity's role in this scheme was both prodigal son and saviour inside nature and yet at the same time capable of viewing it from the outside, human experience was to be the agency through which the connectedness of things was to be celebrated and the shattered wholeness of the cosmos to be reintegrated. Human experience was a microcosm of the deep reality of things:

. . . there is in Man a Creative Thought-source continually in operation, which is shaping and giving form not only to his body, but largely to the world in which he lives. In fact, the houses, the gardens, the streets among which we live, the clothes we wear, the books we read, have been produced from this source.<sup>(6)</sup>

Nature's unity would then stem from a common origin and the myriad forms of life could be seen as a scale of being along which the creative will have expressed itself. This view gave equal dignity and status to all the manifestations of creation. Our experience of the world was not really an encounter with the Other; instead it was an epiphany between one manifestation of the Great Self and another. There was no form of life too humble to be an expression of the cosmic purpose: "Every oyster has its fads and fancies."<sup>(7)</sup>

But if every individual had a value, it was not as isolated and lonely atoms that possessed this worth. Carpenter recorded the teaching of his own gnani (spiritual teacher) with enthusiasm: one should not speak of helping other, for although the practice was praise-worthy, this form of

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speech encouraged the delusion that "you and they were twain."<sup>(8)</sup> Nor were the elements and processes of inorganic matter separate either. In diversity there was also unity.

His idea of spiritual democracy, which was at the basis of his ethical socialism, was firmly rooted in the Western concept of man's evolution after his legendary fall. He interpreted the fall as a loss of 'unity' in primitive man who had lived in harmony with himself and nature. Through the development of self-knowledge on the one hand, and through the influence of property and government on the other—the latter completing his alienation 'from nature', 'from his true Self', and 'from his fellows'—man descends into hell and sound 'the depths of alienation from his own divine spirit', and at last turns towards the 'unity' he has lost.

These were strange views to hold in the face of the assumption of isolated individualism that characterised common place Victorian thinking about the person and the nature of nature. Carpenter emerged from his awareness of the miseries of alienation both personal and social in the respectable world of Victorian England. One of the Victorian orthodoxies was an optimistic belief in science and progress, and Carpenter revolted against inhumanities involved in this almost blind faith in man's mastery over nature. Carpenter's 'whole-hearted' revolt against the Victorian orthodoxies was 'expressed in an individualistic form'.<sup>(9)</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurate to call his revolt personal than individualistic. It originated from his sense of alienation, and took the form of an effort to conquer his own isolation and self-consciousness and to restore health and unity to his personality.<sup>(10)</sup>

## IV

In 1889, the Fellowship of the New Life or the New Fellowship was renewed with the publication of its monthly organ *Seed-time*. It desired "to emphasize the ethical factor in social evolution and aimed at a reform of the ideals of individuals." It promoted the founding of new schools and educational communities, and a project was mooted to start one within easy reach of Millthorpe. Dr Cecil Reddie, and educationalist, and Bob Muirhead were among its sponsors, and the school was opened in a mansion house called abbotsholme — shortened from its original name 'Abbot's Clownholme'— on the banks of the Dove near Rochester in Staffordshire, actually on the edge of the Derbyshire Moor.

To the members of the New Fellowship and the humanitarians Carpenter remained the foremost advocate of the return to nature, "a gospel of salvation by sandals and sunbaths", and these remained the symbols of what he called "a return to the more primitive, indispensable, and uni-

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versal part of oneself.”<sup>(11)</sup>

There were corresponding changes in consciousness. Isolation and alienation arose with competitive individualism; industrialisation and an urban way of life separated us from an authentic contact with nature; modern man's disintegrated mentality meant that he was no longer at home in the world. Through its over-valuation of rationality, modern “brain-cultured” humanity was left “face to face with a dead and senseless world.”<sup>(12)</sup>

The last stage was of course the Democracy towards which the long and often revised eponymous poem pointed. Not only was it the “Celestial City of equals and lovers,” it was also the end and the aim of history, the terminus that was the destiny of the universe. Carpenter's views of the cosmos as an integrated and organic unity striving teleologically towards an as-yet undiscovered end state hardly fitted with the assumptions of Victorian and Edwardian science. A confident if unreflective empiricism had become a powerful model through its success in biology and physics:

It must be remembered that this was the very flood-tide of materialism, agnosticism — the mechanical theory of the Universe, the reduction of spiritual facts to physiological phenomena.<sup>(13)</sup>

This paradigm was not unduly troubled by its unconsidered auspices and assumptions, for it could rely on a vulgar ability to produce an increasing amount of accurate knowledge. Nevertheless, there existed rules which the science game had to observe if it were to be played at all. Perhaps his most basic difference is found in the construction of the way in which human beings confronted the rest of creation. In reality, we were not observing and studying the Other: rather we were one part of an immensely complex system that was interacting with another part of that same system. There was an underlying unity between knower and known, seeming subject and seeming object, a “countless interchange of communication between countless selves; or, if these selves are really identical, and the one Ego underlies all thought and knowledge, then the Subject and Object are the same, and the World, the whole Creation, is Self-revelment.”<sup>(14)</sup> We were sharers in the process where the universe revealed itself to itself through human enquiry.

Carpenter's epistemology reinforced these metaphysics. Things did not, contrary to the views of the empiricist, constitute a simple reality that was passively registered by the human mind. On the contrary, the world was deeply interfused with our knowing of it. The boundaries between the knower and the Known were not clear cut and the statements we could make about the properties of objects were inextricably linked with the human senses and with human social pur-



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poses. It followed that a view of the universe as dead or senseless matter "may at once be dismissed, not only as having no meaning, but as being incapable of having meaning to us".<sup>(15)</sup> We made our picture of the world throughout senses and our understanding: modern science clided that active perceptual process until it came to seem that the picture was an account of the properties of the world itself:

But it is just here that the fallacy of the ordinary scientific procedure comes in; for, forgetting that these common phenomena are mere abstractions from the real phenomena, we credit them with a real existence, and regard the actual phenomena as secondary results, "effects" or what-not of these "causes."<sup>(16)</sup>

As science had become more abstract, it had lost sight of the constitution of its subject matter and hypostasised and reified its statements until they took on a unwarranted life of their own.

To Carpenter, science was concerned with the study of appearances, not with the reality that lay behind them. We looked at the Platonic shadows and not at the substances. Someone examining an object would not do so from distance that obliterated all surface detail and colouration, leaving only an outline shape. And yet these were the methods of science, "convenient modes of generalization, which by no means express actual facts."<sup>(17)</sup> In the light of this criticism, science's claim to be discovering laws with a temporal and universal validity was subverted. Systems and regularities depended on our particular standpoint in time and space. Things could look thus from here, but very different from somewhere else. Spinoza too had thought that the universe would be different for minds and senses other than our own.

Time presented an even more crushing objection to the arrogance of contemporary science. By comparison with the millenia before the emergence of modern science, today's knowledge was based on the observation of at best a few centuries. It could only assume that the world had conducted itself through its long unobserved history in the way that it did now:

What would you think of an intelligent foreigner who, coming to England to study the game of cricket, remained on the cricket field for a quarter of a minute ... and ... went away and wrote a volume on the laws of the game?<sup>(18)</sup>

The edifices of modern science were in fact rather flimsy confections. We should have more humility and recognise that our knowledge was provisional and temporary and, most importantly, profoundly shaped by the attitudes and assumptions of the society and times to which the scientist belonged. With an argument that would remind the modern reader of Kuhn, Carpenter showed how certain ideas in the history of science were shaped by the influence of the pre-scientific, the social and cultural.<sup>(19)</sup> Tycho Brahe's epicycles, for example, were heroic attempts to

accommodate planetary movement to a geocentric universe; more bizarrely, one Conrad Gessner “began classifying animals according to the number of their horns.” a victims of his culture’s assumptions about what counted as an appropriate unit of study.<sup>(20)</sup> And if the commonsense of everyday life permeated natural science, how much further had it penetrated the self-confident but unquestioning assumptions of Political Economy?

These arguments formed a powerful critique of contemporary science and, though Carpenter argued his position forcefully, he also implied that it was not unexpected for knowledge to take this shape in our own times. The self-estranged and deracinated consciousness of Western civilisation could hardly produce anything other: “The various theories and views of nature which we hold are merely the fugitive envelopes of the successive stages of human growth — each set of theories and views belonging organically to the emotional stage which has been reached . . .<sup>(21)</sup> But the future held better things, forms of knowledge that were not alienated and unduly dependent on rationality alone.

This confidence was based on Carpenter’s view of evolution which, in deference to Whitman, he termed “exfoliation.” It was a theory that implied progress and perfectibility and which emphasised the continuities among the superficially different manifestations of creation.

Man is organic with the rest of creation; and Carpenter cannot look into the eyes of the cattle in the field without seeing the human soul gazing out therefrom.<sup>(22)</sup>

Carpenter’s metaphor for exfoliation was human creativity: our actions emerged from vague and half-articulated desires which gradually hardened into motives and plans. Nature was directional in the same way. What we saw superficially was the world of appearances, that is the effects of the intentions of nature; hidden to us, but nonetheless real, were the intentions and thoughts of the animating spirit of the universe, the Great Self.<sup>(23)</sup> This was obstinately lodged in the essence of every organic being.

In this view of the evolution of society, his basic argument was Lamarckian: like plants, society would grow by throwing off its husks in its search for the secret of its existence. Social progress would take the form of a continual fight against law or the tendency of institutions to stereotype themselves. The husk to be thrown off in a modern society was the capitalist class with its laws and institutions, and the change would begin with a new growth of moral sense within the individual, “a new sentiment of humanity”.<sup>(24)</sup> The new ideal of dignity of person and labor was something that would transcend and surpass even socialist laws and institutions. With this view of exfoliation, Carpenter eschewed all sectarian sentiments and associations. He distrusted all the tendencies to regard particular reforms as infallible and final, and he would help

all the causes that appeared to him to expedite the progress of the new ideal.

This was the line of thought that informed Carpenter's idea of a rational and humane science, for it must be stressed that in attacking the unreflective verities of empiricism he took care to avoid implying that the project of understanding the world was itself flawed: "But while we think that this search of Science for uniformity is delusive, it is clear that the instinct which underlies all this movement, the instinct of Nature's unity is correct enough."<sup>(23)</sup> Carpenter was calling for a science which did not separate and atomise; it was a demand for a way of seeing nature as a unity of organic relationships which included its rational and self-conscious element. Science should make human enquiry and knowledge an element of the picture of the world that it generated. We were not spectators but participants. Rather like Schelling, Carpenter believed,

Only this pre-established harmony beteen nature within and without myself makes it possible not only to kunderstand a living nature, as well as I understand my own life; it makes possible the view of nature as it self visible spirit, and of spirit as invisible nature.<sup>(24)</sup>

Such an integrated view of the practice and subject matter of science demanded an adjustment in our view of the human faculties that made such a practice possible.

The awareness of crisis seen in Carpenter arises from a duality between social conditions in periods of transition and the danger of extreme imbalance and ultimate polarization between individual and social ethics under such conditions. Unlike the Fabians who came to believe in Social Darwinism and the survival of efficient societies and institutions, he turned to the exfoliation of evolution. He elucidated what the basis of life is, and experimented with the aim of actualizing a revolution in harmony and intimate communion with nature.

#### Notes

- (1) Edward Carpenter (1844–1929), exponent of the simple life and critic of contemporary civilisation, is a minor prophet of early British ethical socialist. Not belonging to any particular school or movement, he exercised a diffuse influence. Carpenter feigned to look upon himself as a man who stood alone, being far beyond his time, seeking for the realisation of the eternal dream of human love amidst all falsehood and superstition. "A new state" would rise, declared his Moses, rise nearer heaven, with pure laws, simple customes, and sweet lives." (E. Carpenter, *The Promised Land*, 1909, p. 116) The first full-length biography of E. Carpenter, based for the most part of the material in the Carpenter Collection at Sheffield was written by Chushichi Tsuzuki. (Owenism is based for The Study of Cooperative Thought by Naofumi Hizikata, 1993)
- (2) Edward Carpenter, *The Healing of Nations, and the Hidden Sources of their Strife*, London, 1915, p. 4.
- (3) Henry S. Salt, 'Edward Carpenter's Writings', *Pioneer*, Jan. 1890. Chushichi Tsuzuki, *Edward Carpenter 1844–1929, Prophet of Human Fellowship*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980, p. 110.
- (4) C. Tsuzuki, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

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- (5) Edward Lewis, *Edward Carpenter: An Exposition and an Appreciation*, London, 1915, p. 290.
- (6) E. Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 1904 pp. 24-5 (Christopher E. Shaw "Identified with the One: Edward Carpenter, Henry Salt and the Ethical Socialist Philosophy of Science", *Prose Studies*, 1990).
- (7) E. Carpenter, *Angel's Wing*, 1898, p. 127.
- (8) E. Carpenter, *From Adam's Peak to Elephants*, 1898, p. 177.
- (9) E. P. Thompson, *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary*, 1977 ed. p. 290.
- (10) C. Tsuzuki, op. cit., pp. 2-3.
- (11) *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.
- (12) E. Carpenter, *Civilisation: its Cause and Cure*, 1889, pp. 25-6.
- (13) Frederic W. H. Myers, Fragments of Inner Life, *The Society for Psychological Research*, 1916, p. 15 (See Christopher E. Shaw, Identified with the One)
- (14) E. Carpenter, *The Art of Creation*, 1904, p. 44.
- (15) *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- (16) *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- (17) C. E. Shaw, op. cit., pp. 36-37.
- (18) E. Carpenter, *Civilisation: its Cause and Cure*, p. 166.
- (19) Thomas S. Kuhn, "The Structure of Scientific Revolution" International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, 2-2, Chicago, U.P., 1970. (See C. E. Shaw, op. cit., pp. 38)
- (20) E. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 57.
- (21) *Ibid.*, p. 52.
- (22) E. Lewis, op. cit., p. 69.
- (23) E. Carpenter, op. cit., p. 133
- (24) C. Tsuzuki, op. cit., pp. 59.
- (25) E. Carpenter, *Angel's Wing*, pp. 127-8.
- (26) George G. Seidel, *Activity and Ground; Fichte, Schelling and Hegel*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag, 1976, p. 104.