

## Review

*Oughtopia*. By YOUNG SEEK CHOU. Seoul: Kyung Hee University Press, 1979. 213 pages.

*Oughtopia* by Young Seek Chou is a two-fold milestone in the history of contemporary thought. On the one hand it fuses the best in the intellectual tradition of East and West, and on the other it applies the integrated vision of man, nature, and society to the betterment of mankind. In times when most scholars are intent on restricting themselves to a narrow specialty within which they feel safe and reasonably protected from criticism and when few even conceive of the possibility of summing up great intellectual traditions, creating a new synthesis, and applying it to current affairs, it is not only refreshing but of vital significance that a distinguished Korean scholar presents such a work and sets for contemporary scholars an example of breadth of vision and deep personal courage.

Chou is the chancellor as well as founder of Kyung Hee University in Seoul and president of the International Association of University Presidents. Besides receiving numerous academic honors, he has pioneered wide-ranging social movements: the Better Living Movement in 1965, the Bright Society Movement in 1975, and the Global Common Society Movement in 1976. His latest book is dedicated to the creation of such a global society through the application of vision and will to human affairs.

He is among the great contemporary humanists who perceive the paradox of humanity riding the crest of the greatest wave of scientific and technical innovations in its history and at the same time plunging millions into intolerable conditions of life and threatening the survival of the species itself. He diagnoses the human condition as follows. First, man does not know himself. Second, he lives recklessly, without careful reflection. And third, he lives without any realization of why he lives and how he should live. The anomaly of the contemporary condition is signified by a higher valuation of machines than people, by egoism and possessive materialism, and by the loss of control over both technical and societal processes. Modern society lacks a genuine philosophy, human affection, and indeed the very quality of humaneness. It is badly in need of being reconstructed—a second Renaissance cannot be put off any longer. *Oughtopia* is a contribution toward achieving these ends.

“Oughtopia” is Chou’s term, joining “ought” with “topia” (place). It expresses a cornerstone of the author’s philosophy, namely, that a strong sense of “oughtness” (meaning the exercise of human purpose and will) is both possible and necessary to extricate mankind from its present predicament. He rejects the previous concept of utopia (being no-place) for idealism and irrealism. In Chou’s thinking the descriptive and the normative are strongly intertwined, without contradiction. He finds that the human condition is not one of separateness from nature on a transcendental plane. Neither is it one

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of being subjugated to nature and subjected to laws outside the control of the will and the intellect. Being part of nature but being endowed with will, man can act to control his destiny and change the course of events when necessary.

Giving thought to these matters is imperative, in Choue's view. Failure to do so would lead to a progressive dehumanization of world society and create conditions in which the risk of total and annihilating war becomes overwhelming. Human society therefore must be reconstructed consciously, and the way to this is through reflection and a creative integration of the best of Eastern and Western thought.

This is an enormous task. The author undertakes it with humility, yet with determination. His vision encompasses Confucianism, Taoism, the I Ching and other currents of Oriental thought as well as Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle and such Western thinkers as G. W. Leibnitz, Henry More, and Immanuel Kant. While he enriches his own conceptual synthesis with elements from all these traditions, he is critical of each and is not content to practice a historical exegesis. Conditions in our lifetime require a new mode of thinking, benefiting both from great intellectual traditions as well as from modern science. Choue does not hesitate to draw on the latest findings of astronomy, astrophysics, physics, chemistry, biology, and the theory of evolution. The result is a remarkable organic ontology, expressed in two basic theories: *Chon-Sunghwa* (combining *Chon* [totality], *Sung* [multiplication], and *Hwa* [harmony or combination]) and *Chui-Saengsong* (the principle of organic integration through the exercise of will). Whereas *Chon-Sunghwa* is the basic metaphysic (in the classical Greek sense of the term) explicating the first principles underlying manifest reality, *Chui-Saengsong* is the principle of evolution, the rationale behind the myriad patterns of events in nature as well as in society. Oughtopia is then the kind of society that man, armed with the insights of the basic metaphysic and the principles of change and evolution, can achieve purposefully.

In advocating his own synthesis Choue criticizes the I Ching for neglecting the primacy of the human will, materialism for reducing consciousness and the realm of the spirit to the sphere of matter, and idealism for neglecting the reality of the material realm. Oriental thought likewise leans toward denying the full reality of nonmental things and events. Science on the other hand is better equipped to explain what *is* than what *ought* to be. We must learn to give equal consideration to object and subject as well as to will (or conscious power). This is the task that Choue's theory sets out to fulfill.

*Chui-Saengsongism* is a rationalist, holistic, dialectic, and relational principle. It affirms that all things are governed ultimately by reason and principles; that the universe is an organic whole where all elements are composed of opposing and mutually transforming parts; that everything changes, either growing or perishing; that all things have both their own unique individuality and elements of universality; that all change is generated by the interactions of the constituents of the universe, which include both material and spiritual substances; that reality is infinite; and that truth may be found in the order exhibited in all things.

Reality and appearance, together with the dynamic principle of evolution (purposeful will in humans), make up the heart of *Chui-Saengsong*. There is a principle of reason in inorganic things, there is sensitivity in living things, there is sensation in animals, and there is spirit—sentiment as well as intellect—in human beings. In this triune relationship among subject, object

and human will, the last has the privileged role: It can control the others. Change is always the interaction of object and subject, but whereas in the case of inorganic nature it is controlled by the principle of reason (or order) inherent in the physical world, by reflective sensitivity in plants and by instinctive, low-grade sensation in animals, it is controlled by the conscious mind and will in human beings. *Chui-Saengsong* is thus a principle of integrative organicism, affirming the creation of life and higher levels of order and complexity through the interaction of objects and subjects under the guidance of the rationality inherent in the cosmos. In this respect Choue's work approaches Henri Bergson's *élan vital* and the somewhat more theologically oriented process metaphysics of Samuel Alexander and Alfred North Whitehead.

Choue goes further, however, than most Occidental process philosophers in applying the conclusions of his theory to the betterment of the human condition. He considers the first chapter in the history of mankind to have been the ancient and relatively unordered society, the second the spiritual society of the middle ages, and the third the modern materialistic society. In this oscillation between primitive order and spiritualism and materialism, the guiding force of the higher human principle of the will has been lacking. The next chapter in history therefore should be a kind of society in which all three elements are given their proper place but where the will dominates, making man the master and the moral agent in his surroundings.

The theory of *Chon-Sungwha* provides the detailed metaphysics of the theory of reality and change. Its detailed complexity is equal to, and in some respects even exceeds, the I Ching and cannot be given justice in the space of a review. Its general character is clear, however, even in the briefest overview. It is that of an organic process theory, with great emphasis on evolutionary change and on the holistic nature of the phenomena brought forth in the process of change. Every phenomenon is understood as a product of cyclic interactions between cause and effect. The process evolves according to immutable principles. The universe consists of the natural and the living realms. The natural realm consists in turn of the categories of time and space, while the living realm is made up of the categories of living beings and their environments. These are the basic categories of existence: a "cubic" approach which is explicitly contrasted with the two-dimensional, yin-yang approach espoused by the I Ching.

In terms of this metaphysic the operation of reason-sensitivity-will is expressed as the rational substance. More exactly it is the rational aspect of the universal substance; its other aspect is the physical. Physical substance then may account for the human body (and all other bodies and things), whereas the highest expression of the rational substance is the human mind or spirit. This theory of psychophysical parallelism throughout the range of natural phenomena is a statement remarkably similar to what I advanced as the theory of biperspectivism (in *Introduction to Systems Philosophy*, part 2). The fact that an Eastern scholar could reach this position through criticizing and evolving the I Ching, Confucianism, and Taoism and that a Western scholar could arrive at it principally through the study of modern systems theories and their applications in natural, human, and social sciences testifies to the intrinsic cogency of the viewpoint. These parallelisms are always remarkable and deserving of more detailed exploration.

Further parallels exist as well between Choue's work and systems philosophy. In Choue all things arise and evolve through five types of mutual interactions, described in terms of the arithmetic functions of plus, minus, multiplication, and division, with the addition of a special plus function. These operations refer to the processes affecting the four categories of things (time, space, living things, and their environment [or ecosphere]). In systems philosophy the integrated material-mental process universe evolves according to laws expressed in terms of irreducible order or wholeness, negative-feedback self-stabilization, positive-feedback self-organization, and progressive multilevel hierarchization. The origins of one theory in the I Ching and the origins of the other in thermodynamics and cybernetics are evident, but these historical perspectives should not prevent a functional and relational analysis whereby equivalences are established between descriptively divergent terms and concepts. Just as the *Chon-Sungwaha* insists on the concept of the rational substance in explaining change and the human condition, so systems philosophy introduces the universal principle of negentropic order and hierarchy building, coded on the human level by the introspective evidence of mind, including sensation, conceptualization, and purpose (or will). As *Chon-Sungwaha* aims to correct the deterministic bias of the I Ching, so systems philosophy (and general system theory as a whole) corrects the mechanistic, reflexive, self-control bias inherent in cybernetics and earlier system theories. Both seek to understand and account for the phenomenon of individual freedom through alternatives built into the human condition, together with the capability to choose among them in reference to internal factors, such as values, symbols, preferences, and moral and intellectual criteria. Only thus can there be real meaning to human and social morality. There can be no meaningful "ought" without a real "can." Freedom and necessity are not absolutes but are moderated by the dynamic interplay of complex self-determining systems equipped with internal norms and practical sensors and effectors. This same principle is affirmed by Choue in postulating the triune relationship among object, subject, and will and the effect of the rational substance on man's fate and environment.

The systematic application of *Chui-Saengsong* and *Chon-Sungwaha* to contemporary world affairs requires painstaking analysis and a separate volume in itself. Choue gives us a good start in his last chapter. He identifies the task, the main problems, and the ways we can go about resolving them. He perceives the evolutionary process on the societal level as moving us away from isolationism and individualism and closer to a collective social era which embraces the entire human population and all the states and nations. He indicates world population growth, the advent of mass society without appropriate new values, the uncontrolled use of science and technology, and the lack of human consciousness of the world as a whole as constituting the main problems of our age. These problems are amenable to amelioration through the exercise of human will in the creation of an organic world order: the Global Common Society. This society will be humancentric, viewing man as the highest value in virtue of his will, the highest expression of the universal principle of progressive change in our planetary ecosphere.

Choue suggests five tasks in the building of the new global society. First, a task of rehumanization, reversing the dehumanization of materialism in the modern era. Second, the creation of mutual trust among people and societies. Third, the elimination of irrationality and decadence and the reestablishment

of a morality based on the recognition of man's intrinsic freedom conferred by his superior will. Fourth, the control of science and technology to make them serve the human good rather than create an endless series of material goods and artificial demands for them. And, fifth, the task of building a new world order capable of uniting the people of this planet in a society created on the basis of universal human norms and values. The fulfillment of these tasks would signal the creation of oughtopia, a purposively created world order where mankind can reaffirm itself and become the master of his destiny.

Choue demonstrates in his book the possible convergence of Eastern and Western thought and their application to the building of a humane world society. He also shows how these efforts can, and indeed must, be grounded in basic conceptions concerning the nature of man, nature, and society. In *Oughtopia* he provides an example that other scholars in East and West would be well advised to follow. It is to be hoped that his ideas will gain currency among modern philosophers, scientists, and humanists concerned with the separation of Eastern and Western thought and the isolation of basic philosophies from social and political processes vital to the well-being of humanity.

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