ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN THE WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK

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ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN THE
WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas
August, 1968
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The student of American literature who is also an admirer of the work of John Steinbeck finds himself confronted with something of an anomaly which few have bothered to examine or explain and which the passage of time has not entirely mitigated. Accurate figures are not readily available, but of Steinbeck's twenty-six published volumes eight have been best sellers and all have gone into three or more printings. The Grapes of Wrath has generally been considered one of the most influential novels of the twentieth century and has been made into a memorable motion picture, as have a number of his works including Of Mice and Men, The Red Pony, The Forgotten Village, Tortilla Flat, The Pearl, The Wayward Bus, and East of Eden. To top it all, in 1962 Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for literature, an award not bestowed for mere popularity with the average reader. It is obvious at once that on the score of sheer popularity, Steinbeck completely outranks his

American contemporaries such as Faulkner and Hemingway\textsuperscript{2} and that he may well become (if he not already is) the most widely read of all the outstanding twentieth century American novelists.

On the other hand, the attention devoted to Steinbeck by critics and scholars has been relatively small; for "... Steinbeck has not received nearly as much attention by explicators of text, symbol, and structure as Faulkner and Hemingway have."\textsuperscript{3} Since 1940 Steinbeck has been the subject of only seventy-four literary articles, as compared to 252 on Faulkner and 190 on Hemingway.\textsuperscript{4} Eight books of literary criticism have considered his works, and only one of these — Peter Lisca's \textit{The Wide World of John Steinbeck} — may be considered a comprehensive study. The critical books on Faulkner total forty-six; on Hemingway, twenty-nine; and on Wolfe, nineteen. Even J. D. Salinger, who did not begin writing until after Steinbeck had published a dozen novels, has been the subject of twelve books of criticism.\textsuperscript{5} Lisca

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2}Hemingway has two best sellers — \textit{For Whom the Bell Tolls} and \textit{The Old Man and the Sea}. Faulkner has one — \textit{The Reivers}. \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{3}E.W. Tedlock, Jr., and C.V. Wicker, "Perspectives in Steinbeck Criticism," \textit{Steinbeck and His Critics}, edited by E.W. Tedlock, Jr., and C.V. Wicker (Albuquerque, 1957), p. XVI.
\item \textsuperscript{4}International Index to Periodical Literature, edited by Alice F. Muench and Bea Joseph (New York, 1940-1968).
\end{itemize}
points out and characterizes the antipathy of American critics:

When certain of Steinbeck's novels have been accounted good, the explanations offered for this phenomenon have ranged from the social attitude expressed in them to the fact that Steinbeck is a Californian. When some little aspect of good technique has been noted, it has been usually accompanied by the kind of surprised disbelief one might feel on finding the carcass of a leopard on Mount Kilimanjaro.6

Scholarly and critical neglect of Steinbeck since the thirties may be attributed to several factors: a rather obvious symbolism, which seldom needs explaining; a lack of identification with any recognized ideological system other than the socialistic flurry following the depression of the early thirties; a sometimes sentimental exaggeration and oversimplification in both plot and character; and perhaps above all a marked and stubborn, though not altogether consistent, anti-intellectualism—a characteristic which pervades much of Steinbeck's writing and which is basic to the other objections raised by his detractors.

This anti-intellectualism was first noted by Edmund Wilson in an essay published as a section of Boys in the Back Room (1941), a study designed to put aspiring young western novelists in their proper place. Critically speaking, since then Steinbeck has occupied the station where Wilson first placed him -- the back room. He belongs to no literary "cliques," such as the one Hemingway belonged to in Paris; neither has

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he been associated with any university, as Faulkner was when he taught at the University of Virginia. He seems to have cultivated few friends in literary circles, and his continuing feud with The Saturday Review indicates that he aspires to no prominent place in the intellectual community. He is conspicuously absent from The Paris Interviews, a two-volume collection of statements by outstanding contemporary writers such as Forster, Thurber, Wilder, Faulkner, Hemingway, Algren, Capote, Porter, Ellison, and Warren. In fact, Steinbeck is mentioned only once throughout the entire two volumes, even though the interviews took place after he had received the Nobel Prize for literature.

When it was announced that Steinbeck had been awarded the Nobel Prize, there was a general outcry in the literary circles. In an article headed "Misplaced Bounty," the writer agrees that the science awards represented the consensus of the scientific community, but "this cannot be said of the literature prize. Mr. Steinbeck's disarming doubts about his own merit are, perhaps, shared by many." And for the judges to have chosen Steinbeck over John Cowper Powys or Robert Frost "seems to suggest utter provincialism or critical insensitivity."  

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8 Ibid.
Even Steinbeck's admirers admit the anti-intellectual bias of his writing, and Freeman Champney regrets that this attitude may be responsible for some of Steinbeck's success as a novelist:

... almost alone among important contemporaries [Steinbeck] seems to have no hankering for the literary life or the isolationism of a typical intellectual. The people he writes about are primarily nonintellectuals and his acquaintance with such people and his intuitive feeling for what makes them tick are probably his greatest strength as a writer. He presumably classifies the typical professional intellectual along with the other middle-class "shitheels"9 as inferior and inadequate human beings.10

Such remarks, though well intended, do little to augment Steinbeck's reputation on university campuses or to clarify the nature of his contribution. It seems therefore appropriate at this juncture to take a closer look at Steinbeck's anti-intellectualism in its causes and manifestations.

First of all, it is necessary to consider the meaning and implications of the term intellectual or anti-intellectual. Richard Hofstadter, noted social historian who recently wrote a book on the subject, admits that anti-intellectualism "... does not yield very readily to definition, "11 but is

9 Scatological language borrowed by Champney from The Grapes of Wrath.

10 Freeman Champney, "John Steinbeck, Californian," Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 150.

more a complex of attitudes and seldom found in its pure form. The noun intellectual is defined in Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary as a person who is "guided by the intellect rather than by emotion or experience." Webster's Third International Dictionary adds: "a person claiming to belong to an intellectual elite or caste, given to empty theorizing or cerebration, and often inept in the solution of practical problems." Eric Hoffer also uses a somewhat pejorative tone in his definition of an intellectual: "a literate person who feels himself a member of the educated minority." Hoffer goes on to say, "It is not actual intellectual superiority which makes the intellectual but the feeling of belonging to an intellectual elite. Indeed, the less valid his claim to intellectual superiority the more typical will be the intellectual." The terms intellectual,

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12 Ibid.


14Webster's Third International Dictionary (Springfield, 1961).

15Eric Hoffer is a self-educated social historian-philosopher who until recently worked as a longshoreman on the San Francisco docks. At present, he teaches at the University of California at Berkeley. His books include The True Believer, The Passionate State of Mind, The Temper of Our Time, and The Ordeal of Change. Hoffer was recently appointed by the President to serve on the President's Board to study the causes of violence in the United States.


17Ibid.
intellectualism, and anti-intellectualism as regarded by Steinbeck and as used in this study will emphasize the more specialized meaning suggested by Hoffer and by Webster's Third International Dictionary.

In a more thoughtful discussion of intellectuality, Freeman Champney points out that the intellectual works from the general to the specific and is often so articulate that he cannot conceive of any reality he is unable to define in logical terms. He places a great emphasis on words, but his experience is sometimes too limited for him to make valid inferences and come to sound conclusions. The intellectual's specialized interests tend to isolate him from the masses of society, and he surrounds himself with a coterie of others like himself. He becomes suspect to the multitude, and as a result they do not accept his contributions.18

In treating anti-intellectualism as a definite strain in American thought and literature, Hofstadter points out that there is a type of anti-intellectualism, which he prefers to call "anti-rationalism," including particularly the philosophy of such writers and thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, William James, D. H. Lawrence, and Ernest Hemingway.19 Other social historians prefer to call it not anti-rationalism but rather "romantic" anti-intellectualism. White

18 Champney, p. 150.

19 Hofstadter, p. 8.
concludes that romantic anti-intellectualism is somewhat akin to transcendentalism in emphasizing "heart over head" as the avenue to truth and in glorifying the common people—the farmer, the "artisan" and the "red-blooded man." Steinbeck's fondness for the works and ideas of Whitman, Lawrence, Hemingway, and Emerson is well documented. These authors contributed to the development of an attitude which Steinbeck expressed later in his own works.

This study will, however, confine itself to the major expressions of anti-intellectualism in the works of Steinbeck with some attention to the possible underlying causes. His feeling for nature and his attitude toward education are important early formative influences. Steinbeck's study of biology and his association with Ed Ricketts are central to the more mature philosophical views which led to his fondness for writing about simple and even subnormal characters and which also inspired his satirical attacks upon some forms of

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21 Peter Lisca, "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography," Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 4.

22 It is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace literary influences that have already been noted but not thoroughly documented. In a recent article, Harland S. Nelson points to Emerson as the ultimate inspiration for the philosophical beliefs that underlie much of Steinbeck's work. Harland S. Nelson, "Steinbeck's Politics, Then and Now," The Antioch Review, XXVII (Spring, 1967), 124.
intellectual extremism. Finally, an interest in sociology and politics permeates Steinbeck's writing almost from beginning to end and has resulted in what most critics consider to be his best works. Although these causes and effects are woven haphazardly into the complete fabric of his output, there may be nevertheless discerned an overall pattern which, though it imparts a certain unity to his hostile attitude, both reveals and underscores the basic ambiguity that characterizes his literary reputation and is a part of the Steinbeck dilemma.
CHAPTER II

NATURE AND EDUCATION

Steinbeck's childhood in Salinas, California, was preeminently influential in the development of a kind of romantic anti-intellectualism. Peter Lisca attests that this early locale promoted "an intimate knowledge and love of nature which figures so prominently in his works."¹ Margaret Marshall also mentions that the early period of his life and the beautiful and pleasant surroundings contributed to the development of a love for the land and the simple people who worked it, which resulted in a tendency toward anti-intellectualism.² In East of Eden, Steinbeck recalls those happy years:

I remember my childhood names for grasses and secret flowers. I remember where a toad may live and what time the birds awaken in the summer—and what trees and seasons smelled like—how people looked and walked and smelled even.³

On returning to the place many years later, he stood on a mountain top and reminisced as he looked into the distance:


This solitary stone peak overlooks the whole of my childhood and youth, the great Salinas Valley stretching south for nearly a hundred miles, the town of Salinas where I was born now spreading like crab grass toward the foothills. Mount Toro, on the brother range to the west, was a rounded benign mountain, and Monterey Bay shore like a blue platter. I felt and smelled and heard the wind blow up from the long valley. It smelled of the brown hills of wild oats.\(^4\)

When Steinbeck grew up in Salinas, it was a small rural community of 4000 people,\(^5\) walled in on the east by the Gabilon Mountains and on the west by the Santa Lucias. The wide stretches of level ground in the valley were covered with a carpet of colorful grass and flowers—lupine, poppies, mustard, buttercups, hen and chickens, black-centered yellow violets, Indian paint brush, ferns, goldy-backs, harebells, and tiny lanterns.\(^6\) Amidst these colors and smells, young Steinbeck received his first education, and nature was his first teacher.

This fervent affection for nature Steinbeck never allowed to be supplanted by formal learning, although he read widely as a boy under the guidance of his mother, who was a schoolteacher. Peter Lisca and others who know Steinbeck and his family well seem certain that early influence of unusually beautiful and natural surroundings combined with an unusual


\(^5\) Ibid., p. 183.

interest in books stimulated by his mother are vitally important in the establishment of Steinbeck's literary career and attitudes.

It is, however, interesting to speculate whether Mrs. Steinbeck's profession as schoolteacher did not produce some anti-intellectual effects. For instance, characterizations of teachers in Steinbeck's works and his uncomplimentary remarks aimed at them indicate, at least on the surface, considerable hostility to a group of people supposedly dedicated to intellectual pursuits. Elizabeth McGregor, in To a God Unknown, is characterized as a droll, unassertive, and condescending woman who flaunts her knowledge (which is actually relatively limited) before her uneducated suitor, Joseph Wayne.  

In The Pastures of Heaven, teachers are similarly unsympathetic characters often lacking judgement and stability. Miss Martin, for example, is selfish, narrow-minded, and cruel in her treatment of one of her pupils. One of the most moving episodes in all of Steinbeck's works relates the story of Tularecito, a retarded but artistically gifted foundling, whose life is ruined by his thoughtless teacher. Although twelve years old, he has the mind of a six-year-old child; he has also the strength of a full-grown man and the

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7 Steinbeck, To a God Unknown (New York, 1933), p. 32.
talent of an artist. Forced to go to school with other children of his age, Tularecito is miserably bored with the normal routine until Miss Martin discovers his talent. She asks him to go to the board and draw a picture of some of the animals on his farm, and Tularecito astonishes her by supplying a whole menagerie of pictures, even staying after school to complete it. Miss Martin, however, is not really concerned with helping the boy make a life for himself through use of his talent. She herself wants to capitalize on it: "In her own mind she considered the glory that would come to her for discovering and fostering this genius." Tularecito, unaware of Miss Martin's selfish interests in him, is overjoyed that she has allowed him the chance, for once, to feel that he is a part of the class.

When Tularecito sees his pictures being erased for arithmetic drill, he becomes enraged and wrecks the school room and replaces the animals that had been erased. Miss Martin goes to his father and demands that he be flogged and locked up. After watching Tularecito's beating, she resigns her position rather than teach him any longer. Miss Morgan, the new schoolmarm, profits somewhat by the mistakes of her predecessor, but is shown to have poor judgement by sending

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9 Ibid., pp. 45-50.
Tularecito to dig in the ground for gnomes. After a series of absurd frustrations at school, Tularecito is committed to the asylum for the criminally insane.10

In these gratuitously unsympathetic characterizations of Miss Martin and Miss Morgan, Steinbeck seems to be showing a resentment toward teachers generally and toward public education unsuited to the artistic temperament. One feels from the vividness of this incident that Steinbeck has put much of himself into it. In America and Americans, he makes the snide remark that those who "escape into the . . . semipaternal cloisters of teaching . . . are considered to have failed in the pattern of American literature."11

Another formative influence on Steinbeck's attitude toward education may have been cultural in a more general sense. When he was growing up in California in the early nineteen hundreds, most fathers were skeptical of formal education and dissuaded their sons from seeking too much of it. The following statement by Steinbeck himself describes the general intellectual climate of the Salinas Valley when he was growing up there, and seems to indicate his critical displeasure at the intellectual poverty of his milieu:

10 Ibid., pp. 50-57.

There was a wall against learning. A man wanted his children to read, to figure, and that was enough. More might make them dissatisfied and flighty. And there are plenty of examples to prove that learning made a boy leave the farm to live in the city—to consider himself better than his father. Enough arithmetic to measure land and lumber and to keep accounts, enough writing to order goods and write to relatives, enough reading for newspapers, almanacs, and farm journals, enough music for religion and patriotic display—that was enough to help a boy and not to lead him astray. Learning was for doctors, lawyers, and teachers, a class set off and not considered related to other people.  

The father-son relationship to which Steinbeck refers here suggests that his own father may have occupied a dubious position as head of the Steinbeck household. As a simple miller, he may have held a resentment toward educational pursuits and passed it along to his son. From Steinbeck’s description of his mother in *East of Eden*—a true account of his early life—it is difficult not to visualize her as head of the household: "She was loving and firm with her family, three girls and me, trained us in housework, dishwashing, clothes washing, and manners. When angered she had a terrible eye which could blanch the skin off a bad child as easily as if he were a boiled almond."  

Steinbeck’s remarks also indicate that he harbored mixed feelings about being the son of a schoolteacher, since "her

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13 Ibid., p. 131.
children were presumed to have intellectual advantages both inherited and conditioned." He further intimates that he was not particularly pleased to have his mother teaching school because "the teacher had no private life. She was watched jealously for any weakness of character." He might also have subconsciously resented his mother's profession because of the time away from home that it demanded of her and the dangers involved in it. In *East of Eden* he mentions this latter disadvantage:

In her school there were pupils older and bigger than she was. It required great tact to be a schoolteacher. To keep order among the big un-disciplined boys without pistol and bullwhip was a difficult and dangerous business. In one school in the mountains, a teacher was raped by her pupils.

Rather strangely and unexpectedly for being the well read son of a schoolteacher, Steinbeck proved to be a quite ordinary student in high school. He was president of his class, but Lisca contends that this honor was a result of his athletic ability. At Stanford University he dabbled in literature and biology but left without taking a degree, after attending intermittently for five years. He was not

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a scholar, at least not in the traditional sense, but, in fact, his time at the University ... confirmed rather than weakened his sense of solidarity with working men and women (as opposed to artists, intellectuals, and the wealthy) whose labours, deprivations, and amusements he shared. After leaving Stanford he worked sporadically as ranch-hand, road-builder, and fruit-picker, and even helped build Madison Square Garden, after failing in New York as a reporter.

Another possible psychological reason for Steinbeck's rather cultivated anti-intellectualism is the nature of the life and work of the literary creative artist. As a writer, he may suffer from a stifled feeling caused by the complete immersion in an imaginary world—an immersion which could interfere with relaxation and the simple, ordinary pleasures. Steinbeck, for instance, has been afflicted with marital difficulties. His first marriage ended in divorce in 1942, and his second marriage likewise in 1948; although his literary output since 1950 has been light, his third marriage, as he relates in Travels With Charley, has been a happy one. Although he contends that writing, like sex,

22 Steinbeck, Travels With Charley, p. 20.
is fun, it could also be an unconscious cause for his resentment toward intellectual activity, because of its demands on his personal day-to-day living.

The fact remains, however, that he has devoted his life to a profession which demands a high level of intellectual capacity of those who intend to succeed in it. That he has succeeded indicates that what he has said in his works cuts across class lines and is relevant to intellectuals as well as nonintellectuals. This, then, is the Steinbeck dilemma. What many critics consider him, and what he ostensibly considers himself, is an anti-intellectual writer who has somehow achieved a lasting reputation in American literature but who, like many of the characters in his novels, is a misfit in the community—in this case, the literary community. Since critics do not quite know how to react to him—they seem to have preconceived notions about his work and when he surprises them, they consider him as having failed—they are prone to sweep him under the literary carpet.

The attitude responsible for this dilemma is as elusive as it is complex, but this much may be ascertained: As a result of his early contact with nature in the Salinas Valley, his familiarity with anti-rationalist ideas, his subliminal

\[^23\text{Steinbeck, "Rationale," Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 309.}\]
dislike for his mother's profession, and his ambivalence toward his life as a creative artist, Steinbeck has developed what seems to be a definite anti-intellectual bias.
Steinbeck's anti-intellectualism, springing from the indigenous western culture of his childhood, seems to have been augmented later by his biological studies and by his relationship with Edward Ricketts. An emphasis on biology is evident throughout the writing of Steinbeck, and his knowledge of the subject has led him to the only theories about life that he has ever expressed in a direct manner. Many critics have noted this bias; for it is paradoxical, in a sense, that study of any kind—even study of natural phenomena—should be associated with hostility to intellectual activity. Here again is the ambivalence so characteristic and so puzzling in Steinbeck and his works.

Edmund Wilson was the first to suggest that Steinbeck's penchant for biology and his refusal to set man apart from the animal have prevented his creation of any real human characters. Lisca, in his introduction to The Wide World of John Steinbeck, calls attention to two essays in particular—Frederick Bracher's "Steinbeck and the

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Biological View of Man" and Woodburn Ross's "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest"—because these studies "made clear that it was not only possible but profitable to discuss Steinbeck's biological view of man without succumbing to the old idea of his 'animalism.'" Bracher contends that Steinbeck does not equate men with animals, but rather "goes beyond animalism to a mystic reverence for 'life in all its forms.'" Bracher also suggests that many critics fail to grasp the real significance of Steinbeck's semi-scientific bias, which constitutes a "point of view, . . . a way of looking at things characteristic of a biologist" and which "comprises Steinbeck's typical attitude toward the characters in his novels and also the attitudes of some of the characters themselves . . . ." Steinbeck's basic attitude toward man, then, is biological, and there is evidence that his biological view is one of the underlying reasons for his apparent anti-intellectual bias.

At Stanford, Steinbeck did not try to earn a degree nor did he specialize in literary study, but instead deliberately cultivated an interest in biology which set the stage for


3 Ibid.


5 Ibid.
his relationship with Edward Ricketts. He met Ricketts in 1930 in Monterey, California, where Ricketts had established the Pacific Biological Laboratories. The friendship ultimately resulted in Steinbeck's buying a partnership in the enterprise and rescuing it from bankruptcy.

Ricketts had graduated from the University of Chicago and had intellectual qualifications of a high order himself, but his cultivatedly cynical and anti-social nature led him both to shun the intellectual community and to view the middle class college crowd with repugnance. He had spent his years in Monterey drinking, wenching, and collecting marine specimens, activities which made him immediately and romantically attractive to a young and rebellious non-conformist like Steinbeck. Many of Steinbeck's socio-biological opinions were borrowed from Ricketts' unpublished essays or shaped by association with him. These ideas appear in great detail in a book of non-fiction entitled The Log From the Sea of Cortez, written by Steinbeck in collaboration with Ricketts.6

The Log From the Sea of Cortez is a journal of a scientific expedition made in 1940 around the southern tip of Baja California into the Gulf of California. Like Darwin, almost a hundred years before on a more momentous but similar

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cruise, Steinbeck shaped his ideas concerning man's indebtedness to the animal kingdom. In this journal he sets forth, with repetitious abundance, his perception of the relationship between man and animals.

The locus for Steinbeck's philosophy is the tide pool, which he considers the microcosm—the simplest element in the universal spectrum. To Steinbeck, the unicellular animals which abound there are a means for the understanding of man and his place in the universe. "It is difficult when watching the little beasts," he says, "not to trace human parallels." In fact, says Steinbeck, "Sometimes the simpler organisms can give us a key to the more complex." In order for man to understand himself, Steinbeck declares, "Perhaps we will have to inspect mankind as a species not with our usual awe at how wonderful we are but with the cool and neutral attitude we reserve for all things save ourselves." Steinbeck further declares in all seriousness, with more cynicism than science, "We are no better than the animals, in fact in a lot of ways we aren't as good."

9 Steinbeck, America and Americans, p. 137.
10 Steinbeck, Sea of Cortez, p. 94.
In the same vein, he remarks that man is not so noble as he likes to think himself, but actually resembles some of the less appealing of the species of life:

Mankind seems more nearly related to the predators, possessive, acquisitive, fearful, and aggressive. He is omnivorous, can and will eat anything living or dead, two endowments shared by the cockroach and the common rat.11

Such ideas and observations have frequently led Steinbeck to compare the characters in his novels and stories with animals. In The Grapes of Wrath he inserts the symbolic episode of the slow-moving turtle determinedly making his way southwesterly, just as the Joads begin their trek to California, huddled around the ancient truck. In the same novel, Ma is worried that prison has made Tom mean and vicious as it did "Pretty Boy" Floyd: "They shot at him like a coyote, an' him a-snappin' an' a-snarlin', mean as a lobo."12 And in The Pearl when Kino is being hunted down after he found the pearl, Steinbeck describes him not as a man but as a stalked animal: "... some animal thing was moving in him so that he was cautious and wary and dangerous ... ."13

And when no hope is left and there is no place to hide, "Kino ran for the high place, as nearly all animals do when they are pursued."14 Steinbeck further describes Kino as "hissing

11Steinbeck, America and Americans, p. 137.
14Ibid., p. 99.
like a snake"¹⁵ and Juana as staring "with unfrightened eyes, like a sheep before the butcher,"¹⁶ and as peering "like an owl from the hole in the mountain."¹⁷ Finally, when trapped, Kino "was an animal now, for hiding, for attacking, and he lived only to preserve himself and his family."¹⁸

Pepe, in the short story "Flight," is also pursued into the mountains, and reverts to animalistic reactions as he pits his will to survive against his pursuers. When his path is blocked by a wildcat, the animal apparently senses a kinship with Pepe as another animal and disappears into the underbrush.¹⁹ After Pepe's horse is shot from under him, Pepe "worms" his way up the side of the mountain "with the instinctive care of an animal."²⁰ Near the end, he is described as moving "with the effort of a hurt beast" and as throwing back his head and whining like a dog.²¹

Perhaps the most notable instance of Steinbeck's incorporation of his "biological view of man" occurs in

¹⁵Ibid., p. 76. ¹⁶Ibid. ¹⁷Ibid., p. 110. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 80.


²⁰Ibid., pp. 62-63.

²¹Ibid., pp. 68-69.
another short story, "Johnny Bear." Johnny has the uncanny
talent of reproducing exact sounds and intonations without
knowing what he is saying. By eavesdropping on the towns-
people and reproducing what they say, he earns spots of
whiskey at the saloon from the busybodies interested in
scandal. Johnny Bear is more animal than human:

He looked like a great stupid smiling bear. His black
matted head bobbed forward and his long arms hung out
as though he should have been on all fours and was only
standing upright as a trick. His legs were short and
bowed, ending in strange, square feet . . . . He moved
forward . . . like some prowling night animal.22

When a fly lands on Johnny's head his "scalp [would] shiver
the way the skin of a horse shivers under flies."23 The
cruelty with which Johnny Bear is misused and the tragic
misunderstandings resulting from this misuse are Steinbeck's
comment on the way in which people refuse to acknowledge
their own animality and to recognize a basic dignity which
they have lost. The really hideous behavior of the "normal"
people in this story contrasts vividly with the amoral,
instinctive, sub-normal acts of Johnny Bear.

In another more belated and curious expression of this
sentiment, Ethan Hawley, in The Winter of Our Discontent,
is overcome by bestial desires while sitting with his dying

23 Ibid., p. 151.
brother-in-law:"... as I sat waiting by his bed ...
I wanted to kill him, to bite out his throat. My jaw
muscles tightened and I think my lips fleered back like a
wolf's at the kill." Doc Peele explains to Ethan that
the feeling is "maybe an old memory, ... a return to the
time of the pack when a sick or hurt member was a danger.
Some animals and most fish tear down and eat a weakened
brother." The general nature of this novel, however,
seems to point more to the true dignity and superiority of
man, for Ethan conquers not only his momentary aberration
but his well planned, amoral proposed course of action.

Steinbeck seems to feel also that man commits mayhem
and violence principally because of his animal heritage.
Somewhere, locked deep inside of every person, there is
the wild animal craving for the taste of blood, for cruel
punishment—even to the point of sexual involvement, as
in the short story "The Vigilante" in The Long Valley. After
taking part in the lynching of a Negro, Mike, a young
citizen of the town, admits to the bartender that the
excitement of the lynching made him "kind of tired, but kind
of satisfied, too, ... and kind of sleepy." His wife

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25 Ibid.
26 Steinbeck, "The Vigilante," The Long Valley, p. 140.
takes one look at him and accuses him of having been with a woman. Rushing to a mirror, Mike admits, "By God, she was right . . . . That's exactly how I do feel."²⁷

Steinbeck's biological studies led him to adopt an attitude which he called non-teleological. This systemless approach is the only semblance of a definite philosophy to be found anywhere in his works. He would deny, of course, that it is a philosophy, since by definition it is anti-philosophy, being similar in this respect to existentialism, which also emphasizes that existence precedes essence. Nevertheless, non-teleological thinking is directly connected with his anti-intellectualism and supplies the key to the interpretation of at least four of his novels and many of his stories.

This line of reasoning (or no-reasoning) sidesteps the usual cause-effect relationships of logical intellectuals, who seek to answer the question "why." Instead, non-teleological thinking purports, according to Steinbeck, to accept conditions as they are, asking not "why" but "what" and "how."²⁸ In Steinbeck's own words, "non-teleological ideas derive through 'is' thinking associated with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it. They imply depth, fundamentalism, and clarity -- seeing beyond

²⁷Ibid., p. 141.

²⁸Steinbeck, Sea of Cortez, p. 135.
traditional or personal projections."  

These ideas reflect the influence of Ricketts, and appear in detail in Chapter Fourteen of Sea of Cortez. These pages are devoted entirely to a discussion of non-teleological thinking, and represent a joint effort of the two, with Ricketts supplying the metaphysics and Steinbeck the prose.  

The theory of non-teleological thinking constitutes the underlying pattern of reality in several of Steinbeck's novels, including In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, The Wayward Bus, The Long Valley, and to a lesser degree, The Pearl. Antonia Seixas (Toni Ricketts) explains in her illuminating article on Steinbeck's method, that non-teleological thinking is not only a way of looking at things but an acceptance of reality, a disinclination to take sides. It is a completely objective viewpoint, a dispassionate and disinterested manner of observation and not very appealing to readers who treasure explanations. "To most men," wrote Steinbeck in Sea of Cortez, "the most hateful statement possible is 'a thing is because it is.'"  

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29 Ibid.
30 Bracher, p. 187.
31 Antonia Seixas, "John Steinbeck and the Non-Teleological Bus," Steinbeck and His Critics, p. 275.
32 Steinbeck, Sea of Cortez, p. 86.
such an abdication of curiosity.

To show the reasonableness of non-teleological thinking as opposed to the cause-effect reasoning, Steinbeck points once again to the animal world. He boldly states that just as animals often produce too many offspring for the supply of food, so can there also be at a given time too many workers and not enough jobs. During the Great Depression of the thirties, there were jobs for only seventy per cent of the labor force; nevertheless an appeal was made to the unemployed workers to "roll up their sleeves" and go to work, as if by this process, everyone would then be working. Since by simple mathematics, thirty per cent must be unemployed, these workers would only be displacing others who would then be without a job themselves. The same situation would still exist, except there would be a different list of names on the unemployed rolls.33 The social application of such a system seems nothing more than an enactment of Darwinism.

Perhaps non-teleological thinking is a kind of Darwinism, but Steinbeck contends that it is far from being a heartless philosophy. Making use of another biological analogy to show that his view is actually compassionate, he points to the tiny Tethys, or sea-hare:

33 Ibid., p. 132.
A California biologist estimated the number of eggs produced by a single animal during a single breeding season to be more than 478 million. And the adults sometimes occur by the hundreds! Obviously all these eggs cannot, must not, become reality, else the ocean would soon be occupied exclusively by sea-hares. There would be no kindness in that, even for the sea-hares themselves, for in a few generations they would over-flow the earth; there would be nothing for the rest of us to eat, and nothing for them unless they turned cannibal.\textsuperscript{34}

Since ninety-nine per cent of the eggs are destined to fall prey to predators whose life cycle is dependent on them, it would be folly, continued Steinbeck, for the parent sea-hare to admonish all its millions of eggs to work hard and grow up to be as big and strong as their father, knowing that perhaps only one or two out of a million may possibly hatch.\textsuperscript{35} To Steinbeck, any departure from the natural law of supply and demand and survival is cruel; yet sociologically speaking, meddling intellectuals of the thirties attempted to subvert natural social processes. Steinbeck thus falls, perhaps unwittingly, into the outmoded social Darwinism which some of his works like \textit{Grapes of Wrath} and \textit{In Dubious Battle} seem to attack.

Steinbeck further maintains that teleological thinking is both fearful and selfish:

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid., p. 134.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., pp. 133-134.
... many people are unwilling to chance the sometimes ruthless-appearing notions which may arise through non-teleological treatments. They fear even to use them in that they may be left dangling out in space, deprived of such emotional support as had been afforded by unthinking belief in . . . the institutions of religion [and] science; in the security of the home or the family; or in a comfortable bank account.36

He once described an incident in which he used the non-teleological approach in dealing with a lonely neighbor: A lady who lived near him feared that someone was trying to break into her house and rob her. She asked Steinbeck if he would object to leaving his bedroom window raised so that if anyone cut her telephone line she could summon him by calling through the window. Instead of giving her the usual lecture that her fears were unfounded, and that she was being childish, he assured her that he would be glad to leave his window raised at night and if she needed further assistance not to hesitate to ask.37

Steinbeck's point is, that although her fears were psychological they were fears nevertheless, and the reason for them was at the moment, immaterial. The important thing to her was attaining some peace of mind, and for him to leave his window raised at night was a small thing, but it seemed to please her a great deal.

36 Ibid., p. 145.
37 Ibid., pp. 146-147.
Steinbeck's non-teleological approach to life has involved him in contradictions both confusing and ridiculous, contradictions which multiply the ambiguity in his attitude. Casy's statement in *The Grapes of Wrath*, "There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue; there's just stuff people do," and "some of the things folks do is nice and some ain't nice . . ."\(^38\) poses a peculiar problem. If there is neither virtue nor vice, why are some things nice and some not nice? The apparent contradiction in this line of thinking may be Steinbeck's idea that non-teleological thinking concerns itself with answering only the questions "what" or "how" instead of "why"; but in attacking intellectualism, he makes the following statement: "The lies we tell about our duty and our purposes, the meaningless words of science and philosophy, are walls that topple before a bewildered little 'why.'"\(^39\) And twenty years later in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Ethan Hawley philosophizes:

"I guess we're all, or most of us, the wards of that nineteenth-century science which denied existence to anything it could not measure or explain . . . . We did not see what we couldn't explain, and meanwhile a great part of the world was abandoned to children, insane people, fools, and mystics, who were more interested in what [italics mine] it is than why [italics mine] it is."\(^40\)


\(^{40}\) Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, p. 75.
Steinbeck's inconsistencies seem to indicate either that he never really understood non-teleological thinking or that he does not fully believe in it. However, he must have understood and believed at least a part of it, or he would not or could not have used it as a motif in at least four of his novels.

Steinbeck first uses non-teleological thinking as a pattern of reality in In Dubious Battle. This novel was first regarded by critics as a proletarian tract, and Steinbeck was angered that "... Burton Rascoe and Ben Abramson are the only two reviewers who have discovered that In Dubious Battle is a novel ... ."41 It is not a tract, because Steinbeck presents the action in a non-teleological manner, showing both the strikers and the growers in a thoroughly objective manner. He wastes no time in letting the reader know that the novel is not going to be a partisan treatment of the picker-grower conflict, pitting the guiltless and ill-prepared strikers against the overwhelming odds of the evil fruit growers. Lisca cites three examples to show that Steinbeck is non-teleological in his treatment of the conflict: the strikers are shown to be just as unscrupulous as the growers; Mac, the leader of the strikers, uses cruel and utilitarian methods in dealing with both pickers and growers; and Doc Burton is the

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disinterested observer who voices the author's non-teleological views. Mac, for example, asks Doc if he believes in the "cause"; Doc replies that he refuses "to put on the blinders of 'good' and 'bad,' and limit my vision." He wants "to be able to look at the whole thing." Pressured by Mac for a commitment, Doc admits that he believes in the cause because it "is," just as the moon "is."

The next novel with a non-teleological pattern of reality is *Of Mice and Men*. This short novel relates the tragedy of two insignificant beings who are swept along like cosmic particles through a hostile universe over which they have no control. The original title of this novel was simply "Something That Happened."

Non-teleological thinking is also the underlying philosophical mode in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Not only does the sometimes inexplicable action (the Okies are driven from their land by the forces of nature, which they cannot understand) express this philosophy, but often the dialogue

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42 Ibid., pp. 123-126.
44 Ibid.  
45 Ibid.  
46 Bracher, p. 184.
47 Ibid.
as well. Casy's non-teleological statements have been mentioned earlier. Also there is Tom's attempt to explain the circumstances which have beset his people: "You don't look for no sense when lightnin' kills a cow, or it comes a flood. That's jus' the way things is." 48

The Wayward Bus is Steinbeck's major attempt to use non-teleological ideas as a pattern of reality. Reviewers invariably charge that this novel is "cold, cynical, and lacking in 'answers,'" for Steinbeck does not attempt to stir the reader's emotion as he had in previous works. 49 "He delineates them [the characters] with the objectivity of a man viewing little animals through a microscope." 50 Nothing is resolved or changed at the end; the characters are no different morally from the way they were at the first. 51

The stories in The Long Valley are also non-teleological. In this collection, "each story is something that happened, something to be perceived and, in a non-teleological way, understood..." 52 Also, The Pearl, although it has a strong moral, may be considered a non-teleological parable,

48 Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath, p. 47.
49 Seixas, p. 277.  
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 279.
because Kino's plight is very similar to that of George and Lennie and the Joads. He too is plagued by inexplicable forces of human nature which he is powerless to combat. As Fontenrose points out, The Pearl "is the way things are."  

Steinbeck's biological interests and the influence of Ed Ricketts are important bases for his anti-intellectual bias and the locus for his nonintellectual philosophy, if indeed he has a philosophy at all. He has always declined invitations to discuss any ideological aspect of his work, replying once to the American Humanist Association that he had not the "slightest idea what his philosophy was or even whether he had one." Such disclaimers by authors are not usually to be relied upon, but in Steinbeck's case there is more basis for them than might be expected. On the other hand, it seems unwise to rule out all metaphysical musing.

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53 Ibid., p. 114.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS AND SOCIOLOGY

Steinbeck's political and social views are the most widely known aspect of his work and have an easily discerned anti-intellectual bias. He has often been labeled a Communist by critics, because of his so-called proletarian novels; but he has also been called a Nazi, because of his sympathetic treatment of the Nazi officers in The Moon is Down. An investigation of this novel and others indicates that as a political theorist Steinbeck is neither Communist nor Nazi; for both of these ideologies, although diametrically opposite in most respects, have a characteristic especially deplorable and intolerable to him -- collectivism. Man in a collectivized state, believes Steinbeck, loses his identity, his individuality, and finally, his freedom. Bracher explains Steinbeck's attitude as follows,

Though Steinbeck clearly hates capitalist exploitation and attacks bourgeois virtues, he is far from being an orthodox leftist . . . . Steinbeck hates the system of which they [the exploiters] are natural manifestations, but his severest charge against them personally is that they have become de-humanized, . . . . become so sunk in the social organism as to lose their biological individuality.¹

Observing tiny organisms in tide pools, Steinbeck has noticed that many species of marine animals tend to collect together and form what seems to be one animal, a completely new individual. In the process of collectivizing, each animal loses its biological individuality and becomes only a small, insignificant part of the new "animal." This phenomenon Steinbeck calls "group-animal."

There are colonies of pelagic tunicates which have taken a shape like the finger of a glove. Each member of the colony is an individual animal, but the colony is another individual, not at all like the sum of its individuals. Some of the colonists, girdling the open end, have developed the ability, one against the other, of making a pulsing movement very like muscular action. Others of the colonists collect the food and distribute it, and the outside of the glove is hardened and protected against contact. Here are two animals, and yet the same thing . . . .2

A more obvious example of group-animal is the common school of fish. The school darts and dives in a fashion which causes it to resemble a single large fish; and it seems to react, not as thousands of individual fish, but as a single organism.3 When the small fish becomes a group-animal, he must, of necessity, give up his individuality to the collectivized unit.

This phenomenon of the animal world, theorizes Steinbeck, is paralleled in human affairs by "group-man." Group-man

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3 Ibid., pp. 240-241.
is expressed in many different forms—the most obvious being that of the mob. In *In Dubious Battle*, Doc Burton, noticing that Mac, the dedicated professional radical, has made of the crazed fruit pickers a frenzied mob, which seems not to be individuals at all but a single animal. The roar of the mob sounds, characteristically enough, like the "bellow of an animal in fury."4 Reflecting on its composition, Doc Burton muses,

"It is a big animal. It's different from the men in it. And it's stronger than all the men put together. It doesn't want the same things men want . . . and we don't know what it'll do . . . . Trouble is, guys that study people always think it's men, and it isn't men. It's a different kind of animal. It's as different from men as dogs are."5

The Doctor further comments not only on the organic composition of group-man, but also on mob behavior:

"Group-men seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all, he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you . . . . People have said 'Mobs are crazy, you can't tell what they'll do.' Why don't people look at mobs, not as men, but as mobs? A mob nearly always seems to act reasonably, for a mob."6

Speculating even further, Doc blames group-man for ideological wars:


5 Ibid., pp. 288-289.

6 Ibid., p. 131.
"When group-man wants to move, he makes a standard. 'God wills that we recapture the Holy Land'; or he says, 'We fight to make the world safe for democracy'; or he says, 'We will wipe out social injustices with Communism.' But the group doesn't care about the Holy Land, or Democracy, or Communism. Maybe the group simply wants to move, to fight, and uses the words simply to reassure the brains of individual man."

Possibly another explanation for ideological wars, theorizes Doc Burton, is that group-man has a built-in kind of guilt-sharing and pleasure-sharing quality: "The pleasure we get in scratching an itch causes death to a great number of cells. Maybe group-man gets pleasure when individual men are wiped out in a war." According to Lisca, Steinbeck demonstrates in "The Vigilante" that collectivization has a soul-shattering effect on man: "The vigilante, like the grandfather in 'The Leader of the People,' fully lives only for that time when he is part of a group, and when that group disperses, the single man is left a hull."

In addition to mobs, group-man can take many other forms of collectivization. It may be a town: "A town is a thing like a colonial animal. A town has a nervous system and a head and shoulders and feet." When the buyers are collectively trying to cheat Kino, in The Pearl, out of his magnificent gem, they take the form of group-man: "It was

7 Ibid.  
8 Ibid., p. 132.  
10 Steinbeck, The Pearl (New York, 1946), p. 27.
supposed that the pearl buyers were individuals acting alone, bidding against one another for the pearl . . . . Now there was only one pearl buyer with many hands . . . . Group-man can also take the form of a bank, as it does in The Grapes of Wrath when Steinbeck discusses the evils of collectivism:

The bank is something else than men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It's the monster. Men make it, but they can't control it.12

Group-man is further represented by the Joads who, clinging to the truck, resemble the single organism with its many cells clustered around a nucleus. Whether it expresses itself as a mob, as a syndicate of pearl buyers, or as a bank, group-man is a natural phenomenon, and becomes a danger and an evil because as an organism it may be subject to control by unscrupulous or impractical intellectual leadership.

Steinbeck's intense dislike of collectivism is, in a way, the result of his socio-political anti-intellectualism. Steinbeck, like Eric Hoffer, believes collectivism is an inevitable result of intellectuals in government. "We know that rule by intellectuals . . . .," says Hoffer, "unavoidably approaches a colonial regime."13 Hoffer is further convinced

11Ibid., p. 54.
that the intellectuals are particularly dangerous because they, more than any other group, love power, and more than any other group they are corrupted by it: "The typical intellectual everywhere is convinced that common people are unfit for liberty and for self-government." In The Pearl, Kino is trapped by his own ignorance when dealing with the greedy doctor, who represents the colonialist or the intellectual elite. Kino

... could not take the chance of putting his certain ignorance against this man's possible knowledge. He was trapped as his people are always trapped, and would be until, as he had said, they could be sure that the things in the books were really in the books.

Steinbeck and Hoffer are also very close in their observation that Europeans, who have long suffered under rule by the "intelligentsia," are surprised to learn that there is not much distinction in America between intellectuals and common people. When Edmund Wilson went to London, the British intellectuals were amazed at his lack of class consciousness based upon literary achievement. Steinbeck parallels Hoffer in observing that American literature is a product of the common people, not of the universities:

14 Ibid., p. 65.
15 Steinbeck, The Pearl, p. 39.
16 Hoffer, p. 63.
the true seedlings of our literature sprouted in the tall tales, the jests, the boasting, and the humor of the storytellers in the forests and on the plains. Their product was printed in local newspapers and in publications fiercely ignored by the princely intellectual Brahmins of the East Coast, who felt that the indigenous must somehow be tainted. Even Edgar Allan Poe, who surely wrote more like a European than an American, had to be acclaimed in France before he was acceptable to upper-brow Americans.17

Commenting further on the astonishment of the Europeans at the importance of the "uneducated" in America and the relatively low status of the intellectual, Steinbeck adds that it was beyond the comprehension of these European visitors that a man [Lincoln] without formal schooling at all, should come from what they considered squalor to lead the American nation; and they were stridently puzzled that sometimes these products of our poverty were able, intelligent, informal, and efficient leaders. It was beyond even contemplation that a Lincoln could have become Prime Minister of England.18

Hoffer and Steinbeck agree that America's greatness lies in its reliance on the innate wisdom of its common people rather than on the intelligence of the educated elite.

In a country ruled by intellectuals, says Hoffer, great emphasis is placed on the grandiose and the colossal; a great deal of time, energy, money, and manpower is wasted on big dams, big machines, big weapons, and gigantic factories. As a consequence, little notice is taken of the hungry, who


18 Ibid., pp. 131-132.
need food; of the sick, who need care; of the homeless, who need shelter. The Russians can build the largest steam shovel in the world, but everywhere can be seen weary workers, straining their backs to lift a beam or a block of stone. Steinbeck also points invariably to Russia when he discusses the evils of a society ruled by intellectuals. Russia is notorious for its emphasis on the group rather than on the individual, one sure deterrent to creativity and free thinking.

Our species is the only creative species and it has only one creative instrument, the individual mind and spirit of man. There are no good collaborations, whether in music, in art, in poetry, in mathematics, in philosophy. Once the miracle of creation has taken place, the group never invests anything. The preciousness lies in the lonely mind of a man.

Realizing that one of America's most precious freedoms is its right of unrestrained thought and expression, Steinbeck is understandably fearful of any attempt on the part of government to restrict the creation and proliferation of ideas and principles. America has always maintained and cherished its garden of ideas which have sprouted and flourished because of and not in spite of intellectual achievement. He seems unaware that uneducated, illiterate or unliterate people can be and are quite frequently more

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19 Hoffer, p. 65.

restrictive in their narrowness than intellectuals, who have characteristically associated themselves with change and progress. Similarly, he never fully explains why he seems to advocate collectivism in *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* when the Okies begin to get together and work out their problems and when, in *In Dubious Battle*, the pickers join hands to oppose the growers.

With an obvious reference to Communism, Steinbeck expresses his deep concern for the possibility of its expansion and domination, which would mean an end to these basic rights:

> There are monstrous changes taking place in the world, forces shaping a future whose face we do not know. It is true that two men can lift a bigger stone than one man. A group can build automobiles quicker and better than one man, and bread from a huge factory is cheaper and more uniform. In our time mass or collective production has entered our economics, our politics, and even our religion, so that some nations have substituted the idea collective for the idea God. This in my time is the danger. There is great tension in the world, tension toward a breaking point, and men are unhappy and confused.  

Steinbeck thus expressed his apprehension in the early fifties, when the Cold War had just begun and Communism was beginning its march toward world conquest. Ten years before, in 1942, he voiced much the same fear of collectivism, only this time the agent was Nazism, which, he feared, sought to control the mind of man. Nazism, characterized by military

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21 Ibid., p. 113.
force and dictatorial authority, engaged in a horrendous drive to exterminate not only the free exchange of ideas but also those persons considered by the state to be incompetent and undesirable. But in the process, the Nazis were actually reducing standards; for as Steinbeck points out:

... in a thoroughly collectivized state, mediocre efficiency might be very great, but only through the complete elimination of the swift, the clever, and the intelligent, as well as the incompetent. Truly collective man might in fact abandon his versatility.22

Steinbeck believes collectivism to be an inevitable result of rule by intellectuals, but he has faith in the natural longing of man to be free. In The Moon is Down, Steinbeck's novel of World War II treating Nazism and the resistance movement against it, Mayor Orden affirms to the disenchanted Nazi officer, Colonel Lancer, the ineradicable free will of man:

"The people don't like to be conquered, sir, and so they will not be. Free men cannot start a war, but once it is started, they can fight on in defeat. Herd-men, followers of a leader, cannot do that, and so it is always the herd-men who win battles and the free men who win wars."23

And he goes on to say that colonialist governments do not succeed because they fail to understand the people they

22 Steinbeck, Sea of Cortez, p. 214.

seek to rule: "You and your government do not understand. In all the world yours is the only government and people with a record of defeat after defeat for centuries and every time because you did not understand people." With the passage of time the conquered people in this novel lose their incentive and even their will to live. But this attitude perplexes and frightens the Nazi soldiers (who are never referred to as Nazis), reaching a point where "... the conqueror grew afraid of the conquered and their nerves wore thin and they shot at shadows in the night."  

The dehumanizing effect of collectivism—called "over-integration" or the delegation of man's individual identity to the faceless group—Steinbeck compares with "over-ornamentation" in animals. Over-ornamentation is characterized by a decrease in the drive to survive brought about by an easy life, too much food, too much comfort, and too few obstacles. Fear of over-ornamentation explains Steinbeck's commitment to the nonintellectual class and his mistrust of the intellectuals' dream—the ideal state. If parallels between man and animal can be accepted as valid, then man's future on earth looks bleak. Steinbeck has noticed

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that in the animal world extinction is always preceded by lethargy. The energetic, enterprising animal which must seek endlessly for his food never becomes extinct; but the contented, the satiated, the complicated, the over-armored—these disappear or dwindle.\(^{28}\) If this phenomenon is a natural law, then it must also apply to man, deduces Steinbeck. Therefore, he regards the intellectuals' dream of an ideal society as dangerous to the species:

... the removal of obstacles automatically atrophies a survival drive. With warm water and abundant food, animals may retire into a sterile sluggish happiness. This has certainly seemed true in man .... If these are true in a biologic sense, what is to become of the fed, warm, protected citizenry of the ideal welfare state?\(^{29}\)

In America, the free and easy way of living promotes a lethargic frame of mind;\(^{30}\) and Steinbeck voices his disapproval in the following passage:

It [America] does remind me of something. Have you ever seen a kennel of beautiful, highly bred and trained and specialized bird dogs? And have you seen those same dogs when they are no longer used? In a short time their skills and certainties and usefulness are gone. They become quarrelsome, fat, lazy, cowardly, dirty, and utterly disreputable and worthless, and all because their purpose is gone and with it the rules and disciplines that made them beautiful and good.\(^{31}\)

To Steinbeck, then, the poor and the desperate become the best hope for the future, and this theory as well as compassion

\(^{28}\)Ibid., pp. 224-225.  

\(^{29}\)Ibid., p. 227.  


\(^{31}\)Steinbeck, America and Americans, p. 139.
explains his interest in the lowly, who must become active, cunning, and strong in order to exist. It is ironic, observes Steinbeck, that those qualities considered morally good—kindness, generosity, honesty, understanding, openness, and feeling—are harbingers of failure; and those qualities considered morally bad—greed, acquisitiveness, meanness, egotism, and self-interest—can lead to success. The irony lies in the meaning of the term "success": if material failure or failures increase the urge to survival, and success or successes in material matters decrease energy, then man, with his present commercialized sense of values, is moving rapidly toward extinction.32

If extinction is inevitable, the poor and dispossessed will outlast the "fat cats." Steinbeck puts it this way in two eloquent passages:

... a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums. Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the housefly, the moth, must have a great and overwhelming love for no-goods and blots-on-the-town and bums .. . .33

When our species progress toward extinction or marches into the forehead of God—there will be certain degenerate groups left behind, say, the Indian of lower California, in the shadows of the rocks or sitting motionless in their dugout canoes. They remain to sun

32Steinbeck, Sea of Cortez, p. 96.

themselves, to eat and starve and sleep and reproduce. Now they have many legends as hazy and magical as the mirage. Perhaps then they will have another concerning a great and godlike race that flew away in four-motored bombers to the accompaniment of exploding bombs, the voice of God calling them home.34

When Steinbeck first expressed concern for the future of America in 1941, his fear was that wars constituted the chief threat to man's survival. Twenty years later, he was still worried, but for different reasons. In a letter to Adlai Stevenson, which was originally published in Newsday, Steinbeck diagnoses the state of America thus: There is "a creeping, all-pervading nerve gas of immorality"; there is "a nervous restlessness, a hunger, a thirst, a yearning for something unknown—perhaps morality"; there is a "violence, cruelty, and hypocrisy symptomatic of a people which has too much"; and there is a "surly ill temper" that afflicts "humans when they are frightened." And he concludes, "Mainly Adlai, I am troubled by the cynical immorality of my country. I don't think it can survive on this basis."35

Steinbeck is particularly sympathetic to two types of nonintellectual: the completely indigent but unpretentious ne'er-do-wells; and the self-reliant and proud artisans who possess an innate practical skill. Steinbeck's first

34 Steinbeck, Sea of Cortez, p. 89.

35 Thurston N. Davis and others, "Have We Gone Soft?" The New Republic, CXLII (February 15, 1960), 11.
successful novel, *Tortilla Flat*, is a humorous treatment of the former type. Light-hearted Danny and his paisano friends are listless and amoral, but Steinbeck admires them for their lack of hypocrisy—or their ability to rationalize and forget their sins and to live happily with their more sophisticated neighbors; in fact they are perfect specimens of Steinbeck's biological theory. They are hungry but happy; they cannot afford for long to become complacent, having to depend on their wits to gain them their next meal or bottle of cheap wine. Their very existence depends on their ingenuity, on their determination, and most of all, on their cooperation with their fellows. Steinbeck's treatment of these low-brow types is, in a sense, an indictment of the sophisticated members of the community, for Danny and the boys are a rebuke to those with intellectual aspirations and pretensions, who assume a moral (as well as material) superiority they do not in fact possess.

Mack and his cronies in *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* are Danny and his friends in new guises. The basic probity and charity of these new fellows is greater than that of many respectable citizens who consider themselves mentally and morally superior. Doc (Ed Ricketts), friend and benefactor of the group, calls them

... your true philosophers ... Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world
and possibly everything that will happen . . . .
All of our so-called successful men are sick men,
with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the
boys are healthy and luxuriously clean.36

In addition to Danny and Mack and their nonintellectual
cohorts, Steinbeck has created non-intellectually oriented
characters who possess a natural wisdom both inherited and
learned. Casy, the illiterate ex-preacher in The Grapes of
Wrath, spouts a homespun philosophy of humanism, non-teleol-
ogical thinking, and Emersonian transcendentalism. Tom
Joad, in the same novel, is an illiterate Okie, but by his
resourcefulness he guides a family of nine (including Casy)
to California in a battered and worn-out Model T Ford truck.

George and Slim in Of Mice and Men are low on the social
and economic scale, but show a kind of wisdom beyond the
realm of formal education. George's killing of Lennie, his
sub-normal companion who is about to be lynched for inad-
vertently killing a young girl, represents a wisdom of the
heart rather than of the intellect. Slim, a mule-skinner
in the same book, is also a type particularly appealing to
Steinbeck:

He moved with a majesty only achieved by royalty and
master craftsmen. He was a jerkline skinner, the
prince of the ranch, capable of driving ten, sixteen,
even twenty mules with a single line to the leaders.
He was capable of killing a fly on the wheeler's butt
with a bull whip without touching the mule. There

36 Steinbeck, Cannery Row, p. 88.
was a gravity in his manner and a quiet so profound that all talk stopped when he spoke. His authority was so great that his word was taken on any subject, be it politics or love. ... His ear heard more than was said to him, and his slow speech had overtones not of thought, but of understanding beyond thought. 37

Slim is possibly a model for a later character who is illiterate but wise in the ways of the world—Juan Chicoy, the bus driver in The Wayward Bus. In the bus, Juan carries, in addition to tiny baby shoes and boxing glove, a kewpie doll, and a small virgin of Guadalupe, a .45-caliber revolver, a roll of bandage, a bottle of iodine, a vial of lavender smelling salts, and an unopened pint of whiskey. With this equipment Juan feels fairly confident that he can meet most situations. 38 He is further characterized as "... listening intently all the time, while his squinting eyes seemed to laugh at what he heard, and half of his mouth disapproved. His movements were sure even when he was not doing anything that required sureness." 39 He is a genuinely fine mechanic, who can repair carburetors, clogged gas lines, and "all the little things that the motor-minded public knows nothing whatever about." 40 He is part Mexican and part Irish, dark and virile; and Alice, his wife, is strongly

39 Ibid., p. 15.
40 Ibid., p. 6.
in love with him but also afraid of him, because "he is a man, and there aren't very many of them, as Alice Chicoy had found out." 41

The only passenger on Juan's bus who has any intellectual characteristics is Mildred Pritchard. She has a college degree, and in college had caused her shallow, Babbitt-like father a great deal of embarrassment because of her liberal political activities:

She was playing around with dangerous companions in her college, professors and certain people considered Red. Before the war she had picketed a scrap-iron ship bound for Japan, and she had gathered money for medical supplies for what Mr. Pritchard called the Reds in the Spanish War. 42

She becomes sexually attracted to the nonintellectual Juan, after several disappointing affairs with college boys. Here again Steinbeck is expressing almost gratuitously a scorn for the academic.

Another of Steinbeck's favorite characters of the he-man type is Billy Buck, the efficient ranch hand in The Red Pony. Billy is inarticulate but highly skilled in all ranch work. A razor-sharp pocket-knife in his steady hand is no less effective than a scalpel in the hand of a master surgeon.

When Gabilan, Jody's colt, becomes ill with the strangles, Billy coolly performs a neat tracheotomy to free its breathing. 43

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid., p. 41.

Despite everything Billy can do, however, the colt dies; but Billy promises himself that Jody will have another colt. However, when Nellie, the Tiflin's mare, is ready to foal, Billy discovers that the colt is turned the wrong way. With scientific precision he does what must be done: he kills the mare with a sharp blow to the forehead with a hammer and gently but confidently performs a Caesarean section and successfully delivers the colt.\textsuperscript{44}

Slim and Juan and Billy are, in a sense, Steinbeck's ideal men, because they have not lost their biological individuality, but he seems to consider them a vanishing breed in a world of technology, mass production, and over-specialization. Ernest Horton proves this point to Mr. Pritchard in \textit{The Wayward Bus} after Juan intentionally sticks the bus in the mud and strands his passengers in barren country:

"You know, we're supposed to be a mechanical people. Everybody drives a car and has an icebox and a radio. I suppose people really think they are mechanical-minded, but let a little dirt get in the carburetor and -- well, a car has to stand there until a mechanic comes and takes out the screen. Let a light go off, and an electrician has to come and put in a new fuse. Let an elevator stop, and there's a panic."

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Pritchard.
"Americans are pretty mechanical people all in all. Our ancestors did pretty well for themselves."

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 279.
"Sure, they did. So could we if we had to. Can you set the timer on your car?"
"Well, I--"
"Go further," said Ernest, "Suppose you had to stay out here for two weeks. Could you keep from starving to death? Or would you get pneumonia and die?"
"Well," said Mr. Pritchard, "you see, people specialize now."
"Could you kill a cow?" Ernest insisted. "Could you cut it up and cook it?"45

Mr. Pritchard becomes annoyed with this Socratic lesson and breaks off the discussion because he feels that Horton is right: people are becoming too dependent on the machine, and artisans like Juan Chicoy are becoming more scarce with each passing day.

After The Wayward Bus Steinbeck discards the rustic nonintellectual—except for a reappearance of Mack and the boys in Sweet Thursday—and in his next novel devotes his attention to the political satire, The Short Reign of Pippin IV. This fabrication, as the author calls it, is a retelling of the old story in which the government leaders choose as king a man who they think will be their puppet, but after he assumes office they discover that they cannot manipulate him.

Pippin is a humble Frenchman, a descendant of Pippin II, King of France; and he is made king as a compromise when the French government, split into many factions, cannot decide on a leader. Pippin, however, infuriates the French

intellectuals by becoming a wise and strong ruler. As the mixed descendant of a fine line of bird dogs can, if he is taken out of the city and turned loose in the country, smell out a bird and point him with a talent unknown but remembered, so can a simple peasant descended from royalty assume the throne of a country and raise it out of an economic quagmire. 46

Pippin, who represents the common man or the nonintellectual, restores France to economic and social stability simply by traveling incognito about the countryside and into the cities, finding out the problems firsthand and setting up a remedy. What he finds in the cities disgusts him, and he is amazed that the intellectual leaders who preceded him were unaware that "twenty per cent of the rented buildings of Paris are a danger to health as well as a threat to safety"; that "the wholesaler takes thirty per cent of the selling price of carrots and the retailer takes forty . . ."; and that there are "six hundred ways of avoiding taxes if you are rich enough--sixty-five methods of raising rent in controlled rental areas." 47 Furthermore, Pippin finds that the country's creative minds have dried up under the rule of the intellectuals: "The writers in the


47 Ibid., pp. 136-137.
past burned the name 'France' on the world. They're [now] sitting in huddled misery, building a philosophy of despair, while the painters, with few exceptions, paint apathy and jealous anarchy."

It is a paradox, as Steinbeck points out, that in a society governed by intellectuals the ones who suffer most are the creative artists. Oddly enough, the performance of poets, writers, and artists is greatly curtailed and often stifled. It would seem that the opposite should be true, but as Hoffer points out,

When intellectuals come to power it is as a rule the meagerly endowed among them who rule the roost. The genuinely creative person seems to lack the temperament requisite for the seizure, exercise, and above all, the retention of power. If Hitler had had the talent of a great painter or architect, if Lenin and Stalin had had the making of great theoreticians, if Napoleon and Mussolini had had it in them to become great poets or philosophers, they might not have developed an unappeasable hunger for power. Now, one of the chief proclivities of people who hunger for literary or artistic greatness but lack talents is to interfere with the creativeness of others. They derive an exquisite satisfaction from imposing their taste and style on the gifted and the brilliant."

Thus, the subjection of the creative artist to the rule of an "intelligentsia" is characterized by both profusion and restraint--two evils especially odious to Steinbeck--and this theory or feeling may underlie much of Steinbeck's hostility.

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48 Ibid., p. 138.
49 Hoffer, pp. 68-69.
Steinbeck observed such a situation firsthand when he visited Russia during the regime of Stalin, and recorded the antipathy of an artist to mental restriction:

In the Soviet Union the writer's job is to encourage, to celebrate, to explain, and in every way to carry forward the Soviet system. Whereas in America, and in England, a good writer is the watchdog of society. His job is to satirize its silliness, to attack its injustices, to stigmatize its faults. . . . The two are completely opposite approaches toward literature. And it must be said that in the time of the great Russian writers of Tolstoy, of Dostoevski, of Turgenev, of Chekhov, and of the early Gorki, the same was true of the Russians. And only time will tell whether the [Soviet] approach to writing can produce as great a literature as the watchdog of society approach. So far, it must be admitted, the [Soviet] school has not produced a great piece of writing.50

In *Sweet Thursday* Steinbeck satirizes the pseudo-artist in such characters as Henri the painter and Joe Elegant the novelist, who are so involved with the business of being members of an intellectual elite that they never produce anything worthwhile:

Henri the painter was not French and his name was not Henri. Also he was not really a painter. Henri had so steeped himself in stories of the Left Bank in Paris that he lived there although he had never been there. Feverishly he followed in periodicals the Dadaist movements and schisms, the strangely feminine jealousies and religiousness, the obscurantisms of the forming and breaking schools. Regularly he revolted against outworn techniques and materials. One season, he threw out perspective. Another year he abandoned red, even as the mother of purple. Finally he gave up paint entirely. It is not known whether Henri was a good painter or not for he

threw himself so violently into movements that he had very little time left for painting of any kind.51

Joe Elegant is a writer who deliberately obscures his meaning out of fear that clarity will surely render his work worthless in intellectual circles. When he is not working on his novel, *The Pi Root of Oedipus*, he cooks for Fauna, the madam of the Bear Flag. In a conversation with Suzy, one of the girls at the brothel, Joe Elegant assures her that she would not understand his novel as "it isn't intended for the mass."52 He comments as follows to Fauna, after he has read to her his last chapter:

"You see," he said, "the grandmother stands for guilt."
"Ain't she dead and buried?"
"Yes."
"That's a kind of messy guilt."
"It's the reality below reality," said Joe Elegant. "Balls!" said Fauna. "Listen, Joe, whyn't you write a story about something real?"
"Maybe you can tell me about the art of writing?" he said.
"I sure as hell can," said Fauna.53

Also in *Sweet Thursday* Steinbeck satirizes intellectual extremism in the character Old Jingleballicks.

Old Jay was born so rich that he didn't know he was rich at all. He thought everybody was that way. He was a scientist, but whether brilliant or a screwball nobody even knew, and since he had contributed to so many learned foundations and financed so many projects

52 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
53 Ibid., pp. 133-134.
and served on so many boards of trustees, nobody dared openly to wonder. He gave millions away but he was likely to sponge on a friend. His scholastic honors were many, and there were people who thought privately and venomously that they were awarded in hope of a donation, that he was, in fact like a football player whose grades have little relation to his scholarship.54

Steinbeck seems to classify Old Jingleballicks with Henri and Joe Elegant, since they are all frauds concealing their ineptitude behind a facade of intellectualism. Old Jingleballicks' latest "intellectual" project is testing the amount of pressure involved when a robin pulls a worm out of the ground. It entails putting a scale between the teeth and pulling up forty-eight night crawlers, after which Old Jay concludes that an average worm "resists to the extent of one pound six ounces . . . and a three-ounce bird pulls twenty-two ounces . . . ."55

In the satirical treatment of exaggerated artistic intellectuality, The Short Reign of Pippin IV contains several scathing passages. Pippin's daughter Clotilde is a "renowned" novelist, having written a best-seller, Adieu Ma Vie, when she was fifteen. After the publication of her book

. . . she was sought out and courted by the most celebrated minds of our times. She was acclaimed by the Reductionists, the Resurrectionists, the

54 Ibid., pp. 163-164.

55 Ibid., p. 83.
Protonists, the Non-Existentialists, and the Quantumists, while the very nature of her book set hundreds of psychoanalysts clamoring to sift her unconscious . . . . Her devotees formed the school called Clotildisme, which was denounced by the clergy and caused sixty-eight adolescents to commit ecstatic suicide . . . .

Steinbeck also takes another dig at American universities. When Clotilde asks her American suitor if he can speak French, he replies that he can speak "Princeton French"; he can "ask questions but . . . can't understand the answers." He has attended four universities, and he has learned how to dress at Princeton, has acquired a fashionable accent at Harvard, has assumed a responsible attitude at Yale, and has learned manners at the University of Virginia; and he feels himself knowledgeable in everything except the arts.

Neither do scholars and scientists escape Steinbeck's stinging barbs. The former French premier is also an authority in "psycho-botany," and he is glad to step down from office so that he can devote full time to his "scholarly" paper dealing with pain in plants, called "Tendencies and Symptoms of Hysteria in Red Clover." He is also working on a book entitled "Inherited Schizophrenia in Legumes." This satire on intellectual extremism is reminiscent of Old Jingleballicks' "scientific" investigations in Sweet Thursday.

56 Steinbeck, The Short Reign of Pippin IV, pp. 67-68.
57 Ibid., p. 83.
58 Ibid., p. 70.
59 Ibid., pp. 31-32.
In so far as Steinbeck's attitude toward scholars and university degrees is concerned, it must be remembered that he himself never bothered to take a degree at Stanford, although the time he spent there was sufficient to gain a degree had he chosen to pursue a definite course instead of taking only those subjects which interested him. This lack of regard for a formal education is a part of his general dislike for intellectuals and scholars. In his preface to Tortilla Flat, he makes it a special point to declare that Danny and the boys really existed, in order to quash any notions by future "sour scholars" that they were "nature gods" and their story a myth.\textsuperscript{60} In The Log From the Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck has some further disdainful remarks about scholars:

> It is interesting to see how some scientists and philosophers, who are an emotional and fearful group, are able to protect themselves against fear. In a modern sense when the horizons stretch out and your philosopher is likely to fall off the world like a Dark Ages mariner, he can save himself by establishing a taboo-box which he may call "mysticism" or "supernaturalism" or "radicalism." Into this box he can throw all those thoughts which frighten him and thus be safe from them.\textsuperscript{61}

Distaste for formal education is further evidenced by remarks such as those in In Dubious Battle when Jim, the young radical, is talking to Dan, the old "top-faller," with

\textsuperscript{60} Steinbeck, \textit{Tortilla Flat} (New York, 1935), p. 10.

\textsuperscript{61} Steinbeck, \textit{Sea of Cortez}, p. 54.
whom he is picking fruit, about the young man who is counting buckets of fruit:

"College boy," said Jim. "Every place you go you run into 'em."

The old man squatted down on his limb. "And what do they know?" he demanded. "They go to them colleges and they don't learn a God-damn thing. That smart guy with the little book couldn't keep his ass dry in a barn . . . . Now you and me . . . we know—not so much, maybe, but what we know, we know good." 62

The longer the old man considers his plight with relation to the young man with the book the more angry he becomes, and he decides to quit for the day: "Get out of the way, I'm coming down the ladder. We can't make no money talking—that's for college boys." 63

Actually, Steinbeck (like many anti-intellectuals) seems to believe that universities are over-emphasized in relation to the real contribution they make. But there is reason to believe that he favors intellectual activity if it is the result of pure desire to learn and does not lead to a false sense of values that would discount or ignore simple basic truths. Junius Maltby, a sympathetic character in The Pastures of Heaven, read many of the literary classics and knew the Parthenon better than he knew his own broken-down shack. But because he lived differently from the way his neighbors thought he should live—he never shaved or wore shoes, but spent all his time reading Stevenson and Greek history—he was forced out of the valley and driven back.

63 Ibid.
to San Francisco and his old job as bank accountant. Steinbeck's point in this story is that there is a general attitude that learning is good only for the power and success it can bring. Reading only for the sake of knowing and appreciating is, to most people, a form of insanity, and to this idea Steinbeck will not subscribe. If Junius had used his knowledge to build up a bank account for himself, he would have been accepted by his neighbors, but they could not understand his happiness in merely learning and knowing, and concluded that he must be demented. Junius Maltby is not so important or admirable as men like Slim, Juan Chicoy, and Pippin; but Steinbeck does find compassion for him. It is the over-sophisticated and false whom he most deplores.

Steinbeck's almost complete omission of any highly intellectual character in his novels and stories may be taken as another indication of his lack of regard for the type. Only in his most recent novel, The Winter of Our Discontent, does he include a character who even vaguely resembles one. In this novel, however, Ethan Hawley is depicted as a pathetic but ineffectual figure. Hawley is a descendant of an old and aristocratic New England family, but through unwise investments he has lost all the family holdings and is forced to work as a clerk in a grocery

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64 Steinbeck, The Pastures of Heaven (Cleveland and New York, 1932), pp. 79-96.
store he once owned but which is now owned by Marullo, a Sicilian immigrant.

Hawley is a graduate of Yale and well read in classical literature; he delights in quoting Latin epigrams and making sacrilegious references to Christ and the early church. Although he has an innate sense of honesty and morality, inherited presumably from his Puritan forebears, he succumbs to pressure from his children and his middle-class friends, and sets out to regain the lost Hawley money by planning to cheat Marullo out of the store and by murdering (in effect) his best friend in order to inherit some valuable property. Then he makes plans to rob the bank. As it turns out, however, Marullo out of friendship and appreciation gives the store to Ethan, and Danny (his friend) drinks himself to death on money given him by Ethan, but not before he signs over the property to Ethan. When the plans to rob the bank are foiled at the last second, and Ethan finds out that his son has plagiarized an entry in a national essay contest, he feels that he can no longer cope with life and contemplates suicide. If Steinbeck intends Ethan to represent the hope of America and its return to older and sounder values, he is not entirely convincing. The spectacle of a Yale graduate working as a clerk in a grocery store strains credibility, and the mystical talisman at the last is not

exactly a happy symbol of sturdy moral principles.

Steinbeck's anti-intellectualism in his political and social themes is a definite and persistent attitude. And this much is clear: Steinbeck believes in the freedom of the individual to think, to consider, and to express. He distrusts and fears the intellectual because he believes the intellectual to be a threat to basic freedoms. He voices this fear in one of his frequent asides in *East of Eden*, and it is appropriate here to quote his full statement, which may serve as a summary of his strong belief in the individual freedom of the mind of man.

And this I believe: that the free exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any idea, religion, or government which limits or destroys the individual . . . . I can understand why a system built on a pattern must try to destroy the free mind, for this is the one thing which can by inspection destroy such a system. Surely I can understand this, and I hate it and I will fight against it to preserve the one thing that separates us from the uncreative beasts. If the glory can be killed, we are lost.66

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

John Steinbeck occupies the dubious position in American literature of being perhaps the most extensively published and most widely read of all important contemporary novelists, including Faulkner and Hemingway. On the other hand, he has received comparatively little favorable attention from those critics and students who might be expected to set standards of taste. There is evidence that this critical disapproval is due to Steinbeck's obstinate adherence to an intransigent anti-intellectualism, which is expressed in his works by a rather simple approach in both form and content, by a somewhat maudlin handling of human emotions, and by a doggedly persistent attack on various intellectual types. Steinbeck's attitude is further revealed in his personal life by his abstention from any literary coteries or universities and by his adamant refusal either to discuss his life and works or to offer his considerable talent to any institution of higher learning.

Steinbeck's early years in Salinas, California, contributed to his love for nature and his penchant for observation of natural processes. Peter Lisca and Margaret Marshall point to this early period as the origin of Steinbeck's
special quality of mind, expressed in his role as spokesman for the underdog and the dispossessed. Also, Steinbeck's apparent dislike for his mother's profession as school-teacher may have contributed to his anti-intellectual bias. As he mentions in East of Eden, he was discomfited by the pressure involved in living up his mother's school-teacher image, by the necessity for living in the public eye, and by the time away from him that his mother's profession demanded. Although Steinbeck put in the requisite number of hours for a conventional education, he never displayed any fondness for literary study and left college without obtaining a degree.

Paradoxically, Steinbeck's antipathy toward officially recognized intellectual pursuits was perhaps augmented later by his career as a creative writer. He has apparently completely submerged himself in his creative work to the neglect of his personal life. Steinbeck's two divorces at the height of his literary career, for example, testify to a kind of maladjustment. His last marriage has proved more successful, but his literary output has declined notably.

While in college, Steinbeck developed an interest in biology which culminated in his association with Edward Ricketts, a marine biologist and notorious scoffer at intellectual conformity. This association with Ricketts and various low human types cultivated by Ricketts led Steinbeck
to view the dispossessed and unwashed with consecrated affection and to endow them in his works with more admirable qualities than they may actually have possessed. Steinbeck's biological study led him also to ponder the relationship between man and animal. He and Ricketts eventually arrived at a kind of scientific, non-philosophical philosophy, which they called non-teleological thinking. This system constitutes a massive naturalism which is evident in some of Steinbeck's best works.

Biology also affected Steinbeck's anti-intellectual views on politics and sociology. Observation of the fierce struggle for survival in the tide pools led Steinbeck to theorize on the effects of group-man, over-integration, over-ornamentation in species, and collectivism as a natural process. He convinced himself that collectivized man as well as collectivized animal loses individuality. Rightly or wrongly, Steinbeck believes that intellectuals tend toward collectivization and thus constitute a danger to individual development. Also, since ease of life promotes in animals a lethargic condition which leads to extinction, Steinbeck fears that the intellectuals' dream of a welfare state would promote similar consequences for mankind. They tend to be too easily corrupted by power and they often impose restraints on creative artists, as he points out in
A Russian Journal and in The Short Reign of Pippin IV.
For these reasons, Steinbeck distrusts intellectuals and feels that they are unsuitable for political leadership.

If Steinbeck is really anti-intellectual—and the evidence indicates that he is or has most certainly wanted to be so considered—the question that occurs to his readers is whether Steinbeck is himself conscious of the defensive or exaggerated quality of his stand. If this state of mind has been purposely cultivated, then it appears to be a kind of literary pose, which Steinbeck assumed out of real compassion for human suffering, out of defensive reaction to unfavorable literary criticism, and out of a basic distaste for some of the scholarly extremism indulged in by the academic community.

The evidence further indicates that Steinbeck's anti-intellectual position has actually resulted in a direct and shrewd appeal to a mass audience rather than to a cultivated few. In other words, there might have been something mercenary as well as missionary in Steinbeck's rather insistent disclaimers of philosophical and belles-lettristique purposes. Certainly, his method seems to substantiate such a suspicion—a strong narrative line with a minimal vocabulary span, a simplicity in both plot and character, and perhaps an undue attention to the topical, all of which lead the sensitive
reader to suspect calculation.

Actually, Steinbeck is a complex and well read man—in fact, an intellectual of a kind. He must consider his anti-intellectualism not only quaint but also convenient, inasmuch as it not only abets his appeal to the masses but also provides an excuse for his avoiding such literary functions as lecturing, teaching, or participating in literary criticism. He seems to have accepted in toto the dismal cliche that a creative writer cannot be a critic—not even a critic of his own work. The twentieth century, especially since the revival of Henry James, has begun to discard the view that creative writers cannot be critics also.

Steinbeck's attitude has been too pronounced and melodramatic to be entirely convincing. If he has been unconscious of it, he has obviously written and acted without actually giving any careful thought to the matter, not bothering to define either to himself or to his reader the exact nature of his anti-intellectual bias. Thus, the bulk of Steinbeck's work perpetuates the sensitive reader's suspicion that the author does not really know his own mind and arrogantly refuses to examine the sources and true nature of his thoughts.

Steinbeck's most recent novel, The Winter of Our Discontent, although far from being artistically successful, is important because it marks a recanting of Steinbeck's anti-intellectual
views and a mellowing of his temperament. It is, in effect, the story of an intellectual (albeit Ethan Hawley is not an entirely convincing intellectual) who almost succumbs to the philistinism of the anti-intellectual but finally triumphs over materialistic temptation. He is an entirely new type of Steinbeck hero, and the characterization of Hawley indicates beyond doubt that Steinbeck has at last—perhaps too late—begun to recognize the validity of the intellect and the worth of the intellectual's contribution to American life. If this about-face is more than just another instance of the contradiction and ambiguity in Steinbeck's attitude toward intellectuality, then it is to be hoped that, having given such evidence of abandoning his old and somewhat circumscribed role as sentimental defender of the underdog, Steinbeck will find a new source of creative energy worthy of his very considerable talents as a storyteller.
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