John Steinbeck and Oriental Thought: Some Parallels

S. T. Kallapur

Abstract

A careful reading of the novels of John Steinbeck reveals the fact--unnoticed by most of his critics--that many of his important conceptions have a greater correspondence with Hindu and Eastern thought than with the Christian and Western, though he is indelibly an Occidental in the main covert assumptions on which he operates. An examination of his writings, especially those written before 1945, shows how pervasive this correspondence is. In this respect he is one of the small number of writers and intellectuals who have shown interest in the East and is thus in the direct though diffuse line which stretches from Emerson and Thoreau to the Hippies.

The non-teleological or "is" thinking is useful as a key to the understanding of Steinbeck's writings. Non-teleology is his alternative to the teleological thinking of the West which he considers narrow and misleading. The

picture of the deep ultimate Reality of the universe is, according to Steinbeck, portrayed by "is." Non-teleology is concerned, says he again, with what actually "is" and with acceptance of things and men as they are. However, Steinbeck is not able to develop this theory advanced by him and his biologist friend Edward Ricketts into a fully articulate philosophical concept. Basing his conclusions on a study of marine biology, Steinbeck argues that the whole universe is an ecological unit. His concepts of the divine and the mystical unity of the universe are similar to the non-dualistic concepts of the Upanishads. He postulates further that Reality consists of something more than mere empirical reality and he sees this Reality as underlying the plurality of constantly changing natural phenomena. In To a God Unknown and The Grapes of Wrath Steinbeck makes an enquiry into the nature of the divine, and in some of his other novels he considers the practical implications of the concept of non-dualism. Reality and illusion is the central theme of Tortilla Flat and The Pearl, and non-attachment of Cannery Row. He sees nature as an aspect of the divine.

Steinbeck does not, however, give us a unified system of philosophy. He is not always consistent and

often lapses into sentimentality. Most of his characters tend to be abstractions. In spite of these weaknesses, however, we can recognize a philosophical and religious point of view. A close scrutiny of the novels of Steinbeck reveals a vein of thought which is strikingly parallel to the Hinduistic and a recognition of the correspondence between Steinbeck's and Oriental thought provides a new illumination of his work.

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PREFACE

There have been a few full-length studies of John Steinbeck, but none from the Oriental point of view. A study of Steinbeck's thought in the context of the correspondence it has with Hindu thought should make this an illuminating study.

In citing references, I have used English editions of Steinbeck's novels wherever American editions were not available. The English editions have Anglicized spellings, with the result that some of the quotations in the thesis have American spellings and the rest English.

I am highly obliged to Dr. Robin Hoople, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, without whose guidance, kindness and encouragement this thesis could not have been written. My thanks are due to Dr. Joseph Fontenrose, Department of Classics, University of California, Berkeley, and Dr. Warren French, Department of English, University of Missouri, Kansas City, whom I had occasion to consult. Dr. Joseph Fontenrose has kindly permitted me to quote from his letter.

I should also express my thanks here to the University of Manitoba without whose award of a Graduate Fellowship it would not have been possible for me to undertake this study of Steinbeck.

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C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

The Case for the Defence

It is no longer critically fashionable to praise John Steinbeck as a writer. He has remained popular with the reading public, but that popularity itself makes him suspect with the critics. A wide variety of charges have been levelled against him. It is said that he lapses into sentimentality, that his philosophy is naïve, and that he depicts characters on the instinctual level only. Admitting all this, The Grapes of Wrath is not only artistically successful but philosophically profound, and In Dubious Battle is a model of objective writing. These, with The Pastures of Heaven, To a God Unknown, Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, and Cannery Row, fill a permanent niche in the history of American literature.

Why Steinbeck's Work Deserves a Close Study: Correspondence between Steinbeck's and Hindu Thought

Such high praise of Steinbeck's novels is not undeserved. They demand critical attention, for though the setting of most of Steinbeck's writing is modern American society and the problems he concerns himself with are those of the American nation as a whole--its

ideals or lack of them, its dreams and disillusionment, and its past and present--Steinbeck transcends the local and the particular to give us his Weltanschauung. The theme of The Pastures of Heaven and East of Eden is the American dream of finding a new Garden of Eden for the one lost by Adam and Eve; The Winter of Our Discontent has for its theme the decline of moral values in modern American society; and The Grapes of Wrath, Of Mice and Men and In Dubious Battle centre round the great and continuing divisions in American society, but there is a serious vein of thought underlying the topical nature of the subject-matter and its local background. Woodburn O. Ross suggests that Steinbeck's thought has been affected by the ideas of Hume, Rousseau and Auguste Comte.[1] Frederic I. Carpenter states that in the ideas of John Steinbeck, "the mystical transcendentalism of Emerson reappears, and the earthy democracy of Whitman, and the pragmatic instrumentalism of William James and John Dewey."[2]

[1]Vide "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," in Steinbeck and His Critics: A Record of Twenty-five Years, ed. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, third printing (Albuquerque, 1965), p. 178; cited hereafter as Tedlock.

[2]"The Philosophical Joads," in Tedlock, p. 242.

It is clear that Steinbeck has searched broadly for a philosophical framework in which to embody his ideas of the good life and the good society. It is also clear that the central tenets of his philosophy have a basic correspondence with those of Hindu thought. Nobody, however, appears to have studied this correspondence, though some critics have noticed it. Joseph Fontenrose, discussing To a God Unknown, writes: "The pantheistic theme links pagan and Christian forms of belief to the religious ideas of India, in which Steinbeck has shown interest. Joseph's Vedanta-like identity with the world is symbolized in his vision of his relaxed body as a world that endures for a million years and is then suddenly wiped out at the will of the brain overlooking it."[3] Warren French, too, notices the Hindu correspondence and refers to it in his discussion of In Dubious Battle: "Although Steinbeck makes no direct acknowledgment of any influence of Thoreau or Gandhi upon his thinking, he shared their concepts of individual dignity; it is not, therefore, out of the question to look for their idea of passive resistance in his work."[4] There is more of fundamental

[3] John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation (New York, 1963), pp. 17-18; cited hereafter as Fontenrose.

[4] John Steinbeck (New Haven, 1961), p. 68; cited hereafter as French.

similarity between Hindu thought and Steinbeck's than even these critics recognize.

Difficulties in the Way of a Critical Study of this Correspondence

However, there is much to discourage careful critical treatment of the parallelism between Oriental thought and Steinbeck's. First, a critic has to be conversant with the root concepts rather than the superficial and the more commonly known aspects of Hinduism such as the custom of sati (the wife's burning herself on her husband's funeral pyre), idol worship and the caste system. Second, terms like "Brahman" and "maya" may sound strange to American ears; and ideas like the divinity of man and the non-existence of evil may appear unfamiliar to persons brought up in certain Christian traditions. Another discouragement to critical treatment of this aspect of Steinbeck's thought is the extensive use of Western myths made by Steinbeck in his novels. By "Western" is here meant Biblical and Graeco-Roman myths, pagan fertility myths and Arthurian legends. The use of myths gives depth and significance to what is usually a realistic experience on the surface. It is a technique used to great advantage by artists like T. S. Eliot and William Faulkner. A wide use of well-known myths, however, is not without a certain disadvantage--it

may act as a "blinder" and possibly prevent the reader from perceiving the author's use of less well-known myths. For example, as I shall point out later, there are certain incidents in The Grapes of Wrath which are similar to some episodes in the life of Buddha, but the more obvious presence in the novel of myths from the Old and New Testaments would reduce the probability of an unwary Western critic's recognizing the Oriental parallelism. Similarly the figure of the old Chinaman in Cannery Row is a striking counterpart of Vishnu in the Gita,[5] but no critic appears to have noticed the possible correspondence in Steinbeck's work to this Hindu myth.

The extensive use of myths may also prevent the reader from recognizing ideas which may be implied by the writer but which may happen to be contradictory to those which are usually associated with the myths used. The Grapes of Wrath provides a good illustration. There can be little doubt that Jim Casy is meant to be a Christ figure, the equivalent and symbol in modern times

[5]Gita is the popular name of the Bhagavad-Gita, one of the important books of the great Sanskrit epic, Mahabharatha. Krishna elaborates the doctrines of the Upanishads to Arjuna, the Pandava hero, on the field of battle. Krishna is one of the incarnations of Vishnu. Quotations from the Gita are from Bhagavad-Gita, tr. Swami Prabhavananda and Christopher Isherwood, 11th printing (New York, 1964).

for what Christ represented at an earlier time. A complete identification, however, between Casy and Christ on the part of the reader diminishes the symbolic richness of Casy. He may not see that Steinbeck is making Casy express not the dualism of Christianity, but non-dualism which is associated with the Upanishads. Steinbeck's advocacy of non-dualism, or what Hindus call advaita, is the subject of a later chapter, but I may suggest here that the non-dualistic conception is indicated by Casy's statement that every man's soul is part of a bigger soul and that all life is holy, and by Joseph Wayne's identification with nature in To a God Unknown. The contention that the extensive use of certain myths may act as a stumbling block to the recognition of different ideas implied by the writer is borne out by Martin Staples Shockley's statement about Casy:

> It is easy to identify elements of Steinbeck's ideology with other religions. For example, the principles of reverence for life, or "all that lives is holy," has been believed and practiced for centuries by Buddhists. Such, however, I regard as incidental quibbling. In The Grapes of Wrath the major intended meaning is neither Buddhist nor Freudian nor Marxist; it is, I believe, essentially and thoroughly Christian. In my interpretation, Jim Casy unmistakably and significantly equates with Jesus Christ. 6

[6] "Christian Symbolism in The Grapes of Wrath," in Tedlock, p. 270.

Because Casy is a Christ figure, Shockley assumes that whatever Steinbeck is saying must be in accordance with Christian doctrines and rules out all other possibilities. But we shall see that there is more to Jim Casy and the way he is presented than we can find by restricting analysis to Christian symbolism.

Still another reason why the similarity of thought between Steinbeck and Hinduism may have been overlooked is Steinbeck's reticence. He shies away from giving information about himself and his writing. When the California State librarian sent him a questionnaire, he wrote:

> Name: John Ernst Alcibiades Socrates Steinbeck.
> Born: Lesbos, Magna Graece, 1902.
> Father: Heredotus Xenephon Steinbeck.
> Mother: Chloe Mathilde Lopez.
> Married to: Jo Alfreda Jones, in Tia Juana.
> Writings: The Unstrung Harpie. Donahoe, 1906.
> Taxgiversating Tehabedrous. MacDougall, 1927.
> Barnacles. (Ballinadae.) Monograph. 2 vols. Stanford University Press.
> Bugs, a Critical Study. Morbide Press.[7]

Steinbeck has not been more helpful regarding information about his reading either. There is little external evidence of Steinbeck's reading of Oriental books. It is frustrating

[7]Harry Thornton Moore, The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study (Chicago, 1939), p. 91.

for a critic not to find some external evidence in support of conclusions based on a reading of a writer's works. This kind of frustration may be seen in Joseph Fontenrose's statement: "Steinbeck has surely read the Bhagavad-Gita, but I cannot prove it."[8] The only valuable piece of information available is contained in Peter Lisca's statement:

> /Steinbeck's/ interest in oriental/sic/ and early Christian literature goes back as far as To a God Unknown, whose theme and title refer to both the Vedic Hymns and the Acts of the Apostles, and whose kindly priest reads La Vida del San Bartolomeo. Sea of Cortez demonstrates an intimate knowledge of the works of several Spanish Jesuits who wrote about Baja California, and The Wayward Bus shows a familiarity with St. John of the Cross. While he was working on The Pearl, he wrote to Pascal Covici about the Arabian Nights, "strange how you can find the roots of practically all western stories there." (JS - PC, 1/15/45) In his letters and fiction there are occasional references to the Bhagavad-Gita, Buddhism, and Oriental concepts of Being. Doc of Cannery Row quotes from "Black Marigolds" and reads Li Po. Ricketts once referred to The Golden Bough as "Steinbeck's Vade mecum." 9

As to whether Steinbeck has read the Upanishads, with the philosophy of which his thought has serious affinity,

[8]In his personal letter to the present writer, dated September 28, 1966.

[9]The Wide World of John Steinbeck, 4th printing (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1965), p. 223; cited hereafter as Lisca.

there is no information.

Internal Evidence

But though there is little external evidence of Steinbeck's readings of books on Hinduism and Buddhism, a study of his novels provides the reader with some evidence of Steinbeck's knowledge of Indian books. The Vedic hymn which he quotes as epigraph to his novel To a God Unknown and Bilhana's "Chaurapanchasika" (translated as "Black Marigolds" by Powys Mathers) quoted in Cannery Row are direct evidence of Steinbeck's knowledge of Oriental literature. He refers to Buddha in The Pastures of Heaven, Cannery Row, Sweet Thursday and The Winter of Our Discontent, and to the Gita in Sweet Thursday. Though the references are casual and not followed by any philosophical discussion, they are not without significance; even if they do not prove a first-hand knowledge, on Steinbeck's part, of the philosophies of the East, they do indicate a certain bias towards its spiritual and moral values. The correspondence between Steinbeck's and Oriental thought should not, therefore, come as a surprise. I have explained in the Appendix those of the Hindu root concepts which have a relevance to Steinbeck's thought.

Oriental Thought and Transcendentalism

It should be even less of a surprise if we remember the important role Oriental thought has played in the shaping of Transcendentalism. Transcendentalism is the cultural heritage of all Americans, except very recent immigrants, whether it is recognized as Transcendentalism or is called by some other name. It has ever remained a force in American culture and it is so pervasive that it is natural for Steinbeck to have imbibed it as a part of his heritage. To any one who has studied the Transcendentalists, Hinduistic ideas and concepts will be familiar ground. Emerson combined within himself Western and Eastern thought, though he could not always reconcile the two. A brief glance at those ideas of Emerson which are similar to Hindu thought will serve to show that Hindu thought is neither strange nor foreign to American thought. Emerson sees in the universe an all-pervading spiritual power which he calls the Over-Soul. This Over-Soul is his God, but he denies to it any personality. Nature and Spirit or Over-Soul are closely related to each other; in fact, nature is the symbol of the Spirit. All things in the universe emanate from the Over-Soul. The subject of his poem, "Brahma," is the absolute unity of the world which underlies the multiplicity of things. This fundamental unity is the Over-Soul

and is to be found everywhere: "What is there of the divine in a load of bricks? What is there of the divine in a barber's shop?....Much. All."[10] Emerson also posits that the soul in the individual is the same as the Over-Soul: "Within man is the soul of the whole."[11] ("The Over-Soul") Men usually do not see the unity underlying the multiplicity of objects because they suffer from illusions:

> Illusion works impenetrable,
> Weaving webs innumerable. ("Maia")[12]

In moments of illumination, however, man can see through illusions and be one with God: "He will weave no longer a spotted life of shreds and patches, but he will live with a divine unity."[13] ("The Over-Soul")

The illumination that Emerson refers to is the result of mystical experience, and in his essay, "The Over-Soul,"

[10] Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson and Waldo Emerson Forbes (Boston and New York, 1909-14), III, 321; cited hereafter as Journals.

[11] The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, ed. Edward Waldo Emerson (Boston and New York, 1903-04), II, 269; cited hereafter as Works.

[12] Works, IX, 348.

[13] Works, II, 297.

he describes one of his experiences: "There is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences."[14] This mystical experience should be applied, says Emerson, to the philosophy of history and to the daily conduct of life. An important corollary to the idea of unity which one experiences through mystic illumination is that both evil and good are illusory. First, good and evil are only relative terms. Second, the law of "Compensation" redresses any temporary imbalance, and he associates this law with the Hindu idea of karma. Third, good and evil exist on the level of phenomena only. "Mysticism denies the reality of 'evil' in the conventional sense, and Emerson's interpretation was fundamentally that of the mystic,"[15] explains Frederic Ives Carpenter. The man who has experienced the unity with the Over-Soul is beyond good and evil. Again, because the Over-Soul is by definition good, everything emanating from it is good. It follows that man, too, is good. When Emerson suggests that Jesus Christ was human, he is implying that every human being is divine. And when he talks of "self-reliance," he is not speaking of "self" in the sense of the empirical ego but of the higher self:

[14] Works, II, 267.
[15] Emerson Handbook (New York, 1953), p. 143.

"Self-reliance, the height and perfection of man, is reliance on God."[16] ("The Fugitive Slave Law")

Where Emerson got these ideas--whether from Plato, neo-Platonism, or Hinduism, or whether he arrived at them himself--is of no importance here. What is really to the purpose is that these ideas tend to bridge the wide gulf between ancient mystical Hindu thought and modern American pragmatism.

Historical Association between Hindu Thought and American Culture

The numerous references to Transcendental ideas in the foregoing are not without reason, for Steinbeck is in the direct though diffuse line which stretches from Emerson and Thoreau to the Hippies. From the early decades of the nineteenth century there has always been in America a small number of philosophers, writers and intellectuals who have shown an interest in the East, especially India, China and Japan. The Oriental philosophies of Hinduism and Buddhism came to America in the company of neo-Platonism, German Transcendentalism, and English Romanticism. Emerson was characteristically American in that he borrowed ideas from wherever he could.

[16]Emerson, Works, XI, 236.

He transcended Puritan intolerance and welcomed the spiritual values of the East. He and his disciple Thoreau had a first-hand knowledge of Hindu religious books like the Gita, the Laws of Manu, and the Vedas.[17] The mysticism of the Upanishads with its intuitive way of attaining knowledge appealed to Emerson more than the dry rationalism of the eighteenth century, and Upanishadic non-dualism more than Christian dualism. After Emerson and Thoreau, Transcendental thought became a pervasive influence in America, and the interest in Hinduism and Buddhism did not disappear altogether. Appropriately, it was in New England that most of the interest in Hinduism appears to have been centered. James Freeman Clarke published his Ten Great Religions (1871) "which went through at least twenty-two editions, and brought a knowledge of the high aspirations of other religious leaders to Christian people."[18] At Concord, the rumour ran, "in every household, they read the Rig-Veda at the breakfast-table."[19] As late as the

[17]Vide Arthur Christy, The Orient in American Transcendentalism, reprinted (New York, 1963), Appendix, pp. 278-323.

[18]Ambrose White Vernon, "Later Theology," in The Cambridge History of American Literature, ed. William Peterfield Trent et al (New York, 1921), III, 211.

[19]Van Wyck Brooks, New England: Indian Summer, 1865-1915 (New York, 1940), p. 23; cited hereafter as Brooks.

middle seventies, there was a class of young girls studying Sanskrit in the town of New Britain.[20] Francis Marion Crawford, the novelist, had studied Sanskrit and had been editor of the Indian Herald at Allahabad (India) for two years, and, back in America, he wrote for the press on every subject, including Buddhism. A longing "for the East was a symptom of the moment, especially marked in New England."[21]

The interest in Sanskrit studies was kept alive by the Harvard University Press with its publications of the Harvard Oriental Series, the first of which was The Jātaka-mālā: or Bodhisattva-avadāna-mālā [Buddhist Stories] (1891) and the third was Buddhism in Translations (1896). The American Oriental Society, New Haven, had started publishing its Journal half a century earlier, in 1843.

The meeting of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 drew the attention of the general public towards India. The Indian representative was Swami Vivekananda whose brilliant presentation of Hinduism made such a profound impression that The New York Herald wrote:

[20]Vide Brooks, p. 83.
[21]Ibid., p. 358.

"Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation."[22] He gave lectures at various places and founded Vedanta societies. "Vivekānanda's influence still lives in America. There are societies that teach Hinduism in various ways in New York, Boston, Washington, Pittsburg and San Francisco. His influence seems to be far stronger in San Francisco than anywhere else."[23]

The love of Buddhism led the New Englanders to Japan, too. Percival Lowell's The Soul of the Far East, a study of Japanese life and religion, was very popular, and it was at least partly responsible in sending Lafcadio Hearn to Japan. Ernest Fenollosa lived in Japan for a number of years and helped in saving traditional Japanese Art which the Japanese were discarding. John La Farge and Henry Adams were among others who were attracted to Japan. They visited Ceylon, too, and Adams "sat for half an hour under the shoot of Buddha's bo-tree. Where else could he ever hope to find Nirvana?"[24]

[22]Quoted in J. N. Farquhar, Modern Religious Movements in India (New York, 1919), p. 202.
[23]Ibid., p. 207.
[24]Brooks, p. 372.

The approach to the East of these persons was, however, different from that of Emerson. He had made an eclectic synthesis of Hindu idealism, Confucian practicality and Yankee pragmatism. He had serenely ignored all logical inconsistencies. The later New Englanders, however, wanted Buddhism not for stimulating thought but for "quiet, solace and escape."[25]

The influence of the East appears to have come to America through English sources, too. T. S. Eliot (an American who settled in England) and Aldous Huxley are two of those who influenced the American intelligentsia. Eliot's interest in Hinduism and Buddhism is evident in The Waste Land (1922). The influence of the East on Huxley may be seen in his Ends and Means (1937) and The Perennial Philosophy (1946). The Doors of Perception (1954), which gives an account of the effect of mescalin upon a sensitive person, drew perhaps more attention than his earlier books.[26] This kind of chemical experimentation with consciousness-changing drugs like LSD has been seriously and experimentally tried by Alan W. Watts and

[25] Ibid., p. 360.

[26] The use of chemicals for the heightening of consciousness is not entirely foreign, for it is known that William James had used nitrous oxide and ether to stimulate the mystical consciousness.

reported in his The Joyous Cosmology: Adventure in the Chemistry of Consciousness (1962). The interest of the Beatles in Eastern mysticism and the recent movement of the Hippies appear to be expressions of the drift towards the Orient.

Other American writers were inclined toward the East for various reasons. Ezra Pound was attracted to and influenced by various Oriental forms of poetry. Some of Eugene O'Neill's plays show a strong flavour of Oriental thought. He rejects materialism in favour of those intangible conditions of the Orient which would permit spiritual development, as in Marco Millions (1927) for example. All the actions of Marco, who represents the West, are directed towards making him rich. He is interested only in making millions. He wants even his father and uncle to pay him for the favours he may do in his official capacity. Kublai, who stands for the moral and spiritual values of the Orient, gives Marco an opportunity for spiritual growth, but he grows only a spiritual hump. Kublai's statement that "he has not even a mortal soul, he has only an acquisitive instinct" is only too true.[27] O'Neill suggests further that the acquisitive spirit of Marco has entered

[27] Nine Plays, reprinted (New York, n.d.), p. 251.

American culture by an interesting dramatic technique. O'Neill has appended a significant epilogue which runs:

> The play is over. The lights come up brilliantly in the theatre. In an aisle seat in the first row a MAN rises, conceals a yawn in his palm, stretches his legs as if they had become cramped by too long an evening, takes his hat from under the seat and starts to go out slowly with the others in the audience. But although there is nothing out of the ordinary in his actions, his appearance excites general comment and surprise for he is dressed as a Venetian merchant of the later Thirteenth Century. In fact, it is none other than MARCO POLO himself...His car, a luxurious limousine, draws up at the curb. He gets in briskly, the door is slammed, the car edges away into the traffic and MARCO POLO, with a satisfied sigh at the sheer comfort of it all, resumes his life. 28

Steinbeck could easily have imbibed Oriental ideas simultaneously with Transcendental thought. He is eclectic rather than original, religious rather than metaphysical, and mystical rather than dialectic. Various trends of thought have gone into Steinbeck's. What has been said of a typical American applies to Steinbeck: "He looted the philosophical stores of the past, took what pleased him without reference to logical coherence, and fitted it all

[28] Ibid., p. 304.

together into a pattern that had symmetry only in his eyes."[29]

Steinbeck Gains, in spite of Inherent Weaknesses, When Examined in the Light of Hindu Thought

It is not known whether, like Emerson, Steinbeck does not see any particular virtue in consistency. Whether he sees it or not, it appears that he lacks the first class intelligence necessary to integrate the various strands of thought that he has included in his philosophic repertoire into one organic whole. One sees in most of his writings a kind of yearning to find a solution which is religious rather than material. He would solve the problem of the migrants through making them comprehend the concept of the Over-Soul rather than through social and legal reforms. He wants men to recognize the unity of mankind, but he depends for it on intuition more than on education. Again, Steinbeck does not give us a complete system of philosophy, though he treats subjects like the Over-Soul, immortality, and reality and illusion. The argument of this thesis is that even if Steinbeck does not give us a complete system of philosophy, he is more profound than his critics have in general realized, and that his concepts of the Over-Soul,

[29]Henry Steele Commager, The American Mind, 17th printing (New Haven and London, 1965), p. 28.

immortality, and reality and illusion are seen to gain in added significance and depth when examined in the light of Oriental thought. The references to the Gita and Buddha indicate the direction in which we are to look to discover the full significance of what Steinbeck has written. The correspondence between Steinbeck's and Hindu thought illuminates aspects of Steinbeck's Weltanschauung which might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Steinbeck's Weltanschauung

In his early novel, To a God Unknown, Steinbeck makes a careful search for a satisfactory conception of the divine. He examines the Christian concept of an anthropomorphic God, pantheism, and the Over-Soul, and comes to the conclusion that while all these conceptions have a certain validity, the highest concept is that of the Over-Soul or the non-dualist Brahman.[30] He clarifies this concept further in the early chapters of The Grapes of Wrath and he appears to think that the Over-Soul is a kind of corporate soul of which individual souls are parts. He suggests that knowing the secret of one's own being is the first step towards comprehending the Over-Soul. He also appears to suggest that self-realization sublimates all

[30]Steinbeck's Godhead will be referred to as the Over-Soul to distinguish it from the Brahman of the Upanishads.

egoistical feelings and the service of humanity or true altruism is the natural outcome of self-realization. However, he protests very strongly against "do-goodism." The altruism he advocates is conceptually better understood in terms of what the Gita calls "desireless action."

In rejecting the conception of an anthropomorphic God, Steinbeck is rejecting the Christian and Western conception that man is the crown of creation and that the universe has been created for his benefit. He also feels that it is valid to understand man as an animal before he is understood as man. Steinbeck's view of life is biological--he accepts the biological heritage of man, treats all animate and inanimate things as though they live by their own right, and sees that everything in the universe is subject to the cosmic process which follows the biological law of birth, growth and decay. The biological concept of life implies ethical and spiritual values like the recognition of the unity of life, hospitality, and non-violence.

Steinbeck advocates very strongly that men and situations should be understood and accepted as they are--

"It's so because it's so."[31] This understanding-acceptance is called by Steinbeck "non-teleology." He considers Christian concepts to be teleological and therefore narrow-minded. He rejects most of the Christian doctrines and beliefs, like the depravity of man, Virgin Birth and the Bible's being the revealed word of God. Like the Upanishadic sages, he does not consider sin to be absolute. People want to be good, but it is unfortunate, he thinks, that goodness is made difficult. Only a guiding principle from within can bring about a harmonious relationship with the universe surrounding.

The reality of the universe, Steinbeck appears to predicate, consists of matter and spirit. He also appears to say that there are different levels of reality.[32] Illusions are less real than empirical reality, and, compared with ultimate Reality,[33] empirical reality itself is only relatively real. In The Pastures of Heaven, the stories deal with the inevitable

[31] The 'Log' from the Sea of Cortez, reissued (New York, 1962), p. 137; cited hereafter as The 'Log'.

[32] Subject of a later chapter.

[33] "Reality" in the phrase "ultimate Reality" will be spelt with a capital "R" to distinguish it from empirical reality.

disillusionment that faces those who accept illusion and empirical reality as Real. Illusion and Reality is the central theme of The Pearl, too. Because the empirical world is only relatively real, the Upanishads and the Gita recommend non-attachment as the ideal way of life. The central theme of Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row is non-attachment, and in Tortilla Flat, Steinbeck suggests that it is a very difficult ideal and that if man slips from its observance even once, he will find it difficult to be free again.

Steinbeck's conceptions of time and immortality, too, are similar to those of Hinduism. The Hindus have a cyclic conception of time. They believe that there is nothing in the world which has not been there before many times: history repeats itself and truth has to be discovered again and again. This idea is implied in the conception of the many incarnations, as against the single revelation of truth in Christianity through the person of Jesus Christ.

In Hinduism immortality consists of complete deindividualization or realizing the identity of the individual soul with the Brahman, while in Christianity separate individuality is retained even after death. Though Steinbeck does not state explicitly what happens to the

soul after death, he appears to imply, as may be seen from the self-realization of Joseph Wayne and Jim Casy, that immortality consists of the identification of the individual soul with the Over-Soul.

Steinbeck's Limitations as an Artist

Since we shall not be concerned with Steinbeck the writer and artist but with Steinbeck the philosopher, the technical weaknesses of Steinbeck as a literary artist may, therefore, be mentioned here briefly. However viable the values Steinbeck sets forth may be, it must be admitted that he does not make a philosophical presentation of them. He makes a serious enquiry into the nature of the divine, but the enquiry, considered as a philosophical concept, though serious is not systematic. A creative writer suffers from a handicap whenever he tries to express a philosophical concept in terms of a human story or abstract thought through symbolic action. The problem becomes all the more intricate when he tries to render Oriental ideas against the background of Western culture: intuition may be misunderstood for softness of the brain and contemplation for laziness. Steinbeck has not been able to surmount this difficulty in spite of relying rather heavily upon symbolism. Again,

he is an uneven writer. Not only does the quality vary from novel to novel, but in the same novel there are heights of excellence side by side with marks of weaknesses like sentimentality, weak characterization and theatricality. The unevenness may be seen in the case of even his best novel, The Grapes of Wrath. The non-dualistic philosophy it advocates, the powerful story it narrates, the great art with which the narrative and intercallary chapters are juxtaposed and integrated, and the number of strategically employed prose styles, like the structural rhythms of the Old Testament in some passages, the staccato prose of some others, the beautifully controlled objective passages of others still, and the earthy speech of the characters which give variety and epic sweep to the novel, have deservedly earned for it the praise given by Freeman Champney: "The Grapes of Wrath is a big book, a great book, and one of maybe two or three American novels in a class with Huckleberry Finn."[34] The novel is, however, not without certain weaknesses, especially that of sentimentalism. Frederick J. Hoffman appreciates In Dubious Battle, but all the other novels of Steinbeck are marked, he says, by "the deficiencies of a homespun philosophy, in

[34]"John Steinbeck, Californian," in Tedlock, p. 144.

which the suggestions made are vitiated and confused by a 'hausfrau sentimentality' and a naïve mysticism."[35] This criticism of Hoffman is too severe, but it has to be admitted that Steinbeck is an incorrigible sentimentalist. His sentimental approach to life may be seen in his celebration of non-intellectuals. The paisanos of Tortilla Flat, Mack and his friends of Cannery Row, and some of the soft-brained characters in his other novels are treated as born philosophers. Their foibles are applauded, vices white-washed, and virtues gilded. Gay (Cannery Row) is described as "the little mechanic of God, the St. Francis of coils and armatures and gears."[36] Tom Joad, too, is admired for being a good mechanic, but no blame is attached to him for killing a man in a drunken brawl. Nor is Pepe ("Flight") blamed for throwing a knife into the heart of a man in a little quarrel. And all the lovable characters in Steinbeck's fiction have a habit of feeling their way to a solution rather than reasoning it out.

[35] The Modern Novel in America: 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1951), p. 148.

[36] Cannery Row, in The Short Novels of John Steinbeck, reprinted (London, 1957), p. 418; cited hereafter as Short Novels. The volume contains in addition to Cannery Row, Tortilla Flat, The Red Pony, Of Mice and Men, The Moon Is Down, and The Pearl.

Sentimentalizing ruins, too, some of what would otherwise have been good realistic situations and turns them into tear-jerkers. In one of the intercallary chapters in The Grapes of Wrath (Chapter XV), the father of a migrant family comes into a restaurant with two little boys to purchase bread worth ten cents, which is all he can afford. A loaf costs fifteen cents and the girl at the counter does not want to sell only ten cents worth of it. At last she gives the whole loaf for ten cents only and candy worth ten cents for only one cent for the little boys. The sentiment is completely out of place since the chapter deals with the weary discontent of the rich and the exploitation of the migrants by businessmen along the way. For example, in the same restaurant are three slot machines, and when any one of them is ready to pay off, the owner himself plays and gets the jack pot. The incident described by Steinbeck is, therefore, unrealistic. Sentimental, too, is the scene of the final illness of Sairy Wilson. It has the same maudlin quality as of the death of Smike in Charles Dickens' Nicholas Nickleby and of Eva in Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin.

Another defect in The Grapes of Wrath is the theatricality of certain situations. The last scene in which Rose of Sharon breast-feeds the starving old man is a highly symbolic episode expressing the central theme of

the novel that all life is holy, but it leaves the impression that it has been manipulated to carry a moral. This is not a solitary instance, and there are other episodes in Steinbeck's novels which are theatrical--Pepe's standing up on the top of the mountain to receive the bullets in his chest, Kino's throwing the pearl into the sea, and George's shooting his friend Lennie.

Still another defect in The Grapes of Wrath is that some of the idealistic passages do not ring true. The well-known passage about progress is eloquent but unconvincing:

> This you may say of man--when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when narrow dark alleys of thought, national religious, economic, grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back. [37]

It reads as though the writer was trying to convince himself of something of which he was not too sure. ~~himself~~. And when Tom expresses at the end of the novel Transcendental metaphysics in words of one syllable, it is difficult to believe that an illiterate Okie like Tom could give expression to such beautiful thought.

[37] The Grapes of Wrath, reprinted (London, 1953), p. 135.

Steinbeck's Importance

In spite of all these weaknesses, however, Steinbeck holds an important position in that minor stream of American thought which has important correspondences with the Oriental from the days of Emerson onwards. The possibility that Steinbeck was not at all aware of the meaning the present writer derives from his work cannot be ruled out. It is also possible that this meaning was not at all intended by Steinbeck. In the words of Wallace Stevens, "That the meanings given by others are sometimes meanings not intended by the poet or that were never present in his mind does not impair them as meanings."[38] Hence this attempt.

[38]Quoted in "Stevens' 'The Emperor of Ice-cream'" (editorial notes), in The Explicator, VII, No.2 (Nov. 1948), Item 18.

CHAPTER — I

Steinbeck's Search for the Divine:

"Who Is the God to Whom We Shall Offer Sacrifice?"[1]

Steinbeck makes a serious enquiry into the nature of the divine in two of his novels--To a God Unknown and The Grapes of Wrath. It will, however, be found that this is a continuing concern, and in some of his other novels like Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven and In Dubious Battle the search is less ambitious but not entirely absent. It will be helpful to see what Steinbeck has to say about divinity in The 'Log' before considering his conception as it emerges from his novels.[2] There are several passages

[1]From the epigraph of To a God Unknown.

[2]John Steinbeck and Edward F. Ricketts are the joint authors of Sea of Cortez, 1941. The first half of the book is the log of the expedition and is written by Steinbeck, but is drawn from the two journals kept by both of them separately. The second half, written by Ricketts, comprises the scientific description of the specimens collected. The log was issued separately in 1951 as The 'Log' from the Sea of Cortez, with a profile of Ed Ricketts written after his accidental death in 1948. The book is invaluable as offering a definitive statement of the ideas underlying Steinbeck's fiction. Steinbeck himself considered the book to embody the central thought of all his writings. In this book, Steinbeck sets himself up as a philosopher and tries to explain the metaphysical basis of his artistic point of view.

which are relevant here. The first passage expounds the concept of the unity of life underlying all things. He writes:

> Our own interest lay in relationships of animal to animal. If one observes in this relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational to the point where an Einsteinian relativity seems to emerge. And then not only the meaning but the feeling about species grows misty. One merges into another, groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. Then one can come back to the microscope and the tide pool and the aquarium. But the little animals are found to be changed, no longer set apart and alone. And it is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, <u>known and unknowable</u>. 3 (Italics added.)

And when one achieves this cosmic view of things, one realizes that "in a unified-field hypothesis, or in life, which is a unified field of reality, everything is an

[3] <u>The 'Log'</u>, pp. 216-217.

index of everything else."[4]

This idea of unity advocated by Steinbeck is not original; it is not even new. Emerson expressed it more than a hundred years ago when he declared, "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact."[5] (Nature) He calls this unity the Over-Soul: "That Unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other."[6] ("The Over-Soul") The Upanishads proclaimed this concept about three thousand years ago: "[The Brahman] has filled all."[7] Steinbeck does not claim that the idea of unity is original; in fact, he refers to Emerson and his essay "The Over-Soul" in the chapter on non-teleological thinking (Chapter 14), though it does not necessarily follow that he got the idea of the Over-Soul from Emerson or was influenced by him. He posits, however, that

[4]Ibid., p. 257.
[5]Works, I, 26.
[6]Works, II, 268.
[7]Isa Upanishad, 8. The translations of the Upanishads quoted are from: S. Radhakrishnan (ed.), The Principal Upanisads (London, 1953).

> the profound feeling of...[the unity] made a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein. Each of them in his own tempo and with his own voice discovered and reaffirmed with astonishment the knowledge that all things are one thing and that one thing is all things— plankton, a shimmering phosphorescence on the sea and the spinning planets and an expanding universe, all bound together by the elastic string of time. 8

The unity of the universe, the inter-relationship throughout nature, Steinbeck intends to say, has been seen and accepted by scientists and philosophers alike, by a biologist like Charles Darwin, by a physicist like Einstein and by a seer like Jesus Christ. When science tries to explain the nature of the universe by as few concepts as possible, it is pointing towards the unity of the universe, since one concept alone cannot explain the universe unless the universe is one and unless all phenomena are governed by the same laws. Jesus Christ saw the operation of the moral law in the universe. As Emerson puts it, "The soul knows no persons. It invites every man to expand to the full circle of the universe, and will have no preferences but those of spontaneous love."[9] ("An Address Delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College")

[8] The 'Log', p. 217.
[9] Works, I, 130.

Another passage in The 'Log' provides, though it occurs earlier in the book, an explanation of the phrase "known and unknowable" found in the first passage quoted above. Steinbeck writes:

> The whole is necessarily everything, the whole world of fact and fancy, body and psyche, physical fact and spiritual truth, individual and collective life and death, macrocosm and microcosm (the greatest quanta here, the greatest synapse between these two), conscious and unconscious, subject and object. The whole picture is portrayed by is, the deepest word of deep ultimate reality, not shallow or partial as the reasons are, but deeper and participating, possibly encompassing the Oriental concept of being. 10

Basing his conclusions on observed biological data, Steinbeck predicates that there is a unity underlying all reality, reality ranging from empirical reality to the "Oriental concept of being." He does not clarify what he means by "Oriental concept of being," but his use of the two phrases "deep ultimate reality" and "Oriental concept of being" as synonyms, allows us to assume that he is referring to the Upanishadic concept of the Brahman, since the Upanishads describe the

[10] The 'Log', pp. 150-151.

Brahman as "the truth of truth"[11] or the Reality of reality. The Brahman is the ultimate Reality, the Absolute Principle of Existence.[12] Since it is not subject to change, decay or decease, as empirical objects are, the Brahman may be called the one true Reality. In comparison with this Reality, phenomenal reality is only partly real. This ultimate Reality underlies and unites all phenomena which, according to common sense and science, are a multiplicity of separate and individual objects.

Steinbeck, unlike most Christian apologists, posits, too, that there is divinity in man: "If we would cease to wear the image of a kindly, bearded, interstellar dictator, we might find ourselves true images of his kingdom, our eyes the nebulae, and universes in our cells."[13]

Steinbeck's Catholicity

The passages from The 'Log' quoted above contain the core of Steinbeck's conception of divinity. This conception may be called the Over-Soul, though Steinbeck

[11] Brihadaranyka Upanishad, II, 3, 6.

[12] The concept of the Brahman and Reality is discussed later in the chapter.

[13] The 'Log', pp. 264-265. It may be mentioned here that though Steinbeck does not agree with certain fundamental aspects of Christianity, his admiration for Jesus Christ and Christ's sacrifice for the sake of humanity is abundantly clear in his writings.

himself does not give it any name. He does not, however, rule out as invalid other conceptions of the divine. He does not, for example, agree with the anthropomorphic conception of God, but concedes that it has a certain validity. Describing a church and a statue of the Virgin, he writes:

> This is a very holy place, and to question it is to question a fact as established as the tide....This Lady, of plaster and wood and paint, is one of the strong ecological factors of the town of Loreto, and not to know her and her strength is to fail to know Loreto. One could not ignore a granite monolith in the path of the waves. Such a rock, breaking the rushing waters, would have an effect on animal distribution radiating in circles like a dropped stone in a pool. So has this plaster Lady a powerful effect on the deep black water of the human spirit. She may disappear and her name be lost, as the Magna Mater, as Isis, have disappeared. But something very like her will take her place, and the longings which created her will find somewhere in the world a similar altar on which to pour their force. No matter what her name is, Artemis, or Venus, or a girl behind a Woolworth counter vaguely remembered, she is as eternal as our species, and we will continue to manufacture her as long as we survive. 14

What Steinbeck says here is universally true. It reflects an idea deeply imbedded in Hinduism, for example,

[14]Ibid., pp. 175-176.

where Shakti symbolizes the procreative power of the universe. Though she is worshipped under various names by different sects, the Upanishads designate her by the name of maya, as the energy or the power inherent in the Brahman through which the universe has been created.

Steinbeck's Central Themes

The concepts of the nature of divinity, of the divinity in man, of the unity of all life, of Reality and illusion, and of non-attachment to the material things of the world are the central themes of Steinbeck's fiction. The present chapter will examine two of his major novels, To a God Unknown and The Grapes of Wrath, in which Steinbeck is concerned with his most profound search for the nature of divinity.

Analysis of To a God Unknown

To a God Unknown is a book dismissed with scant attention by several critics. Charles Child Walcutt, for example, writes that the novel "deals with a farmer whose devotion to this land becomes a mystical pagan fertility cult that leads to suicide when his crops fail."[15] (Italics added.) Even an understanding critic like Warren

[15] American Literary Naturalism, A Divided Stream (Minneapolis, 1956), p. 259.

French writes:

> One's reaction to the story depends upon one's interpretation of the behavior of the central character; if one finds Joseph Wayne more psychopathic than altruistic (and what educators would call "a slow learner" in the bargain), one is likely to have little patience with the rest of the book. Steinbeck may, of course, have intended Joseph to be viewed as insane: one of the priest's speeches--"Thank God this man has no message. Thank God he has no will to be remembered, to be believed in...else there might be a new Christ here in the West"--suggests that the whole novel may be intended to satirize the Messianic complex. If so, the satire got lost in pseudomysticism; the story would have had more human implications if Joseph...had had a message. If the point is simply that one should do what he likes, readers may find it hard to identify with a character who ends up slashing his wrists ritualistically. 16

That one critic could misunderstand Joseph's act of self-sacrifice (meant to symbolize, as I shall demonstrate later, the act of self-realization) and the other could consider Joseph to be insane is only further evidence of the great difficulty a creative writer has in rendering Oriental ideas in an Occidental context. A few critics, however, have seen into the symbolic revelation of the divine that Steinbeck offers through this novel. F. W. Watt

[16] French, p. 52.

writes: "Despite its flaws it has a passionate and haunting quality which makes it as memorable as anything Steinbeck has written....Its theme is the struggle for physical and spiritual fulfilment of Joseph Wayne."[17]

The novel depicts on the story level the lives of certain pioneer settlers. Joseph, hungry for land of his own, leaves the family farm in Vermont for California with his father's blessings. When his father dies shortly after, Joseph believes that his spirit has come to reside in the huge oak under which he has built his home. His three brothers come to join him, establish their separate homesteads and live with Joseph. Joseph's love for the land is seen in his passionate desire for increase and Joseph expresses this passion in a number of erotic images--the land is like a woman, a pine tree pierces the moon, and the intertwining boughs of a tree have a "curious femaleness."[18] Juanito, a Mexican Indian, takes Joseph to a glade with a rock and spring at the centre which had been a fetish for the Indians for generations and which now strikes Joseph as holy. Joseph marries

[17] John Steinbeck, 2nd printing (New York, 1962), p. 29; cited hereafter as Watt.

[18] To a God Unknown, p. 8.

Elizabeth and they get a son. The land is fertile, the animals breed, and everything appears to be flourishing when a drought sets in and at the same time Elizabeth falls and dies while trying to climb the rock in the glade. One of Joseph's brothers has been killed and another has moved away to town. The prayers and worship of the people of the valley for rain are of no avail and Joseph goes to the rock and sacrifices himself. The sacrifice finally brings the much needed rain.

To give Joseph's search for divinity depth and significance, Steinbeck uses a variety of myths. He places himself under obligation to the myth of the Fisher King, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the story of Joseph in the Old Testament, and ancestor worship. Though their use gives the novel symbolic depth, they have not made the narrative any more convincing.

Various Religious Attitudes: Animalism

But if the novel is unconvincing as a story, Steinbeck uses his characters to display various religious attitudes, all of which promote his religious relativism. He examines hedonism, animalism, sectarianism, paganism, Catholicism, and pantheism and finds them all wanting. He finally indicates that only the non-dualism of Joseph

(which, as I shall show, has a very close correspondence to Upanishadic non-dualism) has a meaningful spiritual value. Steinbeck's method of providing for different perspectives through the characters has frequently resulted in the creation of thin embodiments of points of view rather than convincing human beings. While this method is an artistic weakness, it has one minor convenience: there can be little doubt about what the characters represent. Thomas, the eldest brother, suffers from the limitations of instincts as against the powers of intuition in the search for the divine. The strange old man with whom Joseph feels such an affinity that he thinks he has met him before (though he has not) and who indicates to him the role of personal sacrifice in self-realization only makes Thomas nervous. The glade in which Joseph attains self-realization appears only evil to his brother. Thus the principal features of Joseph's spiritual environment are objects of fear to Thomas. Being a creature of pure instincts, he does not understand Joseph and the old man. Nor does he show any signs of spiritual development in the novel. However, from the sympathetic portrait Steinbeck has drawn of him, it is evident that he does not devalue instincts but only indicates their limitations in the search for the divine.

Veniality

If Thomas is blind to the spiritual nature of things because of the instinctual plane on which he lives, Benjy has vitiated the pure pleasure of instincts by his veniality. In his obsessive pursuit of the pleasures of the flesh, he is stabbed in the back by the man to whose wife he is making love. It is significant that Benjy, the venial lover, is killed the same evening that Joseph, the seeker of spiritual values, is married. Joseph has married Elizabeth for the symbolic purpose of fertility and there is no veniality in his relationship with her. Steinbeck appears to be suggesting here that spiritual progress can begin only after the death of obsessive veniality.

Sectarianism

Veniality may be dead to spiritual values, feels Steinbeck, but it is better than spiritual pride; for when spiritual pride sets itself above normal human weakness, the act is tantamount to a denial of divinity in other human beings. Benjy is blind but he is better than Burton who refuses to see. Burton represents the narrow-minded sectarian point of view. He is an evangelical Protestant who abhors paganism and hates Catholicism. If Steinbeck has disgust for anything, it is for narrow

sectarianism, since sectarianism is wilful depravity which precludes all possibility of spiritual evolution. The disgust is evident in the satirical portrait of Burton: "He kept himself from evil and he found evil in nearly all close human contacts."[19] His sickly squeamishness makes him one of Steinbeck's least likable characters. He is described as follows:

> Burton had embraced his wife four times. He had two children. Celibacy was a natural state for him. Burton was never well. His cheeks were drawn and lean, and his eyes hungry for a pleasure he did not expect this side of heaven. In a way it gratified him that his health was bad, for it proved that God thought of him enough to make him suffer. [20]

His mortification of the flesh has given him intolerance and uncharitableness bordering on positive cruelty. He has isolated himself from the rest of humanity. The fact that he suffers from the sin of spiritual pride may be seen from his declaration: "'There is only one law. I have tried to live in that law.'"[21]

[19]Ibid., p. 38.
[20]Ibid., p. 38.
[21]Ibid., p. 209.

Steinbeck apparently means Burton to be a complete contrast to Joseph, for he is the farthest removed from the spiritual evolution that would lead man to self-realization. Burton sees only evil around him; Joseph sees no evil. Burton isolates himself from the rest of humanity; Joseph identifies himself with the universe. Burton is a sick man; Joseph is healthy, their state of physical health being indicative of their spiritual state.

Steinbeck evidently means Burton to be a contrast to Thomas and Benjy, too. The two latter characters, as I have stated earlier, do not evolve spiritually in the novel, but the fact that they do not deny life is a factor in their favour. Burton does not and cannot progress spiritually, for he refuses to live. He accepts neither himself nor life. So while Benjy and Burton could conceivably progress (since they are only ignorant and not wilfully blind), Burton is utterly and irrevocably damned.

Catholicism

As a contrast to the sectarian Burton, Steinbeck offers in Father Angelo a portrait of what may be considered a traditional good Catholic. Steinbeck indicates that when even good men are coerced by organized religion into

conforming to traditional beliefs, there must be some broader concept of the divine to fall back upon, and Steinbeck advocates non-dualism as the right alternative. Father Angelo is tender and understanding, but his patronizing air towards the people who celebrate pagan rites betrays a sense of superiority: "'They wanted the rain so, poor children.'"[22] And instead of helping the Mexican Indians to search for spiritual values, he continues to keep them in darkness by providing them with three-foot figures of the Mother and Child, beautifully carved in wood, blessed and completely sanctioned by the archbishop. Steinbeck implies that it is the traditional church which is responsible for this condescending attitude, since it considers priests to be intermediaries between God and the layman. Again, Catholic doctrines prevent Father Angelo from admitting Joseph's spiritual stature even when he comprehends his greatness. In an unguarded moment of admiration for Joseph, he calls him a new Christ: "'Thank God this man has no message. Thank God he has no will to be remembered, to be believed in.' And in sudden heresy, 'else there might be a new Christ here in the West.'"[23] However, he soon recants as if he

[22]Ibid., p. 325.
[23]Ibid., p. 310.

had committed some sacrilege in speaking of a mere mortal in terms of God. A doctrine which sees only dualities and differences in the universe is less broad and ennobling than the one which sees the identity of the Creator and the created.

Again, Father Angelo has a patronizing air towards the dancing of the Indians. On the other hand, when they start dancing at the fiesta, Joseph says, "'Something will come of this. It's a kind of powerful prayer.'"[24] It starts pouring before the dance is over. Later, Joseph remarks, "'The dance was timeless,...--a thing eternal, breaking through to vision for a day.'"[25] Steinbeck's upholding of the dance and paganism is better understood in the light of the Oriental view of dancing. The significance of dancing was apprehended by the ancient Hindu sages who depicted Shiva as the Cosmic Dancer. Heinrich Zimmer explains:

> Like yoga, the dance induces trance, ecstasy, the experience of the divine, the realization of one's own secret nature, and, finally mergence into the divine essence....To summon from dormancy the nature-powers attendant

[24]Ibid., p. 161.
[25]Ibid., p. 167.

> upon fruitfulness, dancers mimic the gods of vegetation, sexuality and rain.
>
> The dance is an act of creation. It brings about a new situation and summons into the dancer a new and higher personality. It has a cosmogonic function, in that it arouses dormant energies which then may shape the world. On a universal scale, Shiva is the Cosmic Dancer. 26

The dance of the Mexican Indians is not only an expression in terms of rhythmic movement of the desire for rain and all that it symbolizes, but an expression of their fusion with the cosmos and hence with the divine.

Anthropomorphism

Steinbeck feels that it is not only old traditions which can be wrong, but some old concepts, too. Anthropomorphism, for instance. At the time of her marriage to Joseph, Elizabeth tries to imagine the face and figure of Christ, and "when she drew a picture of the Christ in her mind, He had the face, the youthful beard, the piercing puzzled eyes of Joseph, who stood beside her."[27] She recognizes the limitations of her idea of God almost immediately: "She laughed uneasily and confessed to herself, 'I'm praying to my own husband.'"[28]

[26] Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, 3rd printing (New York, 1965), pp. 151-152; cited hereafter as Myths.

[27] To a God Unknown, p. 88.

[28] Ibid., p. 89.

Pantheism

Steinbeck offers a strange old man who represents pantheism as a contrast to Elizabeth whose concept of God is anthropomorphic, to Burton who is a sectarian, and to Father Angelo who holds the Christian God to be superior to and distinct from nature ("'Jesus is a better saviour than a hamadryad'"[29]). Like the pantheistic God who is impersonal and whose spirit pervades the universe, the strange old man is meaningfully made impersonal by Steinbeck. He has not been given a proper name; nor has he a clear identity and personality. He identifies himself with the sun which represents God. He lives on the top of the hill near the seashore and hence is the last man everyday to see the sun set as though he cannot bear to live away from its presence. He sacrifices an animal to it every evening because he has a vague belief, though he is not sure, that the sun, like himself, requires nourishment: "'I can't tell that it does not help the sun.'"[30] He talks of sacrificing himself ultimately: "'When...[the perfect time] comes, I, myself, will go over the edge of the world with the sun. Now you know. In every man this thing is hidden.

[29]Ibid., p. 158.
[30]Ibid., p. 266.

It tries to get out, but a man's fears distort it. He chokes it back.'"[31] The old man appears to be saying that man can become one with God at some perfect moment in the future. He, however, sees the moment of fusion of the individual and God as a certain moment in historical time. He also believes that the fusion can be brought about by a physical sacrifice of oneself. Here, according to Steinbeck, appear to be the limitations of pantheism. The old man does not see that man is always divine, that God is not only immanent but transcendent and that a physical sacrifice of one's body is not necessary. The old man reappears as a character in a novel written twenty-one years later (Sweet Thursday) and he repeats to Doc almost what he had said to Joseph: "'I have to go to the sunset now. I've come to the point where I don't think it can go down without me.'"[32] Steinbeck appears to be suggesting through this repetition that pantheism has its limitations and that the farthest a pantheist can go is to identify himself with nature. Pantheism is limited because its concept of the divine is only immanent and not transcendent.

[31] Ibid., p. 267.
[32] Sweet Thursday, reprinted (London, 1956), p. 70.

Non-dualism

Steinbeck intends Joseph to be a contrast to some of the other characters in the novel and to be more successful in his search for the divine, for his concept of the divine is broader and more profound than theirs. Joseph is not a sensualist like Benjy and not squeamish like Burton. He is less instinctual than Thomas and more clear-headed than the old man. At one time or another he believes in spirits, in anthropomorphism, in pantheism and finally arrives at the concept of the Over-Soul.

Joseph's distrust of institutional religion reflects Steinbeck's search for a more comprehensive and workable idea of the divine. Joseph finds the Church "only a doddering kind of devil worship."[33] The Church is to him a meaningless institution, for it is more interested in a moral code imposed upon from without than in a probe within. As Joseph tells the old man, "'It is not thought safe to open a clear path to your soul for the free, undistorted passage of the things that are there.'"[34]

[33] To a God Unknown, p. 88.
[34] Ibid., p. 267.

Steinbeck and his protagonist find pantheism more meaningful than anthropomorphism, but even pantheism, as shown above, is not enough. Joseph realizes this when he sacrifices a calf hoping to make it rain and it does not. Joseph's discarding of external and ritualistic sacrifice marks probably the most important step in his spiritual progress. His rejection of external sacrifice and institutional religion has a characteristic parallel in the movement in the Vedas. The progress from the Mantra (the first section of each Veda) to the Upanishad (the last section of each Veda) is from prayer to institutional religion to philosophy.[35] Joseph rejects as useless the sacrifice of something external and sacrifices something of himself. If this sacrifice of the body is meant to be significant and not to be taken merely as an act of desperate suicide, then we have to interpret the sacrifice of the body to be symbolic of the sacrifice of the ego. The idea that the sacrifice is to consist of the ego of the person and not of something which is material and external to him was expressed long ago by the Upanishads, though the idea of personal sacrifice for the sake of humanity is to be found in all the major religions. By the sacrifice of his separative ego, Joseph recognizes

[35]For fuller details, please see appendix 'A'.

the identity of himself and the universe, or, to put it in Hinduistic terms, of the Atman and the Brahman.

Joseph's Self-realization

Joseph's discovery of the identity of himself and the universe at the end of the novel comes about, Steinbeck leads us to believe, through intuition. The intuitive process of self-realization is described in one highly suggestive sentence: "And now the calm redescended upon him, and his fear was gone."[36] It is important to notice that Steinbeck writes "the calm" (italics added), and that he says the calm "redescended" upon Joseph. By using the definite article he suggests that it was a calm unlike any other, that it was an infinity of calm, that it was that boundless calm which precedes self-realization only. The predicate "redescended" is even more significant, for "descent" is the word which Hindu Yogis use to describe the action which precedes the final self-realization. Sri Aurobindo writes: "...The descent which is essential for bringing the permanent ascension, an increasing inflow from above, an experience of reception and retention of the descending spirit or its powers and elements of consciousness."[37] The

[36] To a God Unknown, p. 321.
[37] The Life Divine (New York, 1949), p. 811.

correspondence between the thought and language of Steinbeck and those of Hinduism is nothing if not striking.

In terms of the story, Joseph's hand has been cut by a saddle buckle and his wrist and palm are covered by blood. He climbs the rock, lies on it and opens the vein in his wrist.

> The pain was sharp at first, but in a moment its sharpness dulled. He watched the bright blood cascading over the moss, and he heard the shouting of the wind around the grove. The sky was growing grey. And time passed and Joseph grew grey too. He lay on his side with wrist outstretched and looked down the long black mountain range of his body. Then his body grew huge and light. It arose into the sky, and out of it came the streaking rain. "I should have known," he whispered. "I am the rain." And yet he looked dully down the mountains of his body where the hills fell to an abyss. He felt the driving rain, and heard it whipping down, pattering on the ground. He saw his hills grow dark with moisture. Then a lancing pain shot through the heart of the world. "I am the land," he said, "and I am the rain. The grass will grow out of me in a little while." 38

The phrase "mountain range of his body" is a figure rich in associations. Certain mountains are believed to be

[38] To a God Unknown, pp. 321-322.

the residences of gods--the Olympus of Zeus, the Himalayas of Shiva, etc. The highest mountain, real or imaginary, in a country is also spoken of as the connecting link between heaven and earth, and, therefore, is believed to be the centre of the world. Mount Meru in India and "Mount of the Lands" in Mesopotamia are examples. Again, going up a mountain is symbolic of spiritual progress. As a man climbs a mountain, he leaves the plains below. Similarly he leaves his worldly desires behind when he starts on his spiritual pilgrimage. Moses' going into the mount, Christ's into the wilderness, and the practice of the Hindus in ancient times retiring into forests or mountains to contemplate are well known. At the top of the mountain man is alone with God. In other words, he is alone and in mystic communion with the transcendental.

Still again, "temples are replicas of the cosmic mountain,"[39] and it is significant that the rock on which Joseph dies is described (as I shall demonstrate later) in terms closely applicable to a Hindu temple. The significance of his death when quite alone (even his horse has fled) becomes clear in the context of the Hindu temple's being not a place for community worship but for the individual to discover the innermost secret

[39]Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane; The Nature of Religion, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1959), p. 39.

of his being. Steinbeck is clearly concerned with the journey of self-discovery known to the Hindus as the quest for the Atman or the divine inner self.

The idea that God is supposed to reside on the top of the mountain is perhaps reflected on the metaphysical level in the Upanishads and Tantras.[40] "The Brahmopaniṣad (II,9) expounds a curious theory of the 'four places' inhabited by the puruṣa [cosmic consciousness] : the navel, heart, neck, and head. Each of these regions has a corresponding state of consciousness: the navel (or the eye), the state of diurnal waking; the neck, sleep; the heart, dreamless sleep (suṣupti); the head, the transcendental state (turiya)."[41] That is, the head and the mountain symbolize the highest state. The same idea is expressed when the spinal column is referred to as Mount Meru--at the top lives God. The Tantras postulate that the body is made up of vertically arranged sections of ascending importance, the highest of which is the brain. In the brain is supposed to take place the union of Shiva-Shakti.

[40]For more details about Tantrism, please see appendix 'B.'

[41]Mircea Eliade, Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, translated from the French by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1958), p. 128.

Steinbeck identifies a mountain as the spiritual symbol of man in his first novel, Cup of Gold: "Sir Henry Morgan lay in an enormous bed; a bed so wide that his body, under the coverlid, seemed a snow-covered mountain range dividing two great plains."[42] Again, "'They are moving,'...[Morgan] thought. 'I am not moving. I am fixed. I am the center of all things and cannot move. I am as heavy as the universe. Perhaps I am the universe.'"[43] Thus when Joseph identifies himself with the mountains he is expressing an idea which closely approximates to Upanishadic and Tantric thought. The mountains he is watching are himself, and the rain he has been wanting is himself. He sees himself everywhere in the universe and the universe in himself. The term for this manner of comprehending man's relation to the universe is advaita or non-dualism, a concept first posited by the Upanishads and later advocated in America by Emerson.

Non-dualism of the Upanishads

A brief glance at the Upanishadic non-dualism will reveal how closely akin it is to Steinbeck's non-dualism.

[42] Cup of Gold, 8th printing (New York, 1962), p. 191.
[43] Ibid., p. 196.

The Upanishads are a core of documents in which are to be found the roots of various systems of thought in Hinduism. The most important of these systems is the non-dualistic school. Behind the manifold plurality of objects and the ever-changing phenomena of nature the Upanishadic philosophers saw an unchanging Reality. This Reality they called the Brahman.[44] The Brahman is described as having two aspects: the one without any form or qualifying aspects and called the Nirguna Brahman, and the other with form and characteristics and called Saguna Brahman.[45] The Saguna Brahman is a personal God for worship for those who cannot meditate on the Impersonal Absolute. The process of the creation of the universe, according to the Upanishads, may be said to have two stages. In the beginning, there was the Brahman alone. It accepted the limitations of maya and became the Saguna Brahman. The Saguna Brahman decided to multiply Himself and created the universe. The universe was not created out of something outside Himself but out of Himself. One of the images used to describe the creation

[44]For a more detailed discussion of non-dualistic thought, please see appendix 'C.'

[45]It is usual to designate the Brahman without attributes by the neuter "It" and the Brahman with qualities by the masculine "He."

of the universe is that of the spider and its web. Again, the Brahman pervades the universe in the same way as a lump of salt dropped into a glass of water would diffuse into it--the salt would be invisible, but every drop of water would be salty. Similarly everything in the universe, animate and inanimate alike, has the Brahman within it. Here the Upanishadic thought shows a pantheistic strain. The Brahman is immanent in the universe, but did not exhaust Himself in creating it. He remains outside and above His creation also. He is, therefore, not only immanent but transcendent.

The Upanishadic seers looked at the process of nature and wondered whether there was anything that was constant in this world of change, anything real behind the mutability. And they came to the conclusion that there was something which was immutable and called it the Brahman. In the same way they looked within themselves and observed the incessant changes in the body and the flow of emotions, thoughts and sensations. Amidst this constant procession they found something superior to it and called it the Atman. "Brahman" was the name they gave to the ultimate essence in the universe, and "Atman" to the vital breath in man, but the Brahman and Atman are not two distinctive things. The two terms are

synonymous. What is called the Brahman from the objective side is called the Atman from the subjective. "It was here," writes Paul Deussen, "that for the first time the original thinkers of the Upanishads, to their immortal honour, found it when they recognized our atman, our inmost individual being, as the Brahman, the inmost being of universal nature and of all her phenomena."[46]

The Upanishads consider the ultimate end of human life and endeavour to be moksha or mukti, liberation or emancipation. It is liberation from human finiteness which looks upon things in the universe as separate entities, and a realization that they are all parts of one whole. It is a liberation from the passions and emotions that usually sway men and an emancipation from the ignorance of the divinity in us. It means the realization of the identity of the Brahman and the Atman.

Motif of Non-dualism in To a God Unknown

The concept of non-dualism which Steinbeck advances at the end of the novel in clear terms does not come as a surprise. He has been preparing the reader for it

[46] The Philosophy of the Upanishads, reprinted (Edinburgh, 1919), p. 40.

throughout the novel with unobtrusive but suggestive evidence. The evidence is provided even before the story begins--in the epigraph. The epigraph is a hymn from the Rigveda, Book X, No. 121. Epiphanius Wilson,[47] who holds a very high opinion of the Vedic hymns in general, and of this in particular, writes:

> The Vedic hymns are among the most interesting portions of Hindoo literature....One of the most remarkable of these hymns is that addressed to the Unknown God. The poet says: "In the beginning there arose the Golden Child. As soon as he was born he alone was the lord of all that is. He established the earth and this heaven." The hymn consists of ten stanzas, in which the Deity is celebrated as the maker of the snowy mountains, the sea and the distant river, who made fast the awful heaven, He who alone is God above all gods, before whom heaven and earth stand trembling in their mind. Each stanza concludes with the refrain, "Who is the God to whom we shall offer sacrifice?" 48

Steinbeck's version of this hymn differs in some respects from the standard translations. Peter Lisca points out how the original hymn has ten stanzas, not six, how Steinbeck combines five and six, seven and eight, and how the first and last stanzas have been omitted. But

[47]Epiphanius Wilson (1845-1916) wrote and edited six books, two of which are: The World's Great Classics: Hindu Literature and Sacred Books of the East, both of them published by the Colonial Press, New York.

[48]Epiphanius Wilson, Sacred Books of the East, revised ed. (New York, London, n.d.), Introduction, p. 3.

> the most important change is that where other versions follow the original in giving the lines "May He not injure us, Who is the begetter of earth, the true and faithful one who begat the sky, who begat the great and shining waters" as a prayer, a request, Steinbeck makes them interrogative: "May He not hurt us, He who made the earth,/Who made the sky and the shining sea?"
>
> This change from prayer to question...is basic to the novel. For To a God Unknown is concerned not only with the problem of "Who is He to whom we shall offer our sacrifice?" (as the poem's refrain indicates), but also with the nature of man's proper relationship to that God. 49

It is true that Steinbeck has converted a prayer into a question. The refrain has been variously translated. F. Max Muller translates it as: "Who is the God to whom we shall offer sacrifice?"[50]--which is the same as Steinbeck's in the last stanza. (In the other stanzas Steinbeck uses "He" in place of "the God".) R. T. H. Griffith translates the refrain as: "What God shall we adore with our oblation?"[51] Kaegi's translation is essentially the same: "What god shall we adore with our oblation?"[52] The Hindu translators, however, render it:

[49]Lisca, pp. 41-42.

[50]Sacred Books of the East, ed. Epiphanius Wilson, pp. 5-6.

[51]Swami Nikhilananda, ed. The Upanishads, abridged ed. (New York, 1964), General Introduction, pp. 18-19.

[52]Vide Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, I, reprinted (Cambridge, 1957), 19.

"He it is to whom we offer our oblation."[53] The hymn describes the characteristics of the God who has created the universe. He is the creator ("He is the giver of breath," "He made the sky and the earth"); He is the ruler ("And he rules the world and the men and the beasts"); and He is omnipotent ("The high Gods revere his commandments"). Knowing all this, why does Steinbeck ask: "Who is the God to whom we shall offer sacrifice?" The implication appears to be that there are several conceptions of God, each one valid to some extent. The God Steinbeck and Joseph are in search of and finally discover, however, is not a figure having any particular form. As Emerson said, "I deny personality to God because it is too little, not too much."[54] God is not to be considered as nothing more than nature either, for He is not only immanent but transcendent. He is not outside man, and so the search for Him is to be not outward but inward. He is in the heart of everyone. He does not need a ritualistic sacrifice. Epiphanius Wilson sees monotheism in the hymn:

[53] Swami Nikhilananda, Ed. The Upanishads, abridged ed. (New York, 1964), General Introduction, p. 18 n.

[54] Journals, IV, 416.

> We have in this hymn a most sublime conception of the Supreme Being, and while there are many Vedic hymns whose tone is pantheistic and seems to imply that the wild forces of nature are Gods who rule the world, this hymn to the Unknown God is as purely monotheistic as a psalm of David, and shows a spirit of religious awe as profound as any we find in the Hebrew Scriptures. 55

But Wilson misses an important point in the hymn. It expresses monotheism, but what is more, it expresses monism. The concept of monism or non-dualism was to be developed later in the Upanishads, but it is suggested in this hymn:

> From His strength the mountains take being,
> and the sea, they say,
> And the distant river;
> And these are his body and his two arms. (Italics added.)

And it is this monistic idea that Joseph expresses at the end of To a God Unknown. His God is unlike the earlier God of the Old Testament, a God of anger and jealousy. He is also unlike the fatherly figure of the New Testament. He is like the Hinduistic Brahman, the Transcendental Over-Soul.

[55] Sacred Books of the East, Introduction, pp. 3-4.

Steinbeck continues to express the idea of non-dualism in terms of the story. When Joseph is returning home with Elizabeth after their marriage, they come to a high pass in the mountains and their walking through it is described in obvious sexual imagery. Critics have taken the description to be symbolic of nothing more than sexual intercourse. Peter Lisca, for example, writes: "The scene in which Joseph takes his bride through the narrow, steep pass in the mountains is so obviously symbolic of sexual intercourse and the loss of virginity that it needs no comment--the monolith, the stream, the naked white rock, the valley beyond."[56] The sexual image itself is symbolic of something more difficult to describe--the act of dualities becoming a non-duality. Joseph wants to tell Elizabeth something, but he cannot put it into words. He addresses her silently in his heart:

> "Listen, Elizabeth. Do not be afraid. I tell you I have thought without words. Now let me grope a moment among the words, tasting them, trying them. This is a space between the real and the clean, unwavering real, undistorted by the senses. Here is a boundary. Yesterday we were married and it was no marriage. This is our marriage--through the pass--entering the

[56]Lisca, p. 51.

> passage like sperm and egg that have become a single unit of pregnancy. This is the symbol of the undistorted real. I have a moment in my heart, different in shape, in texture, in duration from any other moment. Why, Elizabeth, this is all marriage that has ever been, contained in our moment." 57

Joseph and Elizabeth are no longer two persons but one entity, and the duality represented by two persons--the duality of the I and the you, self and not-self, man and God, God and nature--no longer exists. Joseph and Elizabeth form one microcosm, and as Joseph says, their marriage is all marriages. Their passage through the pass, with its symbolic meaning, takes place in a kind of micro-time, a moment which is a capsule of eternity.

Steinbeck points to the concept of non-dualism through the ritualistic act of Rama's going to Joseph's bed also. Joseph, like the Fisher King, has become in a sense impotent, for Elizabeth is dead. Rama goes to him, for the union with Rama is, as she tells him later, a need for him. Rama is described as a "strong, full-breasted woman with black brows that nearly met over her nose....She automatically took charge of all children

[57] <u>To a God Unknown</u>, pp. 96-97.

who came near her."[58] She is a Mother-Earth figure, an idea I shall demonstrate later in this chapter. The union of Rama and Joseph approximates, as I shall show later, to the union of Shiva-Shakti, the "antagonistic yet cooperative pairs of opposites."[59]

Joseph's intuitive progress towards self-realization is given a concrete direction by a story which Elizabeth had once told him: "'Elizabeth told me once of a man who ran away from the old Fates. He clung to an altar where he was safe.'"[60] The story indicates to Joseph the solution to his problem--going to the rock in the glade and clinging to it spiritually. The rain that follows is symbolic of his spiritual regeneration. In Hinduistic terms, he attains liberation or moksha at the moment of his death.

Symbolism of Sex Rituals

Non-dualism and self-realization are basically Oriental concepts and Steinbeck advocates ideas which are closely parallel to them. It is, therefore, not surprising that he uses a hymn from the Rigveda to indicate the

[58]Ibid., p. 37.
[59]Heinrich Zimmer, Myths, p. 137.
[60]To a God Unknown, p. 296.

direction in which we should look to get at the real meaning of what he has written. There are other indications. I have stated earlier that the erotic image of the walking of Joseph and Elizabeth through the pass is symbolic of the merging of dualities into a unity. Eroticism is not absent in Christianity or Islam. Sufism (Islamic mysticism) refers to God as the Lover, and the medieval Western monk, St. Bernard, uses a sexual image when speaking of the relationship of the soul to Christ. The "Song of Solomon" expresses what is believed to be the love between Christ and the Church in highly sensuous terms. Erotic imagery, however, appears to be more prevalent in Hinduism. The highest moment of bliss, when all individualities are forgotten and the identity of the Brahman and the Atman is recognized, is often described in sexual terms. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says, "As a man when in the embrace of his beloved wife knows nothing without or within, so the person when in the embrace of the intelligent self knows nothing without or within."[61] In Tantrism, sexualism becomes an analytical technique and instrument of salvation. Sexuality serves as a vehicle for attaining transcendence. The woman symbolizes prakriti, the supreme primordial energy, and

[61] Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, IV, 3, 21.

man, purusha, the supreme cosmic consciousness. She is the activating energy, dynamic and creative; he is the passive and contemplative aspect. The texts dealing with Tantric cults are written in an esoteric language which is difficult to understand, and one cannot be sure whether a particular statement in their scriptures is to be taken literally or symbolically. One cannot say categorically whether the cults are trying to convey the idea that the bliss of realization is as inexpressible as that of the sex act, or that man has an equal capacity for physical and spiritual love. It is, however, clear that the Tantrics mean sexual union to be a means to self-realization.

The evidence, both by statement and by implication, leads one to believe that Steinbeck intends us to view the episode of Joseph and Rama in the light of the sex rituals of the Tantrics. Then only does the episode, which on the realistic level is one of adultery, achieve a profundity. Rama is a symbol of prakriti, the supreme primordial energy of Tantric metaphysics. Prakriti, the principle, becomes Shakti, the goddess, in Tantric theology, where she is worshipped as the divine Mother. Shakti is the consort of Shiva and is known by many other names, like Parvati, Uma, etc. Two of the names significant

in this context are Jagadamba (Mother of the earth or universe) and Annapurna (Goddess of plenty, One who is full of food), and as Annapurna, She may be identified with Mother-Earth who provides food. As far as Rama is concerned, there can be little doubt that Steinbeck intends her to be a Mother-Earth figure. In addition to the description of her person, to which reference has been made earlier, Steinbeck gives her a name which associates her with a famous heroine in Indian literature who is clearly a Mother-Earth figure--Sita of the Ramayana. The association is very interesting. The name of the epic hero is Rama; in the novel, it is the same name but is now applied to a woman. It is the practice of Steinbeck to use names suggestively. For example, in The Grapes of Wrath, he uses the name Joad to suggest Judah, an Old Testament name, and "toad," that lowly but enduring creature. In East of Eden, the good characters have names beginning with "A"--Adam, Aaron and Abra, to suggest "Abel," and the bad characters have names beginning with "C"--Cathy, Charles and Caleb, to suggest "Cain." The parallelism between and the significance of the names of Rama of the novel and Rama of the Ramayana are illuminating. On the occasion of Elizabeth's first coming to the ranch after her marriage, Rama had "around her neck, upon a silver chain...an amulet

of ivory brought by some sailor ancestor from an island in the Indian Ocean."[62] The reference to the Indian Ocean and the amulet of ivory suggests the direction in which we are to look to get the full significance of the character and of the novel. As if to see that this suggestion is not lost, Steinbeck goes on to say that "the laws of Rama never changed, bad was bad and bad was punished, and good was eternally, delightfully good."[63] Rama, the epic hero, is famous for his justice, and the association of the two persons is apparently intentional.

It is pertinent to note here that the name of the wife of Rama is Sita, and "sita" means "furrow" in Sanskrit. In the ancient hymns of the Rigveda, Sita is simply the goddess of the field-furrow which bears crops for men. That Sita of the epic is associated with the fertility of the earth is made clear by the way she is born--she is found in a furrow of a field by her father. And she dies by disappearing into the earth. Sita is a Mother-Earth figure like the Rama of the novel. And as a Mother-Earth figure, Rama is one of the aspects of Shakti, the divine Mother worshipped by the Tantrics.

[62] To a God Unknown, p. 115.
[63] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

Three of the details in the Tantric sex ritual in the light of which the Rama-Joseph episode attains a significant position in Joseph's progress towards self-realization may be noted here: First, the sex ritual for spiritual progress is between two persons who are not husband and wife. To them, the ideal form of true love is that of a beloved for her lover. The assumptions made in this connection are that true love cannot exist in marriage, and that the love of the wife and husband cannot be as intense as that of lovers. In other words, promiscuous love, and especially promiscuous love in separation, most resembles the love of the devotee for God. Second, "every naked woman incarnates prakṛti."[64] (Italics added.) Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great nineteenth-century Indian saint, who was a Tantric of a sort, is known to have worshipped the naked figure of his wife as an incarnation of the divine Mother. Third, the woman, as the symbol of the dynamic primordial energy, plays the active role, while the man, as the symbol of the supreme cosmic consciousness, is immobile. "The tantric inonography of divine couples (in Tibetan: yab-yam, 'father-mother'), of the innumerable 'forms' of Buddha embraced by their Śaktis, constitutes

[64]Mircea Eliade, Yoga, p. 259.

the exemplary model of maithuna [coitus]. We should note the immobility of the god; all the activity is on the side of the Śakti."[65] It is worth noticing that in the episode of Rama and Joseph, they are not husband and wife; it is Rama who comes to Joseph's bed; she comes completely naked; and Joseph plays the passive and immobile role.

The Symbolic Clinging to God

Another Oriental myth which finds a parallel in Steinbeck is the story of the man who clings to an idol to escape death. As I have pointed out earlier, it is this story which Elizabeth had once told him which directs Joseph to the sacred glade and leads him on the path of self-realization. This is a very popular legend with the devotees of Shiva and is to be found in some of the Puranas of Hinduism.[66] The story is briefly this: Markandeya was an ardent devotee of Shiva and used to worship a Lingam (symbol) of Shiva.[67] He had been ordained

[65] Ibid., p. 259.

[66] Puranas are a class of ancient epic poetry. Some of them deal with cosmogony, while the others are narrative in method and didactic in purpose. For more information about this legend, please see appendix 'D.'

[67] For more information about whether the Lingam is a phallic emblem or just a symbol of Shiva, please see appendix 'E.'

to die at the age of sixteen. At the end of that period the servants of Yama, the God of Death, came to take away the devotee to the other world. Markandeya saw the evil messengers and clung to the Lingam of Shiva. The servants did not dare touch the Lingam. They went back to Yama and reported what had happened. Yama came in person, and, finding it difficult to disentangle Markandeya from the Lingam, bound the devotee and the Lingam together with a rope. Yama is punished by Shiva for having touched His devotee.

Motif of the Shiva Temple

The description of the sacred glade and the rock where Joseph attains self-realization also finds a parallel in the Hinduistic religious traditions of idol worship, for the description approximates to that of a temple dedicated to Shiva. A description of the various emblems through which Shiva is worshipped will be helpful in understanding how closely Steinbeck's description approximates to that of a temple dedicated to Shiva.

Shiva is represented by different images, anthropomorphic, phallic and animal. In the anthropomorphic form the popular image is that of Shiva, the Universal Father, and Shakti, his wife, the Universal

Mother. Another image is that of the Ganges falling from heaven on to Shiva's head and then gently descending to the ground. This is based on a very popular myth with the Hindus, recounted in the Ramayana, the Mahabharatha, and the Bhagavata Purana. Some ancestors of King Bhagiratha had been burnt to ashes through the anger of Kapila, a sage. The sage later relented and said that if the Ganges, the heavenly river, came down to the earth and flowed over the ashes, the souls of the dead persons would go to heaven. So King Bhagiratha practised great austerities, and Brahma finally agreed to send down the Ganges, but there was a practical difficulty. The force of the fall of the water would shatter the earth to pieces. So the Ganges could come down only if Shiva agreed to bear the force of the fall on his head. Shiva consented, and the Ganges fell on to his head, wandered among the knotted coils of his hair and then gently descended to the earth. The Ganges bestows prosperity by irrigating the fields, and destroys the sins of men, for she is holy. A relief-sculpture at Mamallapuram, near Madras, representing this celebrated myth is "one of the largest, most beautiful and dramatic reliefs of all time."[68] And the

[68]Heinrich Zimmer, Myths, p. 112.

myth is so popular that even in temples where the Lingam in worshipped, there is a pot hanging over the idol from which water drips continually, the dripping water symbolizing the coming down of the Ganges from heaven.

It should, however, be stated that the anthropomorphic forms of Shiva are not as popular as the Lingam as objects of worship. In the temple of Lingam is a cylindrical column on a platform or altar. "It also should not be supposed that in its early phase it symbolized in any way the union of male and female. Even in its conventionalized shape, though its base and the horizontal projecting piece are sometimes regarded as representing the female principle, these features of the emblem really serve the very useful purpose of putting it firmly in position and draining off to some distance from its base the water profusely poured on its top."[69]

If the Lingam is one of the emblems of Shiva, the bull is another. All the Hindu gods have a vehicle for their use, and the vehicle sometimes symbolizes the god. Vishnu's vehicle is a gander, Indra rides an elephant, Kartikeya flies on a peacock, and Shiva has a bull. Nothing could have represented more appropriately the

[69] Jitendra Nath Banerjea, "The Hindu Concept of God," in The Religion of the Hindus, ed. Kenneth W. Morgan (New York, 1953), p. 65.

virility and fertility of Shiva than this magnificent and majestic animal. Therefore "in every Śiva temple may be seen an image of this sacred bull, called Nandi, placed on a high pedestal facing the shrine, its eyes riveted on the emblem of the god in the main sanctum."[70]

Now if we turn to the description of the glade in To a God Unknown, it will be found that Steinbeck's description has important similarities with the ideas of the myth of the Ganges, of the Lingam worship, and of the bull. The "open glade, nearly circular, and as flat as a pool,"[71] surrounded by dark trees "straight as pillars and jealously close together"[72] is the temple. The rock at the centre is "mysterious and huge."[73] The edifice is "something like an altar that had melted and run down over itself"[74]--which would look very much like the Lingam on a small platform. The rock is covered with a short, heavy green moss, and in one side of the rock there is a small black cave fringed with five-fingered ferns, and from the cave a little stream flows silently and crosses the glade and disappears into the tangled brush--all of which suggest the Ganges

[70] Ibid., p. 62.
[71] To a God Unknown, p. 54.
[72] Ibid., p. 54.
[73] Ibid., p. 54.
[74] Ibid., p. 54.

wandering through the dark coils of Shiva's hair and then flowing down to the earth. And then as if these suggestions are not enough, Steinbeck brings in a great black bull, its front legs folded under. It is a hornless bull with shining black ringlets on its forehead, and it has a long black scrotum which hangs nearly to the knees. The bull suggests the creative power of Shiva, and Steinbeck makes a buzzard, which is associated with carrion, symbolize His destructive power. "A buzzard swept across the circular sky, low over the treetops."[75] In terms of the action of the novel it will be remembered that Elizabeth dies from a fall trying to climb the rock, and it is on the same rock that Joseph attains self-realization.

However, one could argue--and with much plausibility--that Steinbeck is describing nothing more than a sacred grove common in many ancient cultures, including Greece, Italy, England, and Russia. The tree and the rock and the spring have all been held sacred in many religious cultures. And Steinbeck's rock, tree, spring, and bull could be explained with reference to Zeus. He lives on Mount Olympus, the low ground of Dodona is the place where

[75]Ibid., p. 56.

direct communication with him can be enjoyed, the oak tree is sacred to him, and so is the eagle. He delights in the sacrifice of bulls, and it is in the form of a bull that he carries off Europa. If the holy glade of the novel were considered alone, the explanation with reference to Zeus would probably be convincing, but there are other elements in the novel which are, as I have been pointing out, best explained in the context of Hindu thought, and it would be more homogeneous to explain the glade, too, with reference to Hinduism.

From the evidence pointed out above, it seems plausible to argue that Steinbeck means us to interpret the story as a search for the highest concept of the divine. And he indicates that the highest concept of the divine is that of non-dualism.

Theme of Non-dualism in The Grapes of Wrath

Steinbeck's interest in non-dualism is not casual--he clarifies further his conception of the Over-Soul in The Grapes of Wrath. Jim Casy had been a fire-eating evangelist, and the emphasis in evangelism is on the duality of good and evil, the omnipotence of God, the depravity of man, and the necessity of winning the grace of God. The first thing that evangelists try to do is

to convince men that they are born sinners. Casy had been capable of drumming up hysteria. He tells Tom Joad, "'Used to howl out the name of Jesus to glory. And used to get an irrigation ditch so squirmin' full of repented sinners half of 'em like to drownded,'"[76] but he had been unable to resist what he had considered sin--taking girls out in the grass. He says, "'Finally it give me such pain I quit an' went off by myself an' give her a damn good thinking' about.'"[77] Casy, like Jesus, goes into the wilderness, and like Joseph Wayne, passes through the stages of belief in anthropomorphism and pantheism before he arrives at non-dualism. As an evangelist, he had believed in an anthropomorphic God, but once he goes into the wilderness to think, he cannot figure out to whom he is praying or for what. Like the old man of To a God Unknown, he watches the sun go down. He tells the Joads:

> "Night-time I'd lay on my back an' look up at the stars: morning I'd set an' watch the sun come up; midday I'd look out from a hill at the rollin' dry country; evenin' I'd foller the sun down. Sometimes I'd pray like I always done. On'y I couldn' figure what I was praying' to or for." 78

[76] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 16.
[77] Ibid., p. 19.
[78] Ibid., p. 72.

He then feels an identification between himself and the hills: "There was the hills, an' there was me, an' we wasn't separate no more. We was one thing. An' that one thing was holy."[79] The idea of non-duality or identity is clearly expressed here. Different objects do not <u>become</u> one—they are always one whether we realize the fact or not. The veil of ignorance is lifted and Casy realizes the identity which has always existed, the identity of the hills and himself. From this feeling of identification between man and nature, Casy arrives at the ultimate conception of one big soul of which everybody is a part. He expresses this idea in very clear terms: "'Maybe all men got one big soul ever'body's a part of.'"[80]

The Over-Soul and the Group

Steinbeck appears to think of the Over-Soul as a kind of corporate soul of which individual souls are parts. Casy's idea of the Over-Soul is further clarified by Tom. Explaining it to his mother, he says:

> "Says one time he [Casy] went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an' he foun' he didn' have no soul that was his'n. Says he foun' he jus' got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain't no good 'cause his little piece of a soul wasn't no good 'less it was with the rest, an' was whole." 81

[79]Ibid., p. 72
[80]Ibid., p. 20.
[81]Ibid., p. 383.

It is not difficult to see how Steinbeck arrived at this conception of the Over-Soul as a kind of group soul. In Steinbeck's Weltanschauung, the conception of the group is of fundamental importance. It is the group organism of the tide pool which provides a basis for his metaphysical speculations. Steinbeck posits that all life is related, and he calls the unity of all life the Over-Soul. Every individual thing is related to the whole in such a way that the whole is a kind of corporate body of which individuals are parts. This implies that the good of the corporate body as a whole is more important than the good of an individual. The conception of the individual identities merging into a whole is basic to the idea of the Over-Soul.

The individual loses his separate identity in the group, but the group has characteristics different from those of the individuals of which it is composed. Steinbeck discusses the psychology of the group man in In Dubious Battle. He examines the potential of the group for good and for evil. According to Mac, men are social animals and, therefore, like to work together. And as a group, they are capable of achieving more work than the sum of the work done by all the individual members put together. Mac tells Jim, "'Do you know that ten men can lift nearly

twelve times as big a load as one man can?'"[82] The energies of men which are usually dissipated in futile individual attempts, can work miracles if only they are directed into the proper channel. The group, however, appears easily vulnerable to ills against which an individual would be proof: "'Group-men are always getting some kind of infection.'"[83]

Because a group is a different kind of animal from individuals, it is difficult to predict its behaviour under a particular set of circumstances. And it is equally difficult to over-rate its capacity for doing evil. A group of men can be capable of inhuman cruelty. Mac gives an instance of such cruelty: "'I saw a nigger lynched one time. They took him about a quarter of a mile to a railroad overpass. On the' way out that crowd killed a little dog, stoned it to death. Ever'body just picked up rocks. The air was just full of killin'. Then they wasn't satisfied to hang the nigger. They had to burn 'im an' shoot 'im, too.'"[84] On the other hand, a scared group of men will run like rabbits if a truck backfires.

[82] In Dubious Battle, p. 54.
[83] Ibid., p. 131.
[84] Ibid., p. 244.

Though a group of men are unpredictable on the psychological level, Steinbeck appears to predicate that a group is God or the Over-Soul on the spiritual level:

> "'Religion, hell!' Jim cried. 'This is men, not God. This is something you know.' 'Well, can't a group of men be God, Jim?'"[85] (The second speaker is Doc Burton.)

Doc Burton's question is rhetorical and he appears to imply that a group of men are God. It is, however, difficult to believe that Steinbeck means to suggest that a group of men are the same as God or are equal to God. What he appears to imply is that since every man has something of the divine in him, namely, his soul, a group of human beings is a group of souls and the souls of all the human beings put together would be a kind of corporate soul of which individual souls are parts. Doc Burton's statement, however, is flimsy and unconvincing, and Steinbeck himself appears to have felt so, for when he came to write <u>The Grapes of Wrath</u>, he does not make Casy advance any arguments. Instead, Casy declares, "'I knew it so deep down that it [that all men have one big soul everybody is a part of] was true, and I still

[85] Ibid., p. 231.

know it.'"[86] Steinbeck appears to be suggesting here, like the Upanishads, that self-realization is attained through an intuitive process and not through logical reasoning. Casy's statement that he felt it deep down in his heart is an accurate description of the process of self-realization.

The moment of realization comes to Casy when he is lying under a tree, the "tree" which is rich with associations. It is associated with the Tree of Life, the various trees sacred to different gods, the oak of Mamre, the Cosmic tree under which Vishnu plays as a child, Yggdrasil, and the Christmas tree. In this case, it is a tree under which Casy sees the light. It is, therefore, the Tree of Enlightenment, and may be associated with the Bodhi tree sitting under which Siddhartha became Buddha, the Enlightened.

Self-realization and Discovery of the Self

Steinbeck identifies the realization of the Over-Soul with the discovery of the self. Casy had gone into the wilderness to find the secret of his own being. His problem had been the futility of his attempts to stop

[86] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 20.

himself from taking girls out in the grass after every evangelical meeting. "'Then I'd feel bad, an' I'd pray an' pray, but it didn't do no good,'"[87] he says. Instead of trying to help himself by facing the problem honestly, he tries to suppress his desires through prayer. In other words, he is trying to avoid a struggle. As Floyd H. Ross puts it, "The forces which a man refuses to meet at the level of open-eyed consciousness burrow underground, becoming subterranean compulsions driving him to further distractedness."[88] In the wilderness Casy comprehends the nature of the Over-Soul and the fact that "'there ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue.'"[89] That is, when Casy goes into the wilderness to discover his inner being, he discovers the nature of the Over-Soul. In other words, Steinbeck is saying that discovering oneself is the same as comprehending the Over-Soul.

This idea is found to have an important parallel in the Upanishads. According to the Upanishads, each individual soul is the Brahman, a point made clear in the dialogue between Uddalaka and Shvetaketu. Uddalaka tells his son,

[87] Ibid., p. 18.

[88] The Meaning of Life in Hinduism and Buddhism, (London, 1952), p. 63.

[89] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 19.

"'That which is the subtle essence (the root of all) this whole world has for its self. That is the true. That is the self. That art thou, Śvetaketu.'"[90] Paul Deussen explains: "Yet the individual atmans are not properly distinct from the supreme atman. Each of them is in full and complete measure the supreme atman himself, as he manifests himself."[91] That is, there is no distinction between the Atman and the Brahman, the individual soul and the universal soul. Since there is no distinction between the two, it logically follows that awareness of one is awareness of the other. That is the important discovery which Jim Casy makes when he goes into the wilderness.

Casy's Enlightenment Reflected in the Joads

The enlightenment of Casy is reflected in the behaviour of the Joads. The westward movement is a kind of spiritual progress. Ma Joad comes to be the accepted head of the family. Her interests do not extend beyond the immediate family in the beginning, but as her family becomes smaller through death and desertion,

[90] Chandogya Upanishad, VI, 8, 7.

[91] The Philosophy of the Upanishads, reprinted (Edinburgh, 1919), p. 256.

her family in a sense grows larger as she accepts strangers as members. The vicissitudes help her to overcome her clannishness. The Joads and the Wilsons become one family through the death of Grampa Joad. The families at the Weedpatch camp cooperate with each other and their relationship is marked by cleanliness, friendliness and hospitality. Civic consciousness, however, is not the ultimate in human relationship. Voluntary cooperation between individuals is necessary for all civilized societies, but there can be no real cooperation and understanding unless the brotherhood of man is recognized and the fact of the whole world's being a single organism accepted. Steinbeck's message to the Okies is that their hearts should be transformed. Warren French calls this transformation "education of the heart." He writes:

> What "education"?--the education of the heart, one that results in a change from their jealously regarding themselves as an isolated and self-important family unit to their regarding themselves as part of a vast human family that, in Casy's words, shares "one big soul ever'body's a part of." 92

Ma Joad, Tom and Rose of Sharon comprehend the truth

[92] French, p. 101.

intuitively. Tom expresses the truth in words and Ma and Rose do not, but the fact that they have seen the light is clear from the highly symbolic scene at the end of the novel where, without a word being spoken, they agree that Rose should save the life of the starving man by breast-feeding him.

Tom's Spiritual Progress

Jim Casy, the spiritual leader of the Joads, is, as I have suggested earlier, a Christ figure, but he is also John the Baptist, since he introduces Tom Joad to a new career and Tom in turn becomes a Christ figure. The spiritual progress of Tom is clearly marked. When the novel opens, Ma is, so to say, ahead of Tom. When Tom returns from jail, Ma asks him, "'You ain't poisoned mad? You don't hate nobody? They didn' do nothing' in that jail to rot you out with crazy mad?'"[93] Again, when the question of taking Casy along with them to California comes up, it is Ma who almost insists upon it. At the end of the novel, however, it is Tom who has progressed more--it is he who explains the idea of the Over-Soul to her. There are four incidents in the novel which are instrumental in this progress of Tom--the meeting with the preacher

[93] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 67.

Jim Casy and the latter's death, the death of Grampa Joad, the illness of Sairy Wilson, and the senility of Granma Joad. It would be incorrect to claim that each one of these incidents affects Tom directly, but the total effect of the incidents is easy to see. All these incidents serve different purposes on a realistic level and in terms of the plot. Both Grampa and Granma Joad die because they cannot adjust themselves to changed conditions. The death of Sairy Wilson brings out glaringly the utter helplessness of the migrants. And the death of Casy stresses the power and inhumanity of the landowners in California. It is nevertheless true that it is something related to these incidents that affects the Joads in general and Tom in particular. When Grampa dies under the Wilsons' tent, the mind of the Joads is broadened and the two families travel as one unit. Later, when Sairy becomes ill and the Wilsons have to be left behind, the Joads give them something of whatever they have--some pork, half a sack of potatoes, and two dollars. When Granma dies, it is not her death which affects Tom so much as his mother's sleeping with the corpse so that they can get through to California quicker without being stopped by the police for having a dead body in the truck. Finally it is Casy, with his message of the Over-Soul and his death for the sake of others, who influences Tom most.

Steinbeck does not try to draw a moral from each one of these incidents, but they play an influential role in Tom's conversion.

We may notice a significant parallel between the four incidents referred to above and the "four signs" which Siddhartha saw before he became Buddha. In the Introduction to the Jataka[94] it is narrated how Siddhartha retired from the ways of the world. One day he went for a ride in his chariot and he came across "a decrepit old man, broken-toothed, gray-haired, crooked and bent of body, leaning on a staff and trembling."[95] On another day he came across a diseased man. On the third occasion he saw a dead man. All these three signs are the emblems of suffering on which Buddha would draw for the centre of his teachings:

> "Birth is painful, old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful....
> Now this, monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain, the cessation without a remainder of craving, the abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment." 96

[94] Jataka is the "Book of Birth-Stories." The Birth-Stories are supposed to be the tales of the anterior existence of Buddha.

[95] Henry Clarke Warren, Buddhism in Translations, 6th issue (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1915), p. 56; cited hereafter as Buddhism.

[96] The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha, ed. E. A. Burtt, 8th printing (New York, 1963), p. 30.

When Buddha went out for a fourth time, he met a monk who had retired from the world. Then the thought of retiring from the world became "a pleasing one to the Future Buddha."[97] The parallelism between the "four signs" and the four incidents in the novel referred to above appears to be clear. The incidents set both Tom and Buddha on the road to spiritual progress.

Sublimation of Instincts

Like Buddha who went in search of truth after his meeting a monk, Tom begins to change after meeting Casy. Casy after self-realization, and Tom after listening to Casy's spiritual experience are transformed men. Earlier Casy had felt that he had not been free to use vulgar words, curse, drink, or tell off-colour stories. He now curses without feeling bad about it and drinks without inhibitions. The most surprising change, however, is in his relationship with women. Formerly he did not want to take girls out in the grass, but could not help it. He took them out and then regretted it later, for he thought he was doing something wrong. Now he realizes that taking them out is no sin. He tells Tom once that he is lusting after the flesh, but he no longer takes them out. His is

[97]Henry Clarke Warren, Buddhism, p. 57.

now asceticism without frustration and goodness without self-righteousness.

It is pertinent to note here that though Jim Casy and Tom Joad are Christ figures, they are not born free from Original Sin like Jesus Christ but achieve enlightenment like Buddha. In fact, Steinbeck reiterates the idea that, like Casy, Tom is a "sinner." On the day he was released from jail, he ran him down "'a hoor girl, like she was a rabbit.'"[98] When he meets Casy, he declares that he has been so long without women that "'it's gonna take some catchin' up.'"[99] He listens to Casy's talk of there being no sin and no virtue and of the Over-Soul and appears to forget the existence of girls. There are numerous references to the activities of Al and other young men and women, but there is not a single mention of Tom's or Casy's being interested in a woman. The only way this extraordinary change in Casy and Tom can be explained is to assume that the sex instincts of both of them have been transmuted into a spiritual love of humanity.

[98] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 154.
[99] Ibid., p. 19.

Self-realization and Integrated Personality

Once a person is enlightened, all contradictions are removed, all conflicts resolved and all dualities surmounted. One cannot have a fully integrated personality as long as one mistakes the empirical ego for the self, for the empirical ego with its finiteness can see only distinctions, dualities and imperfections. One sees dualities in the world due to ignorance in one's own heart. In other words, imperfection without is a sign of imperfection within. Once a man realizes the self, realizes that the Atman in himself is the same as the Brahman in all things in the universe, he comes to see that he cannot harm anybody else without harming himself. This is what Casy appears to be implying when he tells the vigilantes who are about to kill him, "'You fellas don' know what you're doin'.'"[100] The statement sounds like an echo of Jesus' "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."[101] The sentence in the Bible might mean that the men who crucified Christ were either not aware that they were crucifying the Son of God, or that they were unaware of the crime against humanity. The sentence in the novel apparently means that the vigilantes did not know the harm they were doing the poor labourers.

[100] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 354.

[101] St. Luke, XXIII, 34 (Authorized Version).

However, it could also mean that they were unaware of the Over-Soul in each of them and that what they were doing was not only unworthy of the divinity in each of them, but an injury to themselves since they could not hurt others without hurting themselves.

Self-realization and Altruism

The ignorance of the identity of the Atman and the Brahman results in chaos and mutual destruction, and knowledge of it leads to truly altruistic action. Casy has been enlightened and he has no personal desires to be satisfied. Tom, too, follows in Casy's footsteps. Theirs are "desireless actions" in the sense the Gita uses the phrase.[102] The Gita does not recommend the giving up of actions but the fruit of actions. In this matter, Tom and Casy are following the path of active service and non-attachment to the fruit of their actions. Paul Deussen points out the Upanishadic reason for the ethics of active service:

> The Gospels quite correctly establish as the highest law of the morality, "Love your neighbour as yourselves." But why should I do so since by the order of nature I feel

[102]Vide Gita: "Renounce attachment to the fruits," p. 40.

> pain and pleasure only in myself, not in my neighbour? The answer is not in the Bible...but it is in the Veda, in the great formula That art Thou which gives in three words the combined sum of metaphysics and morals. You shall love your neighbour as yourselves because you are your neighbour. 103.

Casy and Tom are more in the line of Upanishadic sages who serve humanity with no desire for reward here or hereafter.

Casy takes to social service after his enlightenment. Individual salvation has to precede cosmic salvation. How can he save the world who has not saved himself? Individual salvation is not the end but only the first step towards cosmic salvation. Steinbeck appears to be implying that completely altruistic actions are possible only for those who have been enlightened. He protests elsewhere very strongly against the do-gooder whose motive is selfish regardless of his being unaware of it. He writes:

> Perhaps the most overrated virtue in our list of shoddy virtues is that of giving. Giving builds up the ego of the giver, makes him superior and higher and larger than the receiver. Nearly always, giving is a selfish

[103] Quoted in S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions and Western Thought, 2nd ed. (London, 1940), pp. 101-102; cited hereafter as Eastern Religions.

> pleasure, and in many cases it is a downright destructive and evil thing. One has only to remember some of our wolfish financiers who spend two-thirds of their lives clawing fortunes out of the guts of society and the latter third pushing it back. It is not enough to suppose that their philanthropy is a kind of frightened restitution, or that their natures change when they have enough. Such a nature never has enough and natures do not change that readily. I think that the impulse is the same in both cases. For giving can bring the same sense of superiority as getting does, and philanthropy may be another kind of spiritual avarice. 104

Good deeds which are done with the expectation of getting some personal profit out of them, whether the profit is material or spiritual, cannot be called truly altruistic.

Again, Casy's and Tom's loss of interest in women could be explained with reference to the Upanishads. The Chandogya Upanishad describes how an enlightened person is happy only in the company of the self (Brahman): "Verily, he who sees this [the fact of the Brahman or self's being everywhere], who thinks this, who understands this, he has pleasure in the self, he has delight in the self, he has union in the self, he has joy in the self."[105] The

[104] The 'Log', pp. lxiv-lxv.
[105] Chandogya Upanishad, VII, 25, 2.

person who has realized the Brahman has no joy in any thing less than that. Spiritual progress contains within itself moral progress. The Gita echoes the Upanishads: "For when a man's heart has reached fulfilment through knowledge and personal experience of the truth of Brahman, he is never again moved by the things of the senses."[106]

A man who has realized the self is beyond good and evil, for he sees that good and evil are relative terms and he recognizes the unchanging Brahman behind changing phenomena. Swami Prabhavananda explains, "The words sin and virtue are somewhat alien to the spirit of Vedanta philosophy, because they necessarily foster a sense of possessiveness with regard to thought and action."[107] Steinbeck holds a similar view. Joseph Wayne says, "I can have no knowledge of any good or bad."[108] The idea is repeated in The Grapes of Wrath when Casy declares that there is no virtue and no sin. Critics have interpreted the statement to be an expression of Steinbeck's non-teleological point of view that a thing is because it is. However, Casy could be speaking subjectively, and, as a liberated soul, he would be beyond good and evil.

[106] Gita, p. 64.
[107] The Spiritual Heritage of India, (London, 1962), p. 293.
[108] To a God Unknown, p. 113.

So it is seen that the central tenet of Steinbeck's philosophy is the non-dualistic concept of the divine. He postulates that the discovery of the self is the same as the realization of the Over-Soul and that an enlightened person is above good and evil. These ideas have an important correspondence in Hinduism and Steinbeck's ideas become illumined in the light of Hindu thought.

CHAPTER — II

Man as an Animal and the Unity of Life

Charges against Steinbeck

One of the charges commonly made against Steinbeck is that his interest in biological naturalism makes him depict his characters more as instinctive animals than as rational beings. Edmund Wilson writes: "Mr. Steinbeck almost always in his fiction is dealing either with the lower animals or with human beings so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level."[1] This opinion has been echoed by several critics--Frederick J. Hoffman and John S. Kennedy among others. Hoffman writes that Steinbeck has "reduced the scale of definition [for human beings] to their animal nature."[2] Kennedy writes that "habitually and characteristically Steinbeck sets human conduct and animal conduct side by side, on the same plane, not simply as commentaries one on the other but as indications of the same nature in the two apparently disparate sorts of creatures."[3] Horace Platt Taylor, Jr. says, "In general,

[1] "The Californians: Storm and Steinbeck," in The New Republic, 103 (December 9, 1940), 785-786.

[2] The Modern Novel in America, 1900-1950 (Chicago, 1951), p. 150.

[3] "John Steinbeck: Life Affirmed and Dissolved," in Tedlock, p. 127.

Steinbeck is well content to indicate man's nature as animal nature."[4]

The charges are literally true--Steinbeck has a tendency to glorify biological virtues, his characters are types rather than individuals, and he fails to illuminate his characters sufficiently for his intended audience. These weaknesses mark Steinbeck as a minor writer. But he redeems himself to some extent by creating a view of the unity of life in which man is not degraded so much as animals are elevated to a place of vital equality in the realms of life. He finds some biological basis for this concept of the unity of life. On the expedition to the Gulf of California with his biologist friend Ed Ricketts, the Gulf was the tide pool for collecting specimens, but for metaphysical speculations the Gulf spread out in all directions and to infinity in time and space. Steinbeck writes, "A man looking at reality brings his own limitations to the world. If he has strength and energy of mind the tide pool stretches both ways, digs back to electrons and leaps space into the universe and fights out of the moment into

[4]"The Biological Naturalism of John Steinbeck" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, 1961), p. 68.

non-conceptual time. Then ecology has a synonym which is ALL."[5] It is not only that time is infinite and space limitless and all things have a place in the universe, but that there is a pattern which underlies all phenomena. Steinbeck and Ricketts were searching for "that principle which keys us deeply into the pattern of all life; we search for the relations of things, one to another."[6] Steinbeck suggests further that the microcosm is made of the same elements that go to make up the macrocosm,[7] an idea which has an important correspondence with Upanishadic thought. The Upanishads postulate that the macrocosmic self, the Brahman, and the microcosmic self, the Atman, are identical.

The relationship of the inward to the outward, of the microcosm to the macrocosm, is indicated for Steinbeck by the group organism observed in the tide pool. He posits that each individual in the group is one kind of animal and the sum or group of animals a different kind of animal altogether. The group is a larger animal with a life of its own. Its nature is different and so are its drives. The individuals serve the larger good of the group--some of them are

[5] The 'Log', p. 85.
[6] Ibid., p. 110.
[7] Ibid., pp. 264-265.

meant to fight and others to procure food. Steinbeck gives the example of the life of the pelagic tunicates:

> 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 animal, 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--something the early Church would have been forced to call a mystery. When the early Church called some matter "a mystery" it accepted that thing fully and deeply as so, but simply not accessible to reason because reason had no business with it. So a man of individualistic reason, if he must ask, "Which is the animal, the colony or the individual?" must abandon his particular kind of reason and say, "Why, it's two animals and they aren't alike any more than the cells of my body are like me. I am much more than the sum of my cells and, for all I know, they are much more than the division of me." [8]

Steinbeck appears to feel that physical contiguity of the members of the group is not necessary for the group to behave as one organism. This idea becomes clear from his description of a school of fish, the members of which may appear to be independent of each other:

[8] Ibid., p. 165.

> The schools swam, marshaled and patrolled. They turned as a unit and dived as a unit. In their millions they followed a pattern minute as to direction and depth and speed. There must be some fallacy in our thinking these fish as individuals. Their functions in the school are in some as yet unknown way as controlled as though the school were one unit. We cannot conceive of this intricacy until we are able to think of the school as an animal itself, reacting with all its cells to stimuli which perhaps might not influence one fish at all. And this larger animal, the school, seems to have a nature and drive and ends of its own. It is more than and different from the sum of its units. If we can think in this way, it will not seem so unbelievable that every fish heads in the same direction, that the water interval between fish and fish is identical with all the units, and that it seems to be directed by a school intelligence. If it is a unit animal itself, why should it not so react? Perhaps this is the wildest of speculations, but we suspect that when the school is studied as an animal rather than as a sum of unit fish, it will be found that certain units are assigned special functions to perform: that weaker or slower units may even take their place as placating food for the predators for the sake of the security of the school as an animal. [9]

It is obvious that members of a group are held together by some common interest. People who collect near an automobile accident have the common though transitory interest of curiosity; members of a trade union, an economic purpose; members of a club, a social interest; and people who live in a village, multi-purpose interests.

[9] Ibid., pp. 240-241.

Since in schools of fish the interest is that of instinctive survival, their acting as members of a group is, presumably, not a role which they have assumed but one which they have inherited. The group will be one cohesive unit as long as the individual members stay alive. And since it is a question of survival, it may be assumed that the organization is firm though not consciously found. That men and many species of animals live in groups cannot be gainsaid. Konrad Lorenz, one of the outstanding naturalists of today, for example, writes:

> S.L.Washburn and Irven de Vore observed that among free-living baboons the band was led not by a single animal but by a "senate" of several old males who maintained their superiority over the younger and physically stronger members by firmly sticking together and proving, as a united force, stronger than any single young male. In a more exactly observed case, one of the three "senators" was seen to be an almost toothless old creature while the other two were well past their prime. On one occasion when the band was in a treeless area and in danger of encountering a lion, the animals stopped and the young, strong males formed a defensive circle around the weaker animals. But the oldest male went forward alone, performed the dangerous task of finding out exactly where the lion was lying, without being seen by him, and then returned to the horde and led them, by a wide detour around the lion, to the safety of their sleeping trees. All followed him blindly, no one doubting his authority. 10

[10] On Aggression, trans. Marjorie Kerr Wilson (Toronto, 1967), p. 43.

So the idea that individuals live together as one unit or group may be accepted.

Steinbeck extends the conception of group organism from a school of fish to a species, to an ecological community, and to the whole world. He writes:

> In the little Bay of San Carlos, where there were many schools of a number of species, there was even a feeling (and "feeling" is used advisedly) of a larger unit which was the interrelation of species with their interdependence for food, even though that food be each other. A smoothly working larger animal surviving within itself--larval shrimp to little fish to larger fish to giant fish--one operating mechanism. And perhaps <u>this</u> unit of survival may key into the larger animal which is the life of all the sea, and this into the larger of the world. [11]

Whether Steinbeck is correct in his interpretations of the biological studies made by Ricketts and himself is difficult to say. Joseph Fontenrose, who thinks that there is not enough biological evidence to support Steinbeck's conclusions, writes: "Although his biological studies of animal aggregations shaped Steinbeck's organismic theory of the human group, biological science does not really support it; that is, all the evidence

[11] <u>The 'Log'</u>, p. 241.

that he adduces can be, and is, explained otherwise."[12] Woodburn O. Ross holds a similar opinion: "[Steinbeck] definitely feels some groups of individuals to be other and separate individuals. But this conclusion is intuitive and not rational, for the science of biology offers it no support."[13] However, Steinbeck's conclusions are not without some scientific support. Ricketts refers to studies made by Dr. W. C. Allee:

> In their under-rock retreat ...[Amphiodia occidentalis] are almost invariably found in aggregations of from several to several dozen, so closely associated that their arms are intertwined; recent studies of this intertwining habit, by Dr. Allee, lead us to the border-line of the metaphysical.
>
> Working with Atlantic brittle stars, isopods, and planarians, Dr. Allee has found that social units of this type have distinct survival value for their members, bringing about a degree of resistance to untoward conditions that is not attainable by isolated individuals. By treating individual animals and also naturally and spontaneously formed aggregations with toxic substances he found not only that the mass had greater resistance to the action of the poisons (partly because of absorption by secreted slime and the bodies of the outermost animals) but that an actual protective material was given off by the aggregations. This subtle material, which "once in solution passes through ordinary filter paper and persists after the filtrate

[12] Fontenrose, p. 89.

[13] "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," in Tedlock, p. 171.

> is boiled," is apparently similar to antibodies, such as are familiar to the general public in vaccine. Solutions containing these protective units are capable of conferring protection from poisons--fresh water or colloidal silver, for instance--to isolated animals which could not otherwise survive. Furthermore, certain animals can confer immunity on other taxonomically unrelated animals. 14

This passage provides empirical evidence for Steinbeck's contention that a group animal has a nature and drive and ends which are different from those of individuals in the group.

Steinbeck makes this concept of group organisms based on biological studies a springboard for a speculative leap that lands him in the lap of mysticism. As mentioned earlier, the comprehension of the mystic unity of nature is to be achieved, according to Steinbeck, through intuition, and not through "our poor blunt weapon of reason."[15] If Steinbeck errs, he errs in good company. The Upanishads and Emerson have made mysticism respectable for the sceptical and pragmatic West. The non-dualistic philosophers posit that intuition is an instrument superior to reason, and if reason cannot comprehend the unity, the

[14]Edward F. Ricketts and Jack Calvin, Between Pacific Tides (Stanford, 1939), pp. 41-42.

[15]The 'Log', p. 164.

worse for reason.

When man recognizes the unity of all life, he recognizes the equality of all life. And the values which are associated with this recognition are hospitality, non-violence and self-control. These are some of the values which Steinbeck advocates and they are values which have, I may mention here, a basic correspondence with Oriental values. The idea of the unity of all things in the universe, in Hinduism, is the logical outcome of the Upanishadic conception of the creation of the universe by the Brahman out of Itself and not out of pre-existent matter distinct from the Brahman. And the concept that all things, animate and inanimate alike, have individual souls which are identical with the universal soul implies the sanctity and equality of everything in the universe. Because all things are organically related, having been created by the Brahman out of Itself, and because all things are holy, values like hospitality and non-violence are not social virtues but conceptions basic to the Hindu view of life. As contrasted with Christianity which does not consider animals as sacred or as beings in their own right, Hinduism holds all life so sanctified that, as

Rabindranath Tagore comments, "In India a whole people who once were meat-eaters gave up taking animal food to cultivate the sentiment of universal sympathy for life, an event unique in the history of mankind."[16]

A Corrective to Western Values

The values on which Steinbeck lays stress bear a correspondence to the Oriental values referred to above, but it may be mentioned here that he is not the first American writer to advance moral and spiritual values against the materialistic. Thoreau's experiment in plain living and high thinking at Walden pond is perhaps the best known protest-by-example against the growing materialism in American life. Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables (1851) describes the fate of a family which had built up its worldly ambitions by dispossessing a man of his property. Frank Norris protests in McTeague (1899) against the social and economic forces that determine the life of individuals. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925) depicts the wasteland that has been created by the lack of moral and spiritual values in modern America. The household of the Buchanans is typical of the moneyed and corrupt society, with Daisy's despair and ennui and Tom's adulteries. Jay Gatsby in trying to become rich for the sake of Daisy has only

[16] Sadhana: the Realization of Life, reprinted (New York, 1916), p. 9. The statement is exaggerated, for it is doubtful whether meat-eating was totally absent at any time in India.

become a straw man, and when she visits him he piles before her dozens of fine silk suits as though he had nothing more precious to offer her than empty clothes. And God has become only a pair of enormous eyes painted on a billboard.

If Fitzgerald writes about the loss of values in the individual, Dos Passos transfers his discussion to the loss to society itself. The Big Money (1936)--the third and last part of U.S.A.--depicts a society the moral values of which as a whole have been corrupted by big money. Sinclair Lewis' Babbitt (1922) decries the practice of the middle class of associating respectability with material possessions and regrets the power of coercion which society possesses for bringing back into the fold anybody who tries to skip the traces. Even religion is made an instrument for getting more money: "The kernel of...[Babbitt's] practical religion was that it was respectable, and beneficial to one's business, to be seen going to services."[17] It may, therefore, be seen that Steinbeck's emphasis lies not in advancing moral and spiritual values as understood in the West, which many other writers had done before him, but in advancing values which have a correspondence to Oriental values.

[17] Babbitt (New York, 1922), p. 208.

Anthropocentrism Rejected

Edmund Wilson makes yet another charge against Steinbeck's biological attitudes, this time about the portrayal of animals: "Mr. Steinbeck does not have the effect as Lawrence or Kipling does, of romantically raising the animals to the stature of human beings, but rather of assimilating the human beings to animals."[18] Wilson's objection is that Steinbeck depicts human beings as animals instead of portraying animals as human beings. He implies that animals have no place in literature unless they are shown as having human qualities and that men should not be fused into a single sphere with animals. He illustrates the anthropocentric view of the West, placing man at the centre of creation and regarding everything else as created for his benefit.

Steinbeck disagrees, as I have stated earlier, with anthropocentrism and he is not alone in doing so. He shows a marked sympathy with the American Transcendentalists in his rejection of this egotistical view. The Christian view in the Middle Ages that nature was under the curse of God and the Puritan idea that man was a totally depraved creature the Transcendentalists

[18]"The Californians: Storm and Steinbeck," in <u>The New Republic</u>, 103 (December 9, 1940), 786.

rejected. Instincts became divine and intuition a more valuable instrument than intellect. Emerson pointed out that all things emanate from the Over-Soul and that since the Over-Soul is by definition good, the universe is necessarily moral. Evil does not exist, rather every evil deed is compensated by a corresponding good one. Emerson sees a unity everywhere: spirit and nature, soul and body are not opposed to each other but identical. There is a mystical union of God, nature and man. "Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact."[19] (Nature) And if nature is the physical expression of divine reason, it follows that instincts are divine and flesh is not weak.

What Emerson couched in philosophic terms, Whitman expressed in frankly sensuous words. Since he too beheld the divine principle immanent everywhere, everything was holy. He sang, "Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul."[20] ("Song of Myself") He believed in the flesh and appetites of men. He extolled their joyous animalism and insisted upon the divineness of ordinary men. To him, whatever was

[19] Works I, 26.

[20] Walt Whitman, ed. Floyd Stovall (New York, n.d.), p. 5; cited hereafter as Works.

natural was good. He did not suffer from any ethical prepossessions and he could whole-heartedly declare, "I believe in the flesh and the appetites."[21] ("Song of Myself") He found identity in the apparent contradictions of the world and felt a spirit of equality with persons, plants and things. In Whitman, Emerson and other Transcendentalists, we find the anthropocentric point of view rejected in favour of non-dualism which gives sanctity to all things. So Steinbeck is in concord with Transcendentalism as regards a philosophical basis for the rejection of anthropocentrism.

Biological Heritage of Man

Steinbeck also found in several novelists of the twentieth century attempts to give emphasis to the biological aspects of human nature. Sigmund Freud contributed in part with his theory about the important role of sex as the motive force of all human actions and the inevitable harm that results from too much repression. His theories became the new gospel--one of Sherwood Anderson's characters says, "'If there is anything you do not understand in human life consult

[21]Ibid., p. 27.

the works of Dr. Freud.'"[22] The naturalistic writers led by Emile Zola, the fountainhead of naturalism, tended to portray human beings as instinctive animals. Dreiser virtually reduces the drives of man to brute animal behaviour when he writes : "The charm of certain girls...or that of boys, clownish, yet revealing through their bounding ridiculous animality the force and meaning of that chemistry and urge toward mating which lies back of all youthful thought and action."[23] The naturalistic movement obliquely raised animals to the human level by emphasizing the animal nature in man. Though Steinbeck does not directly belong to the realistic/naturalistic school, he accentuates the biological heritage of man. Because scientists predicate that life began in the sea, he argues that much can be learnt about human beings from a study of the animals in the tide pool and that there are certain similarities between marine animals and men. The desire for survival, for example, is deeply rooted in both men and animals. So is the desire to fight. "When two crayfish meet, they usually fight."[24] So, often, do men: "So far the murder trait of our species is as regular and observable

[22] Dark Laughter, 11th printing (New York, 1960), p. 230.
[23] An American Tragedy, (New York, n.d.), p. 29.
[24] The 'Log', p. 17.

as our various sexual habits."[25] This accent on the biological heritage of man has laid him open to Wilson's charges mentioned above. And though Steinbeck states, "It is not observed that I find it valid to understand man as an animal before I am prepared to to know him as man"[26] (italics added), critics have failed to perceive that he does not consider man to be nothing more than an animal. In one story, for example, "Flight," the theme is the progress from the instinctual animal to man. Pepe from the very beginning is trying to perfect the art of throwing a knife until it becomes an instinctive response to a situation, like the sting of a scorpion or the bite of a snake. When he kills a man in a quarrel, he has to take to the mountains. And his flight is a progressive sinking from man and civilization to the animal level of instincts. He loses his hat, his horse (the means of transport) and his rifle. The animals he meets on the way--a wild cat, a mountain lion and birds--look at him as though he is one of their own. He is finally reduced to the level of a crawling animal until at last he stands up on a rock against the sky to face death

[25]Ibid., p. 17.

[26]Letter to the University of New Mexico Press, dated December 7, 1956, in Tedlock, p. 307.

like a man. By this symbolic gesture of rising to his full height, he becomes a man before he dies.

This important aspect of Steinbeck's thought, namely, that man is not merely an animal, is often missed because he has the habit of tucking away significant episodes in obscure corners of his novels. One of the most important episodes in this respect is the parable of the gopher in Cannery Row. The parable follows the description of the glorious party given by Mack and his friends to Doc. The parable has a double significance. If it is read alone, the gopher becomes a symbol for man's inevitable burden of weakness for instinctual pleasures. In the parable,

> A well-grown gopher took up residence in a thicket of mallow weeds in the vacant lot on Cannery Row. It was a perfect place....
>
> But as time went on the gopher began to be a little impatient, for no female appeared. He sat in the entrance of his hole in the morning and made penetrating squeaks that are inaudible to the human ear but can be heard deep in the earth by other gophers. And still no female appeared....
>
> Again he waited and squeaked beside his beautiful burrow in the beautiful place but no female ever came and after a while he had to move away. He had to move two blocks up the hill to a dahlia garden where they put out traps every night. [27]

[27] Short Novels, pp. 500-502.

Compare with this a parable narrated by Sri Ramakrishna, the famous Indian monk who lived in the nineteenth century:

> A tame mungoose had its home high up on the wall of a house. One end of a rope was tied to its neck, while the other end was fastened to a weight. The mungoose with the appendage runs and plays in the parlour or in the yard, of the house, but no sooner does it get frightened than it at once runs up and hides itself in its home on the wall. But it cannot stay there long, as the weight at the other end of the rope draws it down, and it is constrained to leave its home. Similarly, a man has his home high up at the feet of the Almighty. Whenever he is frightened by adversity and misfortune he goes up to his God, his true home; but in a short time he is constrained to come down into the world by its irresistible attractions." [28]

The similarity between the two episodes is striking. The gopher gives up its security and the mungoose its true home, for both of them find the pleasures of the world attractive. In this they symbolize the force of instincts which man finds irresistible.

Man More than an Animal

If, however, the gopher episode is read in conjunction with the chapter that follows (the last chapter of the

[28] F. Max Muller, Ramakrishna : His life and Sayings, (London and Bombay, 1898), p. 139.

novel)--as it is meant to be by the writer--the episode brings out prominently the difference between man and animal. In the last chapter, Doc continues reading "Black Marigolds," some stanzas of which he had read earlier during the party. "Black Marigolds," a title given by Powys Mathers, the translator, is a Sanskrit poem originally called "Chaurapanchashika" and written by Bilhana in the eleventh century. The poet was in love with a princess and they used to meet in secret. The love was mutual, but when the secret was discovered the king sentenced him to death. The lover had to spend his last hours in prison and he there composed these verses in praise of his lost mistress. The story goes that the king forgave the offence of the lover on account of the skill of the poet. The poem is a highly erotic description of the sensuous charms of his beloved, but this is probably its least significant aspect. The lover has loved life in all its forms. Even at the moment of death, the poem is about life. It shows an interest in and a deep reverence for life in all its aspects. Look at the variety of images:

A reeling pirate bee,

or

They chatter her weakness through the two bazaars,

or

> And small men
> That buy and sell for silver being slaves
> Crinkle the fat about their eyes,

or

> You cling to me as a garment clings.[29]

The poet shows in the poem his appreciation of the beauty of woman also. Her beauty has cost him his life, but he has no regrets. Though he knows that the moment of death is approaching, he does not cringe or pray for forgiveness of God or the king. Nor does he wail and dash his head against prison walls. He shows complete non-attachment[30] towards his beloved as though he were a third person looking at the situation. It is not a passive kind of stoicism prepared to bear the inclemencies of fate. His love for her is intense, but the lover's non-attachment for her is of a high order, too. The quality of non-attachment and emotion even under the shadow of the gallows is sustained enough to produce fifty stanzas of unforgettable love.

[29] Short Novels, pp. 497-498.

[30] The meaning and significance of non-attachment is discussed in a later chapter.

It is pertinent to note here that the poem is not quoted in full by Steinbeck, and of particular significance are the last lines he quotes. He stops in the middle of a stanza:

> I have had full in my eyes from off my girl
> The whitest pouring of eternal light--[31]
> (Italics added.)

Eternal light is, as is well known, a very important symbol in the Upanishads for the Brahman, e.g., "From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality."[32] The word "pouring," too, is seen to be the most appropriate one for describing the process of self-realization. Describing the process, Sri Aurobindo writes, "A light descends and touches or envelops or penetrates the lower being, the mind, the life or the body; or a presence or a power or a stream of knowledge pours in waves or currents, or there is a flood of bliss or a sudden ecstasy."[33] (Italics added.) And Steinbeck is probably suggesting that love has become for the poet and lover, as it does in Tantrism, a means to self-realization.

[31] Short Novels, p. 504.
[32] Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, I, 3, 28.
[33] The Life Divine (New York, 1949), p. 811.

Steinbeck has added so much significance to the poem and the gopher parable by putting them side by side that the juxtaposition could not have been coincidental. He obviously intends to convey both a parallelism and a contrast--both the gopher and the lover pay dearly for their adventure, but in the case of the lover, his beloved has become for him a source of self-realization.

Men Live on a Higher Plane than Animals

The juxtaposition has another significance, too. Steinbeck appears to be demonstrating here that men live on a higher plane than animals. While animals live in a physical universe only, man lives in a symbolic universe where language and art play a significant role. Man is so enveloped by linguistic and artistic activities that no individual could live in society without indulging in them. Hence Steinbeck's emphasis on "word":

> The word is a symbol and a delight which sucks up men and scenes, trees, plants, factories, and Pekinese. Then the Thing becomes the Word and back to Thing again, but warped and woven into a fantastic pattern. The word sucks up Cannery Row, digests it and spews it out, and the Row has taken the shimmer of the green world and the sky-reflecting seas. [34]

[34] Short Novels, p. 386.

Though the first sentence of the passage would indicate that it is an echo of the first sentence from the Gospel according to St. John, it is pertinent to point out here a significant parallelism with Hinduism. The Vedas are called Shabda-Brahman, Word-Brahman, the words in which the knowledge of the Brahman is explained. Again, the emphasis is on the spoken word: "On speech do all gods depend; so do, too, celestial beings, beasts and men."[35] We can easily see how poetry, more than most other forms of literature, depends on the spoken word, for a poem is meant to be sung, or at least read aloud to be fully appreciated. So it could not have been by accident that Steinbeck goes out of his way to point out that "Black Marigolds" is read aloud. When Doc reads the poem at the party, Steinbeck writes, "Doc brought out a book and he read in a clear, deep voice."[36] When Doc stops reading, "Hazel was so taken by the sound of the words that he had not listened to their meaning."[37] Next morning when Doc is alone, "for a moment he read to himself, but then his lips began to

[35] Taittiriya Brahmana, ed. Hari Narayan Apte (Poona, 1898), 2, 8, 8, 4. The Taittiriya Brahamana is a part of the Yajur Veda, one of the four Vedas.

[36] Short Novels, p. 497.

[37] Ibid., p. 499.

move and in a moment he read aloud--slowly, pausing at the end of each line."[38] Yet again, "He spoke aloud to the sink and the white rats and to himself: 'Even now...'"[39]

And to show further that command over words is a power which belongs to man alone, the reading of the poem aloud by Doc is contrasted with the activity of the rats which scampered and scrambled in their cages and, more significantly, with the activity of the rattlesnakes which "lay still and stared into space with their dusty, frowning eyes."[40] The contrast with the snakes is particularly significant since snakes have no ears with which to hear. Again, when Steinbeck describes their eyes as dusty he seems to imply that they are unaware of beauty and hence instead of reflecting beauty they are only "frowning." Steinbeck is probably also suggesting here that recollection in tranquillity through the exclusively human gift of imagination and memory is what Doc and other human beings are capable of

[38] Ibid., p. 503.
[39] Ibid., p. 504.
[40] Ibid., p. 504.

but not animals. Still again, the rattlers and mice are conscious of space in a limited sense only and not at all aware of the concept of time. For them space is simply what they experience from their physical movement in the cage and the cage itself becomes symbolic of the limitedness of their awareness. Their time-awareness is probably associated only with the time of their feeding while Doc and the rest have a perception of time and space which enables them to transcend the immediate present and surroundings to partake of the experiences of others of a different time, country and language so that the experience of a lover of eleventh-century India becomes theirs.

It may, however, be made clear that this idea of the superiority of man over animal is not a contradiction of the Upanishadic idea that all things in the universe are equal. They are fundamentally equal in the sense that every one of them partakes of the same Brahman, but man is superior only in the sense that he is conscious of the concept of the Brahman and the Atman.

Steinbeck's View of the Universe is Biological

Steinbeck's view of the whole universe, not only of man, is biological. He views everything, organic and

inert, as a part of the cosmic process which itself is seen as a biological law. He sees the whole universe, as pointed out earlier, as an ecological unit. It is significant to point out that the operation of the biological law is an idea basic to Hindu thought. Betty Heimann writes, "India's view is essentially biological."[41] The biological law sees the cosmic process as one of birth, growth and decay, and also perceives a functional balance and cooperation of individual organisms in that process. That is, nothing is isolated in space or in time; nothing can exist, grow or decay, be born or die without affecting or being unaffected by the universe. Every action, intentional or otherwise, on the part of any person shall have its inevitable repercussions in a wider sphere. A seed even if carelessly cast on the ground will grow up into a tree and bear its appropriate fruit. The death of a hero is in this sense no more cataclysmic than the fall of a leaf, since both are cosmic events whether we realise it or not. Again, the law of compensation is constantly operating in all fields and on all levels. No man can become materially rich without losing something

[41] Facets of Indian Thought (London, 1964), p. 19; cited hereafter as Facets.

in the spiritual sphere. As Emerson writes, "A surplusage given to one part is paid out of a reduction from another part of the same creature....For every thing you have missed, you have gained something else; and for every thing you gain, you lose something."[42] ("Compensation") It is the same principle which is implied in the famous Hindu myth in which gods and demons churn the ocean for nectar, the drink which would give them immortality. They get nectar but before they get it, they get poison. Still again, Indians saw functional cooperation rather than conflict in the universe as a whole and therefore recognized early the preferability of cooperation between individual organisms of society and created the caste system. It was established to forestall unhealthy rivalry and assure a livelihood so that men could live in social harmony and cooperation. The commensal relationship, which is an important idea that Steinbeck expounds in The 'Log' from the Sea of Cortez, is illustrated by him in his novels, especially in Cannery Row. In this novel the whole town is treated as one commensal unit. Without the fishing fleet, the economic structure of the whole town would have collapsed. The fleet brings

[42] Works, II, 97-98.

in the catch; the poor people of the town can the fish; Lee's grocery supplies almost everything; and the only thing it does not supply, namely, girls, the Bear Flag Restaurant does. If Mack and his friends rent out a house belonging to Lee for five dollars a week but do not pay rent, the arrangement is not a total loss to Lee:

> The windows were not broken. Fire did not break out, and while no rent was ever paid, if the tenants ever had any money, and quite often they did have, it never occurred to them to spend it any where except at Lee Chong's grocery. What he had was a little group of active and potential customers under wraps. But it went further than that. If a drunk caused trouble in the grocery, if the kids swarmed down from New Monterey intent on plunder, Lee Chong had only to call and his tenants rushed to his aid. One further bond is established--you cannot steal from your benefactor. 43

And Doc is the heart of this community: "Over a period of years Doc dug himself into Cannery Row to an extent not even he suspected."[44] When Mack's party for Doc fails, the whole community is plagued by accidents, in the same way as a man's constitution would break down if his heart was not working properly:

[43] Short Novels, pp. 385-386.
[44] Ibid., p. 395.

> It was a bad time. Evil stalked darkly in the vacant lot. Sam Malloy had a number of fights with his wife and she cried all the time. The echoes inside the boiler made it sound as though she were crying under water. Mack and the boys seemed to be the node of trouble. The nice bouncer at the Bear Flag threw out a drunk, but threw him too hard and too far and broke his back. 45

And when preparations for the second party begin, the whole town is full of joy. The relationship of the people is suggested by their presence at the party. Even the policemen are present and the squad car is used to get more liquor. The sailors from the fleet come to fight but stay to drink.

In the cosmic process as a whole, Steinbeck tells us, nothing is lost without a compensating gain:

> In the microcosm nothing is wasted, the equation always balances. The elements which the fish elaborated into an individuated physical organism, a microcosm, go back again into the undifferentiated macrocosm which is the great reservoir. There is not, nor can there be, any actual waste, but simply varying forms of energy. To each group, of course, there must be waste--the dead fish to man, the broken pieces to gulls, the bones to some and the scales to others--but to the whole, there is no waste. The great organism, Life, takes it all and uses it all.

[45] Ibid., pp. 470-471.

> The large picture is always clear and the smaller can be clear--the picture of eater and eaten. And the large equilibrium of the life of a given animal is postulated on the presence of abundant larvae of just such forms as itself for food. Nothing is wasted; "no star is lost."[46]

The balancing itself may not be easily discernible. The death of Grampa Joad has apparently nothing to do with the old man whom Rose of Sharon saves at the end of the novel. Steinbeck, however, suggests a relationship between the two through the use of imagery. At the beginning of the novel, Grampa declares, "'Jus' let me get out to California where I can pick me an orange when I want it. Or grapes. There's a thing I ain't never had enough of. Gonna get me a whole big bunch a grapes off a bush, or whatever, an' I'm gonna squash 'em on my face an' let 'em run offen my chin.'"[47] He dies long before the family reaches California, but the picture of an orange being squashed and the juice running off his chin is suggestive of the other old man's being breast-fed by Rose of Sharon. One man dies but another is saved. Similarly Casy dies and Tom takes up his work. The Joads lose their property but become better human beings through their suffering. All occurrences are subtly balanced relationships.

[46] The 'Log', p. 263.
[47] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 73.

Harmony between Man and Nature

I have mentioned earlier that Steinbeck sees the whole universe as one ecological unit. This conception implies that man is a part of nature and has a commensal relationship with it. On the cosmic level nature is, as Alan Watts puts it, "a field of relationships rather than a collection of things."[48] This is in contrast to the Western and Christian attitudes which, instead of seeing the principle of order in the universe, see man and nature as antagonistic forces. The West has taken it for granted that nature is for man's benefit and therefore meant to be conquered. The anthropocentric view that man is the measure of things was an accepted motto even before Protagoras coined the axiom. This may be seen in the creation of gods as anthropomorphic figures who could literally move mountains. They are essentially idealized supermen.

Christianity, too, holds that nature is to be conquered, but for a different reason. It believes that nature is evil and the apotheosis of the idea is to be seen in the Christian conception that life can

[48] Nature, Man and Woman, 2nd printing (New York, 1966), p. 95; cited hereafter as Nature.

be delivered from death, as suggested in Christ's resurrection. It should, however, be mentioned that nature mysticism is not entirely absent in Christian religious writing and hymns, and animals are not always treated as though they are all created for the benefit of man. Dogs, for example, are not eaten or ordinarily killed, even though it be for sentimental reasons only. While this fact does not argue against the dominion of man over nature and animals, it argues against the idea of an unending depravity in nature.

As a contrast to the anthropocentric point of view is the cosmic canon of Hinduism where man is not the measure of things but only a part of the universe.[49] The concept of the Brahman and the creation of the universe out of Itself makes this point clear. Everything from the highest to the lowest is a manifestation of the Brahman. This implies that, first, all life is united and, second, no particular species can claim superiority over the others. All forms of life--and nothing is considered as being without a soul--are

[49]There are anthropomorphic gods in Hinduism similar to the Demiurgos of Greek culture. These were probably a concession to pre-Vedic traditions and are considered inferior gods.

accepted as equally valid expressions of the Brahman. Animals and plants, rivers and mountains are worshipped as symbols of the divine. As Betty Heimann points out, Indian philosophy "regards all things as subsisting side by side, both in Space and Time, all alike being equally expressive symbols of the hidden vital force behind or within them."[50] So while the West usually sees a rift between man and nature, Hinduism sees a fundamental harmony, between the two.[51] So does Steinbeck.

Steinbeck's comprehension of a harmony between man and nature is apparently the result of his love of nature. The descriptions of nature in To a God Unknown and East of Eden bear testimony to that personal and intimate knowledge of nature which came from his being born and bred in the beautiful Salinas Valley in California, with the Pacific on the west and the Gabilan mountains on the east. The perceptiveness of seeing symbolism in nature appears to have come to

[50] Indian and Western Philosophy (London, 1937), p. 19; cited hereafter as Indian.

[51] However, to say that animals and plants are not at all used for purposes of human survival would be an untruth, though it is true that cows and certain varieties of trees are considered holy and are not destroyed and that there is in general an absence of wanton destruction of animal and plant life.

him early. Jody's impressions and experiences appear to have been Steinbeck's own. ("The Red Pony") Jody sees the black cypress trees as a symbol of death, and a mossy tub, of life. The moss-covered rock and the water spring reappear in To a God Unknown as ambiguous symbols of life and death. Later still, water is used as an ambiguous symbol in The Grapes of Wrath, where the flood at the end is associated with the still-born child of Rose of Sharon and saving the old man's life.

Harmony between Apparent Opposites

There is little doubt that Steinbeck holds the processes of nature to be necessarily interdependent though apparently independent, life and death, joy and sorrow to be related though outwardly opposites. This may be clearly seen in the portrait of the old Chinaman in Cannery Row. He is a quaint and picturesque old man with a brown face and blue clothes. He comes from the sea in the morning, returning to it in the evening. People have been seeing him for a long time but without getting used to him. The boy Andy sees something in his face for a moment and nobody else ever has that experience. Every detail about him has a significance much wider than that of the immediate

context. When he comes from the sea in the morning, he has a wicker basket "heavy and wet and dripping."[52] In the evening when he returns to sea, the basket is covered and presumably empty. In the morning he brings with him from the sea sustenance and life; in the evening he is associated with emptiness and death.

The Chinaman appears in the novel four times. On the first occasion Andy sees something frightening in his face--an important episode that will be discussed later. On the other three occasions different consequences are associated with his appearance, though in terms of cause and effect the incidents have nothing to do with the Chinaman. The first association is with the consummation of love between two soldiers and two girls and their perfect happiness. In the second, Doc comes home after a collecting expedition to find his laboratory a wreck after Mack's party had gone out of control. On the third occasion the old Chinaman appears just before the famous party for Doc gets going. The incident of the soldiers is one of perfect happiness, that of the laboratory, destruction, and that of the successful party, harmony. The Chinaman,

[52] Short Novels, p. 392.

who seems to represent maya, is rightly associated with all the three varieties of experience.

Significance of Andy's Experience

Andy's encounter with the Chinaman is a very important episode. Andy feels that he must shout at the old man if only to keep his self-respect. He sings at him in a shrill falsetto, "'Ching-Chong Chinaman sitting on a rail--'Long came a white man an' chopped off his tail.'"[53] The result is:

> The old man stopped and turned. Andy stopped. The deep-brown eyes looked at Andy and the thin corded lips moved. What happened then Andy was never able either to explain or to forget. For the eyes spread out until there was no Chinaman. And then it was one eye--one huge brown eye as big as a church door. Andy looked through the shiny transparent brown door and through it he saw a lonely countryside, flat for miles but ending against a row of fantastic mountains shaped like cows' heads and tents and mushrooms. There was low coarse grass on the plain and here and there a little mound. And a small animal like a woodchuck sat on each mound. And the loneliness--the desolate cold aloneness of the landscape made Andy whimper because there wasn't anybody at all in the world and he was left. Andy shut his eyes so he wouldn't have to see it any more and when he opened them, he was in Cannery Row and the old Chinaman was just flap-flapping between Western Biological and the Hediondo Cannery. Andy was the only boy who ever did that, and he never did it again. 54

[53] Ibid., p. 392.
[54] Ibid., pp. 392-393.

Andy is faced with two contradictory experiences--the material world around him in which he sees a funny old man at whom he can jeer, and a lonely wasteland which has not been a part of his experience before. The huge eye through which he sees the wasteland is highly symbolic. The image sounds like an echo from Emerson's Nature in which he writes,

> Standing on the bare ground,--my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,--all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God. 55

Later,

> Until this higher agency intervened, the animal eye sees, with wonderful accuracy, sharp outlines and colored surfaces. When the eye of Reason opens, to outline and surface are at once added grace and expression. These proceed from imagination and affection, and abate somewhat of the angular distinctness of objects. If the Reason be stimulated to more earnest vision, outlines and surfaces become transparent, and are no longer seen; causes and spirits are seen through them. The best moments of life are these delicious, awakenings of the higher powers, and the reverential withdrawing of nature before its God. 56

[55] Works, I, 10.
[56] Ibid., 49-50.

Emerson is suggesting that there are eyes with differing powers of sight. There is the physical eye which we use in our daily life; then there is the eye of poetic imagination; and then the eye of spiritual insight. When he talks of the transparent eyeball, Emerson is referring to the eye of spiritual insight which penetrates through the dross of material things to perceive ultimate truth. The huge brown eye through which Andy sees is the archetypal symbol for all spiritual vision. The old man and the wasteland are both aspects of one reality, like two sides of a leaf. Andy sees the identity of opposites. Creation and dissolution, light and shadow are not opposed to each other in an ultimate sense. In our daily life, however, we see things not as they are but as we are stimulated to see them. Steinbeck suggests this when he writes about the Chinaman: "Some people thought he was God and very old people thought he was Death and children thought he was a very funny old Chinaman, as children always think anything old and strange is funny."[57] The true nature of things is not easily realised because of the different forms and names that the essence of the Brahman assumes. Steinbeck suggests the identity underlying various things in a rather

[57] Short Novels, p. 392.

simplified manner: when the Chinaman is there, there is no wasteland. And the Chinaman reappears after the wasteland has vanished. The contrasting experience of Andy is probably used to symbolize the identity of opposites.

It is plausible to assume that Steinbeck intends Andy's experience to symbolize the identity of opposites. A strong case can be made for seeing a parallel between Andy's experience and a famous episode in the Gita. The salient points of similarity between the Chinaman and Vishnu may be pointed out here: Vishnu in Hindu theology is associated with the colour blue--both in the sense of the blue sky and the blue sea; Steinbeck gives us the Chinaman dressed in blue jeans and appearing with a dark complexion. Vishnu ~~is seen in his avatara (incarnations) as~~ sleeps on the coils of a serpent, Ananta (Endless), which symbolizes water; Steinbeck shows us the Chinaman emerging from the sea at morning and returning to it at night. Water is in fact the home of Vishnu whatever his form--as a giant reclining on the waters, or as a divine child, or as a majestic wild gander.[58] This is particularly significant

[58]Vide Heinrich Zimmer, Myths, p. 35.

since water is a very important symbol in Hinduism. It is believed that everything is created out of water and everything returns to it at the end of each world cycle; evolution begins in water and involution ends in it. What is more important is that water is also the symbol of maya. That Steinbeck associates water with maya is supported by his description of the hour of the Chinaman's coming. He writes, "It is the hour of the pearl--the interval between day and night when time stops and examines itself."[59] (Italics added.) On another occasion he merely says, "It was the hour of the pearl."[60] The multi-faceted symbolism of the pearl is the theme of a later chapter, but I may mention here that it is a symbol of the unreality of the world's values and an image of impurity. Steinbeck associates it, too, with maya, an idea which becomes clear when we examine Andy's experience with the Chinaman.

Andy's experience parallels chapter XI of the Gita, in which Krishna (one of the incarnations of Vishnu) shows his Universal Form to Arjuna. Arjuna petitions Krishna, "'I long to behold your divine Form.'"[61] Krishna

[59] Short Novels, p. 432.
[60] Ibid., p. 459.
[61] Gita, p. 91.

agrees: "'This very day you shall behold the whole universe with all things animate and inert made one within this body of mine.'"[62] Then he reveals to Arjuna his transcendental divine Form, "speaking from innumerable mouths, seeing with a myriad eyes, of many marvellous aspects."[63] Arjuna sees him also as a destroyer, and Krishna explains,

> "I am come as Time, the waster of the peoples,
> Ready for that hour that ripens to their ruin.
> All these hosts must die; strike, stay your
> hand--no matter." 64

Arjuna expresses in one sentence the paradoxical nature of God: "'You are what is not, what is, and what transcends them.'"[65] Arjuna and Andy experience the same thing--the identity of opposites.

Even in minor respects there are striking similarities between the two scenes. "Andy was the only boy who ever did that and he never did it again";[66] Krishna tells Arjuna that his shape will not be "'viewed by any mortal'"[67]

[62] Ibid., p. 91.
[63] Ibid., p. 92.
[64] Ibid., p. 94.
[65] Ibid., p. 95.
[66] Short Novels, p. 393.
[67] Gita, p. 96.

other than him. Again, Andy whimpers when he sees the landscape in the Chinaman's face; Arjuna tells Krishna, "'Deep is my delight, but still my dread is greater.'"[68]

The significance of the Chinaman has been missed by critics. Peter Lisca thinks that he is Death.[69] Joseph Fontenrose writes, "The old Chinaman of Chapter IV, seen only at sunrise and sunset, is Demogorgon, above and beyond everything; the word 'Ching-Chong Chinaman' did not apply to him."[70] F. W. Watt who associates the old Chinaman with loneliness writes, "Loneliness is a danger barely kept at bay, lurking on the streets of Monterey like the mysterious old Chinaman whom the boy Andy one day foolishly taunts, and in whose eyes he sees a frightening vision."[71] To Warren French, he symbolizes the terrors of isolation. French explains, "The old man means various things to different people, but he seems actually to symbolize through his utter detachment from the world around him,

[68]Ibid., p. 96. It is possible that the idea of Andy's seeing something fearful in the old man's eyes might have been suggested to Steinbeck by Emerson: "They who wrestle with Hari see their doom in his eye before the fight begins." (Journals, VII, 123). Hari is one of the names of Vishnu.

[69]Lisca, p. 212.

[70]Fontenrose, p. 104.

[71]Watt, p. 83.

the thing people fear most--to very old people this is death; but, to young boys like the one who makes fun of him, it is loneliness. The old Chinaman symbolizes the terrors of isolation to the person who must rely upon the opinion of the world around him, rather than upon his internal resources, for happiness."[72] The opinion of each one of the critics is limited. To assume that the old Chinaman symbolizes loneliness and death, and not also their opposites, is to have only a partial understanding of his significance in the novel. If the assumption is correct that there is a close parallel between Andy's experience and the episode from the Gita, we can move beyond to see that Andy's vision of desolation correspondingly shows him a prospect of what is significant and dear in human life.

Necessity of Contact between Man and Nature

Because Steinbeck sees a harmony between man and nature, and not an incompatibility as Christianity does, he posits that a personal and intimate contact with nature is a necessary condition for spiritual development. About contact between man and nature, Alan W. Watts writes, "In many so-called primitive cultures it is a requirement of tribal initiation to

[72]French, p. 125.

spend a lengthy period alone in the forests or mountains, a period of coming to terms with the solitude and non-humanity of nature so as to discover who, or what, one really is--a discovery hardly possible while the community is telling you what you are, or ought to be."[73] In ancient India, a student had to spend his years of education with his hermit-teacher who lived in the forest. He had to spend the last years of his life also in the forest in quiet contemplation. The "good" characters in Steinbeck go into the wilderness to ponder over the mystery of the universe, or at least live in uninhibited contact with nature. Jim Casy, Tom Joad and Joseph Wayne discover their inner being in solitude. Junius Maltby (The Pastures of Heaven) and the strange old man (To a God Unknown) live in constant contact with nature. As Watts puts it, "Man meets the world outside with a soft skin, with a delicate eyeball and eardrum, and finds communion with it through a warm, melting, vaguely defined, and caressing touch whereby the world is not set at a distance like an enemy to be shot, but embraced to become one flesh, like a beloved wife."[74]

[73] Nature, p. 31.
[74] Ibid., p. 81.

Steinbeck suggests that the problematic relationship of man with nature and woman in the West shows an inability to accept them on their own terms. The difference in the attitude to them in the West and the East has been pointed out by Watts:

> For one thing, there is an obvious symbolic correlation between man's attitude to nature and man's attitude to woman. However fanciful this symbolism may sometimes be, it has in fact had an enormous influence upon sexual love in both Eastern and Western cultures. For another, sexual love is a troubled and problematic relationship in cultures where there is a strong sense of man's separation from nature, especially when the realm of nature is felt to be inferior or contaminated with evil. 75

Steinbeck identifies nature and woman and thus implies that the Western attitude to nature is the same as its attitude to women. The identification is done in two ways: first, by depicting women as Mother-Earth figures. There are at least five such figures in his fiction--Rama (To a God Unknown), Ma Joad, Rose of Sharon (The Grapes of Wrath), Lisa (In Dubious Battle), and Juana (The Pearl). The depiction of Rama as a Mother-Earth figure I have discussed in an earlier chapter, and hence only the other four figures need be considered here. Mother-Earth

[75] Ibid., p. 11.

figures are usually not psychologically complex; they are often earthy; they are good and generous by nature; and they have an enduring quality about them. Ma Joad is perhaps more sensitive than Mother-Earth figures ordinarily are. Her matronly figure and maternal feelings for all who surround her leave no doubt about her symbolic purpose in the novel. "Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with child-bearing and work....Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and a superhuman understanding....Imperturbability could be depended upon."[76] She buttons up Grampa Joad's pants with the same naturalness and serenity as she would suckle a child. And when they come across the man dying of hunger, the idea of Rose's breast-feeding him strikes both mother and daughter simultaneously. Ma Joad's daughter, Rose of Sharon, begins as an intensely selfish and self-centred girl, but in the last scene of the novel becomes the symbol of Mother-Earth.

Lisa, her child, and Jim Nolan are meant to suggest the Holy Family in In Dubious Battle. Lisa is the daughter-in-law of London, the leader of the fruit-pickers. She

[76]The Grapes of Wrath, p. 65.

is going through labour pains when Mac joins the camp. Mac exploits the situation for winning the confidence of the strikers, and acts as mid-wife though he had had no training at all. He is risking her life, but she submits to it in the same way as the earth would submit uncomplainingly to the operations of the farmer.

Equally uncomplainingly does Juana submit to the authority of Kino even when her instincts tell her that he is wrong. She advises him to throw away the pearl or destroy it, but he does not listen. When she tries to throw it away, he hits her. And when having lost everything he ultimately gives it to her to cast into the sea, she hands it back to him to perform that final act. Her patient endurance of long suffering without complaint makes her a figure symbolizing a larger consciousness.

The second method by which Steinbeck identifies nature and woman is by the use of erotic imagery. This may be seen clearly when, in The Grapes of Wrath, he tries to point out the difference between cultivating the land with plough and horse and ploughing it with a tractor. He writes:

> Behind the harrows, the long seeders--twelve curbed iron penes erected in the foundry, orgasms set by gears, raping methodically, raping without passion. The driver sat in his iron seat and he was proud of the straight lines he did not will, proud of the tractor he did not own or love, proud of the power he could not control. And when that crop grew, and was harvested, no man had crumbled a hot clod in his fingers and let the earth sift past his fingertips. No man had touched the seed, or lusted for the growth. Men ate what they had not raised, had no connection with the bread. The land bore under iron, and under iron gradually died; for it was not loved or hated, it had no prayers or curses. [77]

Or

"The phalli of the seeder slipping into the ground."[78]

Symbolism of Feeble-minded Characters

The relationship which Steinbeck sees between man and nature is also symbolized by some of his feeble-minded characters. They are symbolic of feelings which modern man has suppressed in submitting himself to the artificialities of a materialistic civilization and in isolating himself from nature. Watts suggests that "the difference between ourselves and the animals is possibly that they have only the most rudimentary form

[77] Ibid., p. 31.
[78] Ibid., p. 33.

of the individualized consciousness but a high degree of sensitivity to the endless knot of nature."[79] Steinbeck makes the feeble-minded stand between man on the one hand and the animal on the other as far as individualized consciousness and degree of sensitivity are concerned. They are more sensitive than men in that they are nearer nature, and they are less instinctive than animals in that they make choices consciously. They are more de-individualized than men and hence do not consider themselves distinct from the rest of humanity; and they are less sensitive than animals and hence are not completely a part of nature. Fontenrose says, "In some strange way the feeble-minded reveal to Steinbeck man's kinship with all creatures: he finds in them perceptions and intuitions which the intelligent often have not."[80] In other words, they represent the better self in every man suppressed under the burden of social conformity, and the better self consists, partly at least, in the recognition of the close relationship between man and nature. Conformity to the conventions of respectability as understood by society involves prudery and hypocrisy, and the feeble-minded, innocent of social advantages, do not subscribe

[79] Nature, p. 8.
[80] Fontenrose, p. 19.

to them. Since they have not either the intelligence to fight back or the common sense to yield, they are destroyed by an unimaginative society, and their destruction is symbolic of the destruction of what is good in man through social pressures. Lennie (Of Mice and Men), says Steinbeck, represents "the inarticulate and powerful yearning of all men."[81] Lennie represents not only the dreams and yearnings of man but the relationship of land and man, too. This love for the land takes the concrete form of the desire to have a little house, a couple of acres of land, rabbits, a cow and some pigs.

Similarly Muley Graves (The Grapes of Wrath) wages a vain fight against the banks which are the new masters of the land. He declares, "'There an't nobody can run a guy name of Graves outa this country.'"[82] And when Casy suggests that he should have gone to California, Muley replies, "'I couldn'. ...Somepin jus' wouldn' let me.'"[83] The name Muley Graves is perhaps meant to be significant--he is as stubborn as a mule and he is grave-oriented in refusing to follow the drift of Okie

[81]Quoted in Lisca, p. 134.
[82]The Grapes of Wrath, p. 39.
[83]Ibid., p. 42.

life to California. In his fight against such powerful and impersonal forces as banks he would break rather than bend. And it is this same stubborn Muley who expresses in his own inarticulate way the concept of universal brotherhood. He has two cottontails and a jack-rabbit in a sack which he empties on the porch.

> Casy picked up one of the cottontails and held it in his hand. "You sharin' with us, Muley Graves?" he asked.
>
> Muley fidgeted in embarrassment. "I ain't got no choice in the matter." He stopped on the ungracious sound of his words. "That ain't like I mean it. That ain't. I mean"--he stumbled--"what I mean, if a fella's got somepin to eat an' another fella's hungry--why, the first fella ain't got no choice. I mean, s'pose I pick up my rabbits an' go off somewheres an' eat 'em. See?"
>
> "I see," said Casy. "I can see that. Muley sees somepin there, Tom. Muley's got a-hold of somepin, an' it's too big for him, an' it's too big for me." 84

A companion figure to Muley is Noah Joad who leaves the family and lives on the bank of a river. He symbolizes the relationship between man and nature. To Tom who protests, he replies, "'No. It an't no use. I was in that there water. An' I ain't a-gonna leave her. I'm a-gonna go now, Tom--down the river. I'll catch fish an'

[84] Ibid., p. 42.

stuff, but I can't leave her. I can't.'"[85] The reaction of Noah and Muley to nature is instinctive, not rational. They show a greater awareness of the unity of the universe. Their living on a primitive level is meant to be an indication of a fuller involvement with nature. This is suggested by the simple but lyrical style of Noah's speech to Tom and the inarticulate words of Muley to Casy quoted above.

Depiction of Animals

Like the depiction of the feeble-minded, Steinbeck's depiction of animals throws further light upon the correspondence between Steinbeck's and Hindu thought. The place of animals in Western and Christian thought is different to some extent from that in Hinduism. The pre-Christian Greeks considered nature as inferior and nature included animals. Aristotle gave plants and animals inferior souls. Christianity lent support to the notion of the superiority of man by giving him a soul and denying it to animals and plants. Man is considered to be, in Betty Heimann's words, "so perfect in himself that even in the last stage of achievement, in his culminating salvation, his specific personality is

[85] Ibid., p. 189.

hoped to be retained."[86] Since man was considered to be superior, he felt he had a right to exploit animals for his benefit. Aldous Huxley writes: "Taking their cue from an unfortunate remark in Genesis, Catholic moralists have regarded animals as mere things which men do right to exploit for their own ends."[87] W. Maxneile Dixon points out how Christianity has ignored the animal world:

> And there is similar silence [in the Christian documents] in respect of the animal world. Their status in God's creation is overlooked. They are not thought of as concerned in the Fall, as sinful, as in need of grace or redemption, or as having any share in a future life. Presumably in heaven we shall never meet with them, and some of us will miss our favourites, birds, or dogs, or horses. If animals were not, like ourselves, sufferers, condemned like us to death, that silence might somehow be explained. But death, we are told, entered the world through sin, and though not partakers in sin they partake death, its consequence. Nor does it appear that they have rights of any kind, nor we any duties in respect of them. We may, it seems, treat them according to our good pleasure. 88

It was not until the nineteenth century that with the

[86] Facets, p. 117.

[87] The Perennial Philosophy, 2nd impression (London, 1947), p. 91.

[88] The Human Situation, (London, 1958), pp. 36-37.

Romantic movement came the idea of treating the animals humanely.

The Hindu point of view is different from the Western and Christian though the difference is one of degree rather than a categorical opposition. There is a tendency in Hinduism to treat animals as if they are beings in their own right. This may be seen in the metaphysics of the Upanishads and the theology of Hinduism. The Upanishads state that the soul in the animals is the same as that in human beings. In theology, the gods are represented by their vehicles. Heinrich Zimmer writes, "These vehicles or mounts (vāhana) are manifestations on the animal plane of the divine individuals themselves."[89] Shiva is represented by the bull, Vishnu by the eagle and Brahma by the gander. Again, the fact that some of Vishnu's incarnations were in the animal form implies that animals are not inferior to human beings.

The foregoing may give the impression that the Western and Eastern conceptions are fundamentally opposed to each other. On the contrary, it will be seen that in the early Greek and Roman myths animals played an important

[89] Myths, p. 48.

role, in the same way as they did in Hinduism. They were used as symbols of the gods; the bull was associated with Zeus, for example. The theory of the transmigration of the souls implied the equality of plants, animals and men. Amongst philosophers, "the pictures of Orpheus in which wild and tame animals were represented as lying down in amity side by side all alike, charmed by the notes of his lyre, illustrate the unity of all living creation."[90] Plato saw a great deal more in the unity of being than did Aristotle--he saw the universe as a unity in diversity. And among the religions, Judaism wanted its followers to operate on the principle that meat should be killed ritually, should be atoned for, and should never be served in such a form as to suggest the living animal; and the dictum "thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother's milk"[91] was meant to emphasize the principle that the sanctity of the life function should never be confused with the death function. The Greek and Roman myths, Plato's mysticism and Judaic humaneness towards animals do not, however, indicate the general trend of Western and Christian thought. On the whole, dissimilarity between Oriental

[90] S. Radhakrishnan, Eastern Religions, p. 137.
[91] "Exodus," 23:19 (Authorized Version).

and Occidental thought is more pronounced than the similarity.

Steinbeck treats animals as beings in their own right and he gives them an individuality which is distinct from the bundle of instinctive reactions which animals are usually believed to be. This is Steinbeck's way of suggesting that animals deserve a more considerate treatment from human beings than is usually accorded to them in the West. The asserting of the personality of the animals should be accepted for its symbolic value and not taken too literally. Unlike the traditional sentimental method of giving domestic animals qualities which are a reflection of the personality of the masters, Steinbeck's method is to give them a few characteristics which are associated more with human beings than with animals. He makes them have, for example, a sense of preserving appearances in public and gives them a conscious sense of likes and dislikes. This is not to say, as Claude-Edmonde Magny does, that "Steinbeck can speak of animals and plants, or orchards and mice better than he does of men."[92] Whatever delightful pictures of horses and men Steinbeck

[92]"Steinbeck, or the Limits of the Impersonal Novel," in Tedlock, p. 223.

might draw, it is doubtful whether he would, like Whitman, "turn and live with animals."[93] ("Song of Myself")

It has been stated above that Steinbeck portrays animals as unique characters by individualizing them. Describing the red pony in the story of that name, Steinbeck writes: "[Jody] put his hand out toward the pony. Its grey nose came close, sniffing loudly, and then the lips drew back and the strong teeth closed on Jody's fingers. The pony shook its head up and down and seemed to laugh with amusement."[94] (Italics added.) Again, "He aimed a tremendous kick at the boy. Every time he did one of these bad things, Gabilan settled back and seemed to laugh to himself."[95] (Italics added.) It is not the biting and kicking that are individualistic, for any horse would instinctively react to being domesticated, but his settling back and laughing to himself, the reflection, which gives him so strongly individuated a personality.

Lindo, a horse belonging to the Lopez sisters

[93] Works, p. 33.
[94] The Long Valley, 5th printing (New York, 1963), p. 211.
[95] Ibid., p. 218.

(The Pastures of Heaven), is even more individualized than the red pony:

> Then....[Maria] backed him between the shafts of an ancient buggy. Lindo purposely stumbled over the shafts, just as he had for thirty years. When Maria hooked the traces, he looked round at her with a heavy, philosophic sadness. ..."The way is not long," Maria soothed him. "We will go slowly. You must not fear the journey, Lindo." But Lindo did fear the journey. He loathed the journey to Monterey and back....
>
> As though to punctuate the conversation, an old Ford appeared over the hill and came roaring down upon them. Maria gripped the lines. "Lindo, be calm!" she called. Lindo paid not the slightest attention either to Maria or to the Ford. 96 (Italics added.)

It is the human feelings and deliberate actions which make Lindo unique.

Steinbeck sometimes makes animals unique by giving them human weaknesses:

> The other pup was not so brave. He looked about for something that could honourably divert his attention, saw a red chicken go mincing by, and ran at it. There was the squawk of an outraged hen, a burst of red feathers, and the hen ran off, flapping stubby wings for speed. The pup looked proudly back at the men, and then flopped down in the dust and beat its tail contentedly on the ground. 97 (Italics added.)

[96] The Pastures of Heaven, pp. 116-119.

[97] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 64.

Steinbeck's art of giving an individuality to an animal appears to lie in adding a gentle humorous touch to the portrait of a type, and the humorous touch which usually points out a weakness in the character of the animal only endears it all the more to the reader, since the weakness is more characteristic of human beings than animals. "He looked about for something that could honourably divert his attention" in the passage quoted above applies to most human beings when they find themselves in embarrassing situations.

Steinbeck not only makes animals unique personalities but treats them as beings in their own right. This is seen most clearly in Doc's behaviour to them. Doc (Cannery Row), who is Steinbeck's persona, "tips his hat to dogs as he drives by and the dogs look up and smile at him."[98] In Tortilla Flat, the Pirate's dogs are even granted a vision of St. Francis, though as Warren French points out, "It is really rather cynical to depict a pack of mongrels as the only ones in the book granted a vision."[99]

The fact that Steinbeck depicts animals as unique

[98] Short Novels, p. 395.
[99] French, p. 56.

individualities does not mean that he does not use animals for purposes of comparison or symbolism--two of the commonest weapons in the armoury of the literary artist. Describing Robbie as he goes to school for the first time, he writes: "His long hair hung over his grey eyes like the forelock of a range pony."[100] If one remembers that Robbie is the son of Junius Maltby who is completely indifferent to the conventions of respectability of middle-class society and that Robbie is a child of nature who has not suffered from inhibitions or inferiority complex, it will be seen how wonderfully appropriate the comparison is. Steinbeck, however, considers analogies to be misleading since they lead to a misunderstanding of the animals. He writes:

> It is difficult, when watching the little beasts, not to trace human parallels. The greatest danger to a speculative biologist is analogy. It is a pitfall to be avoided--the industry of the bee, the economics of the ant, the villainy of the snake, all in human terms have given us profound misconceptions of the animals. But parallels are amusing if they are not taken too seriously as regards the animal in question, and are downright valuable as regards humans. [101]

Man can learn much about the laws of nature through a

[100] The Pastures of Heaven, p. 93.
[101] The 'Log', pp. 94-95.

study of animals but he will only misunderstand them if he sees them analogically, that is, if he applies to them qualities which are valid in the context of human society instead of trying to understand them as they are, with their own behaviour patterns and individuality.

Steinbeck also makes significant use of animals as symbolic figures for natural forces and instincts which are larger than men and animals but of which animals are better representations. The best example of this use is the turtle in The Grapes of Wrath which symbolizes the instinct for survival in both man and animal. The turtle encounters the same kind of destructive forces as the Joads, but, far from succumbing to them, it acts as a carrier of life. However, when I said above that Steinbeck depicts animals as beings in their own right or as individuals, no reference was intended to the use of animals for purposes of comparison or symbolism.

The Individual and Society in Hinduism

I have stated earlier that in the cosmic or biological concept of the universe no species is considered more important than the others. And in a species no individual is singled out. As Betty Heimann says, "According to India's cosmic outlook the individual

does not stand in splendid isolation."[102] Hindu thought emphasizes the functional cooperation of individual organisms in the cosmic process. It sees that man has two aspects, the social and the individual, but both of them intertwine. "The theory of varna or caste emphasizes the social aspect, and that of āsrama or stages of life the individual aspect."[103] Society is not something which is forced upon man but a means of developing his personality since man is a social being. And the caste system, as I have stated earlier, was a means of securing for him a harmonious relationship with the others in society. The conception of the four stages of life--the student, the householder, the forest-dweller, and the ascetic--was meant to provide a framework for the guidance of individual development. As a student, the young person lived in the house of his teacher who disciplined his body and mind for a life of duty. As a householder, he would lead a family life and carry out his duties as an active member of the community he lived in. As a forest-dweller, he withdrew from an active life to live in the forest. Though he did not actively participate in the affairs of the world, he was still available for

[102] Indian, p. 63.

[103] S. Radhakrishnan, The Hindu View of Life, 4th impression (London, 1965), p. 59.

consultations, and his wisdom and experience were at the disposal of the community. This was also the stage of solitude and meditation and a preparation for the next stage. The fourth stage, that of the ascetic, was one of complete renunciation. The only aim then was self-realization. He was giving up the whole world for the sake of his soul. Having carried out loyally his social duties in the three earlier stages, he had arrived at the stage where his purpose might be considered to be individualistic, but which really was to overcome individualism for the sake of universality. As I have demonstrated in the last chapter, the man who realized the self did not really retire but went on serving humanity in the truly altruistic sense, for he had no personal desires to be fulfilled. Thus the concept of the four stages implied a progression from social to spiritual values.

Hinduism saw, however, that conflicts between the social and individual aspects of life could not be avoided. It was difficult to reconcile in practice an individual's allegiance to society and to his soul at the same time. So a hierarchy of values was suggested. The Mahabharatha says, "One should sacrifice one (member) for the sake of the family, for the sake of the village

the family should be sacrificed, for the sake of the country one should sacrifice the village, and for the sake of the soul, even the whole world is to be sacrificed."[104] In the order of ascending importance are the family, the village, the country and the world. The soul, however, is more important than all these. This should not be understood to mean that a man should destroy the world for the benefit of his soul, for the soul in man and the soul in the world are identical and the question of destroying one for the sake of the other does not arise. What the stanza implies is that between the empirical world and the empirical being of an individual, the world is more important. Between the empirical world and the soul, however, the soul comes first, for the world has only a relative reality while the soul is the only true Reality.

The Individual and Society in Steinbeck

Like the Hindus, Steinbeck feels that a person owes a double allegiance, to society and to himself and that he cannot be a fully integrated individual unless he has been an integrated social being. He writes: "But also

[104]Quoted in S.K.Maitra, The Meeting of the East and the West in Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy (Pondicherry, India, 1956), p. 139.

I believe that man is a double thing--a group animal and at the same time an individual. And it occurs to me that he cannot successfully be the second until he has fulfilled the first."[105] Steinbeck sometimes appears to drgue that the interests of individuals are to be made subservient to the interests of the group. Discussing a school of fish in The 'Log' from the Sea of Cortez, he says that the functions of certain individual units can be understood only if the school of fish is considered in terms of a group-animal.[106] Every individual unit has a function to perform, and the function of certain units may be to die for the benefit of the survival of the rest. However, he is definitely opposed to a collective state where the individuality of a person would be suppressed. A completely collectivized state would be undesirable for many reasons: first, the efficiency would not be high; second, an individual would have no chance to work creatively; and third, a collective state is an insult to human dignity. "Factory mass production, for example," Steinbeck says, "requires that every man conform to the tempo of the whole. The slow must be speeded up or eliminated, the fast slowed down. In a thoroughly

[105]"Some Thoughts on Juvenile Delinquency," in The Saturday Review, 38 (May 28, 1955), 22.

[106]Vide The 'Log', pp. 240-241.

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."[107] As for the loss of individual initiative in art, he writes:

> We thought: there is no creative unit in the human save the individual working alone. In pure creativeness, in art, in music, in mathematics, there are no true collaborations. The creative principle is a lonely and an individual matter. Groups can correlate, investigate, and build, but we could not think of any group that has ever created or invented anything." 108

And in In Dubious Battle, he protests against the exploitation of human diginity for the sake of a Cause. As Warren French points out, Steinbeck "views the subordination of the individual to a Cause as an affront to human dignity, because he perceives that, since a 'cause' is an abstraction after all, what one seeks in its name is only what one wants for one's self."[109]

There would appear to be an apparent conflict between Steinbeck's earlier statement that in a school of

[107] Ibid., p. 214.
[108] Ibid., p. xlvi.
[109] French, p. 68.

fish the school as a whole is more important than the individuals composing the group, and the statement that all creative art is the work of an individual and therefore the individual is more important than the group. At least Peter Lisca thinks that Steinbeck is in a paradoxical position:

> Concerning this problem of the role of the individual in Steinbeck's work there is a paradox. For while many of his novels concern themselves with men primarily as mystical, social, psychological, or biological unit-protagonists, rather than individuals *per se*, his thought as a whole rejects the values of the group and asserts the primacy of the individual. For only the individual is capable of initiating the new directions and departures which prevent the species from losing its "survival quotient." 110

Steinbeck's thought is not a complete paradox. Rather it is a suggestion of the need to have a balance between collectivism and individuality. However, the sense of the paradox is not fully resolved; it looks as though Steinbeck wants to have it both ways.

The fact that Steinbeck is not in favour of extreme individualism may be seen in his failure to draw a convincing Faust figure and by the presence of several

[110] Lisca, p. 128.

Christ figures in his fiction.[111] A Faust figure may be considered to be an extreme form of individualism and egoism. The Faust figure stands for an apotheosis of omniscience and omnipotence, for a deification of one whose deep desire for knowledge is vitiated by the uses to which he puts it. Warren French writes: "The Faust figure, who would sacrifice the natural order to his lust for personal power, is the very one that Steinbeck has consistently been unable to realize artistically to the detriment of such works as The Moon is Down."[112]

At the other end from the Faust figure is Jim Casy, probably the most idealized of Steinbeck's characters. At a certain point in his life, self-realization is Casy's only aim, though after self-realization he goes back into the world to serve humanity. He finds no conflict between self-realization and the service to society. His statement that his little piece of soul is no good unless it is with the rest of the Over-Soul expresses not merely the altruistic ideal but the more profound conception that no person or no thing should be thought of as existing separately and independently of

[111]There are at least five Christ figures in Steinbeck's fiction--Joseph (To a God Unknown), Jim Nolan (In Dubious Battle), Doc (Cannery Row), Juan Chicoy (The Wayward Bus), and Jim Casy.

[112]French, p. 32.

the cosmos. This is not merely the knowledge of the principle of the unity of life but the recognition that no man can be distinct from it. This is the cosmic point of view on which Hinduism lays all stress.

Non-violence and Hospitality

The cosmic point of view growing out of the Hindu attitude towards animals as fully participating aspects of the cosmos, issues out in practical ethics as non-violence and hospitality. The most renowned practical exponents of non-violence in modern times were Thoreau and Mahatma Gandhi. The concept, however, does not originate with either of them. The idea is pervasive in Hinduism and goes back at least to the Chandogya Upanishad. Describing how a sacrifice can be performed in spirit and without a ceremonial, it says: "And austerity, almsgiving, uprightness, non-violence, truthfulness, these are the gifts for the priests."[113] Non-violence teaches one to respect all life and accept all of God's creation as good. It is significant that Steinbeck hates violence when it is not necessitated by circumstances or is not in the interests of knowledge. He says of Ed Ricketts, "He hated pain inflicted without

[113] Chandogya Upanishad, III, 17, 4.

good reason."[114] He repeats the idea in Cannery Row, when in speaking of Doc he says, "He can kill anything for need but he could not even hurt a feeling for pleasure."[115] Billy (The Red Pony) kills the mother-horse to save its young one, and that is justified. Steinbeck sees that there is violence in nature, though little of it is wanton. Dr. Phillips ("The Snake") remarks about a snake's killing a rat, "'Of course he'll eat it. He didn't kill it for a thrill. He killed it because he was hungry.'"[116]

Steinbeck takes an amoral attitude towards violence as a fact in nature, but he does not justify it as a weapon even for ideological reasons. A little piece of significant discussion takes place between Jim and Doc Burton regarding whether good ends can justify violent means:

> Jim said, "Y'ought to think only of the end, Doc. Out of all this struggle a good thing is going to grow. That makes it worthwhile."
>
> "Jim, I wish I knew it. But in my little experience the end is never very different in its nature from the means. Damn it, Jim, you can only build a violent thing with violence."[117]

[114] The 'Log', p. xviii.
[115] Short Novels, p. 395.
[116] The Long Valley, p. 84.
[117] In Dubious Battle, p. 230.

Closely associated with the spirit of non-violence is the practice of hospitality. "Probably in no country in the world [but India] may the passing wayfarer be so confident that his needs will be met in whatever village he may find himself, although the provision will not go beyond the minimum of his requirements. Consideration for a guest is enjoined in the Sacred Law-Books of India as an important part of the duty of a house-holder."[118] It may be clarified that "guest" here refers not to one who has been invited but to a stranger who is in need of food. The Sanskrit word "atithideva" means "treating the guest as a god."[119] In addition to the obvious suggestion that a guest should be treated with much consideration and respect, the word appears to imply that one does not oblige a guest by feeding him, just as one does not pray to God for God's benefit, and also that the host's rights over his property are, morally speaking, only limited, since from the cosmic point of view all have the same right to exist. This idea is made clear in Buddhism:

[118] A.S.Geden, "Hospitality (Indian)," in Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh, 1913), VI, 812.

[119] V.S.Apte, The Practical Sanskrit - English Dictionary, (Bombay, 1912), p. 29.

> The Buddhist expresses the true law of hospitality when he says, "Do not flatter your benefactors." The bread that you give me is not thine to give, but mine when the great order of nature has seated me today at your table. Do not let me deceive you by my thanks into the notion that you are aught but the moderator of the company for the hour, though you call yourself rich man and great benefactor, perhaps. 120

Like Hinduism, Steinbeck does not see hospitality as a social virtue but as an expression in concrete terms of the spiritual idea that when one feeds others, one feeds oneself. "A man with food fed a hungry man, and thus insured himself against hunger."[121] Hospitality becomes the test not of one's humanitarianism, as an act of charity would, but of one's recognition of the unity of life. Because the rich in The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle suffer from a sense of separateness, they would rather destroy food in order to bring the workers to their knees than allow them to eat it:

> The works of the roots of the vines, of the trees, must be destroyed to keep up the price....A million people hungry, needing the fruit--and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains....
>
> Burn coffee for fuel in the ships. Burn corn to keep warm, it makes a hot fire. Dump

[120] Emerson, Journals, V, 408.

[121] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 177.

> potatoes in the rivers and place guards along the banks to keep the hungry people from fishing them out. Slaughter the pigs and bury them, and let the putrescence drip down into the earth.
>
> There is a crime here that goes beyond denunciation. There is a sorrow here that weeping cannot symbolize. There is a failure here that topples all our success. The fertile earth, the straight tree rows, the sturdy trunks, and the ripe fruit. 122

The action of the rich was not only against some particular human beings, not only against humanity in general, but against the very principle of nature which produces food for consumption by all forms of life. In other words, it is a betrayal of the principle of hospitality.

The importance Steinbeck gives to the concept of hospitality may be gauged from the number of situations describing hospitality in his fiction. The finest one is to be found, appropriately, in The Grapes of Wrath, where Tom Joad gets his breakfast from a family whom he meets for the first time. It is an adaptation, with very slight changes, of "Breakfast" in The Long Valley. The last paragraph of "Breakfast," omitted in the novel, expresses the beauty of the scene: "That's all. I know,

[122] Ibid., p. 319.

of course, some of the reasons why it was pleasant. But there was some element of great beauty there that makes the rush of warmth when I think of it."[123]

Steinbeck sees that being hospitable is no easy thing, for hospitality is not merely a matter of giving--it is a matter of participation. "It is through struggle and sorrow that people are able to participate in one another--the heartlessness of the healthy, well-fed, and unsorrowful person has in it an infinite smugness."[124]

Steinbeck recognizes, too, that accepting hospitality is even more difficult than giving it. Accepting hospitality with serenity and without a sense of self-consciousness is, in a sense, a mark of victory over egoism. When Casy has realized the self, he has no hesitation in accepting the hospitality of the Joads. He is no longer an individual separate from the rest. He identifies himself with the others, and his sharing the food of others does not make him self-conscious. Joseph Wayne accepts Juanito's invitation with the same serenity: "'The drink has made me hungry. I'll go.'"[125]

[123] The Long Valley, p. 92.
[124] The 'Log', pp. 117-118.
[125] To a God Unknown, p. 313.

Burning Bright provides probably the best illustration of the ability to accept under difficult conditions. Joe Saul yearns to have a son of his own but learns that he suffers from sterility. His ego is terribly hurt and he finds it difficult to accept as his son his wife's child whose father is somebody else. Friend Ed finally tells him, "'It is so easy a thing to give--only great men have the courage and courtesy and, yes, the generosity to receive.'"[126] Joe's acceptance of the child is not merely the recognition that life is holy but a victory over his narrow egoism. He is on the path of de-individualization.

An examination of Steinbeck's writings reveals much about his biological and cosmic point of view. In holding that man cannot claim a distinct superiority over the rest of the creation and that all phenomena in nature are beings in their own right, in recognizing that man is a double thing owing allegiance to society and to himself but that there need be no conflict between the two, and in advocating values like non-violence and hospitality--Steinbeck is putting forward values the significance of which we gain a better understanding in the light of Oriental thought since there is a close correspondence between these values and those of Hinduism.

[126] Burning Bright, (New York, 1950), p. 149.

CHAPTER — III

The Non-teleological Point of View

The central message of The 'Log' from the Sea of Cortez is non-teleology. According to Steinbeck, the picture of the deep ultimate Reality of the whole universe is portrayed by is, and "the truest reason for anything's being so is that it is."[1] Therefore one should accept men and things as they are. Steinbeck's term for this non-blaming attitude is non-teleology or "is" thinking.

With the idea of non-teleology, Steinbeck sets himself up as a metaphysician, but his theory is found to be neither coherent nor adequate. Steinbeck fails to be logical. He begins by suggesting that his non-teleological viewpoint neither attributes purpose to the universe nor passes judgment on the phenomena of existence; but rather intends to accept things as they are and to irradiate the universe with an all-embracing tenderness for its creatures. This claim causes him inconsistencies, for were he to be strictly non-teleological, he would have to give up the artist's prerogative of ordering his materials according to his vision of the universe; he would have to give up his

[1]The 'Log', p. 148.

humanitarian condemnation of man's inhumanity to man, and he would have to give up his social criticism of the attachment in Western society for material prosperity, which does not go with the non-causal attitude he advocates. Yet, though Steinbeck fails to be a convincing philosopher, he asserts values which clearly resemble those of Oriental thought. If there is a unity of being and if this unity of being can be expressed as either what Emerson called the Over-Soul or what the Upanishads call the Brahman, then this stands for the unity of the universe, and a sympathetic human response to it corresponds to the quest for the inner self (the Atman) or the all-embracing grasp of this universe. Thus, though the evidence suggests that Steinbeck is not fully able to develop non-teleology as a philosophic concept in his works, his concern for its implications is significant, since there are correspondences between these implications and Oriental mysticism and ethics.

Rejection of Teleology

Non-teleology is Steinbeck's alternative to the teleological thinking of the West. Teleology is the doctrine of final causes or the view that developments are due to the purpose or design that is served by them.

Steinbeck condemns teleology in no uncertain terms, but instead of considering teleology as a metaphysical doctrine, he treats it as an anthropomorphic concept with faulty and misleading implications which have unfortunate consequencies for human beings.

Non-teleology as a Concept

Steinbeck's pretensions to a competent philosophical use of the term "non-teleology" are not convincing. First, he calls teleology and non-teleology "attitudes": "This attitude [non-teleological thinking] has no bearing on what might be or could be if so-and-so happened."[2] (Italics added.) That is, both teleology and non-teleology are perspectives, ways, or modes of thinking and not doctrines. Second, non-teleology "merely considers conditions 'as is.'"[3] To know things as they are is to observe them in a perfectly objective manner. But Steinbeck himself holds that perfect objectivity is impossible. As he himself says,

> We could not observe a completely objective Sea of Cortez anyway, for in that lonely and uninhabited Gulf our boat and ourselves would change it the moment we entered. By going there, we would bring a new factor to the Gulf.

[2]Ibid., p. 132.
[3]Ibid., p. 132.

> Let us consider that factor and not be betrayed by this myth of permanent objective reality. 4

So his theory of non-teleology amounts to an attitude which is impossible to put into practice. When there is a strike in a mill, for example, whose is the objective attitude: that of the mill-owners who blame the Government for heavy taxation and the consequent lessening of profits? that of the workers who think that the employers exploit them? or that of the Communists who hold that in the robbing of the workers by the capitalists, the Government protects the latter? The same situation is seen differently by different people. One may say that there is an objective situation but it is we who fail to understand it objectively. For the moment we begin to understand it, we see it only from a "point of view." So the first part of the theory that we should see things as they are seems to amount only to a platitude.

Concerned with What "Is"

To prove the superiority of non-teleology Steinbeck writes: "Non-teleological thinking concerns itself

[4]Ibid., p. 3.

primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually 'is'--attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how, instead of why."[5] He proceeds to give an example of how teleology implies blame, and non-teleology, "understanding-acceptance."[6] During the depression, it appears, thirty per cent of the employable people were jobless and destitute. The common recommendation by economic conservatives (and the recommendation implied blame) was that the employable unemployed ought to roll up their sleeves and go to work. Nobody appeared to take into consideration the larger picture or the fact that there were jobs only for seventy per cent of the employable people. So, says Steinbeck, if some of the unemployed became ambitious and aggressive, they would get jobs, but only be displacing somebody else. The right approach, therefore, was the non-teleological which would accept conditions as they were.

Steinbeck is here obviously protesting against the charge made by the self-complacent against the unemployed that they were bums, since there were no jobs for all of

[5]Ibid., p. 135.
[6]Ibid., p. 135.

them. In his discussion, however, he does not even consider what could have been done to assuage the hardships of the poor during the depression. Steinbeck appears to believe that because there were jobs for only seventy per cent of the people, and because this was an incontrovertible fact at a particular time in American history, the situation had to be accepted as "is." What he does not consider is that the pangs of hunger of the unemployed would not have become less intense just because no blame was attached to them as individuals. This was perhaps good for their personal dignity, but probably of no use to their bellies. Herbert Hoover, who was an advocate of rugged individualism, depended upon individual initiative and private charity to fight the depression, but little could be achieved. Franklin D. Roosevelt, on the other hand, was a pragmatist and he did something with his New Deal to overcome the hardships of the depression, especially for the poor people. What was required at that time was a pragmatic course of action and not "acceptance." No doubt Steinbeck means acceptance to be only a first step towards improvement of conditions, but he makes action a distant second step.

Acceptance Better than Blame

To convince the reader that acceptance is better than blame, Steinbeck gives another example:

> A woman near us in the Carmel woods was upset when her dog was poisoned--frightened at the thought of passing the night alone after years of companionship with the animal. She phoned to ask if, with our windows on that side of the house closed as they were normally, we could hear her ringing a dinner bell as a signal during the night that marauders had cut her phone wires preparatory to robbing her. Of course that was, in fact, an improbable contingency to be provided against; a man would call it a foolish fear, neurotic. And so it was. But one could say kindly, "We can hear the bell quite plainly, but if desirable we can adjust our sleeping arrangements so as to be able to come over there instantly in case you need us," without even stopping to consider whether or not the fear was foolish, or to be concerned about it if it were, correctly regarding all that as secondary. And if the woman had said apologetically, "Oh, you must forgive me; I know my fears are foolish, but I am so upset!" the wise reply would have been, "Dear person, nothing to forgive. If you have fears, they <u>are</u>; they are real things and to be considered. Whether or not they're foolish is beside the point. <u>What</u> they are is unimportant alongside the fact <u>that</u> they are." In other words, the badness or goodness, the teleology of the fears, was decidedly secondary. The whole notion could be conveyed by a smile or by a pleasant intonation more readily than by the words themselves. Teleological treatment which one might have been tempted to employ under the circumstances would first have stressed the fact that the fear was foolish--would say with a great show of objective justice, "Well, there's no use in <u>our</u> doing anything; the fault is that your fear is foolish and improbable. Get over that" (as a judge would say, "Come into court with clean hands"); "then if there's anything <u>sensible</u> we can

> do, we'll see," with smug blame implied in every word. Or, more kindly, it would try to reason with the woman in an attempt to help her get over it--the business of propaganda directed towards change even before the situation is fully understood (maybe as a lazy substitute for understanding). Or, still more kindly, the teleological method would try to understand the fear causally. But with the non-teleological treatment there is only the love and understanding of instant acceptance; after that fundamental has been achieved, the next step, if any should be necessary, can be considered more sensibly. [7]

The last sentence of the passage quoted above makes it clear again that action not only comes second, but is considered to be of secondary importance, and that all emphasis is laid upon acceptance. Acceptance alone, however, does not solve all problems. Steinbeck's acceptance of the old woman's weakness is no solution. What if she feels that the Steinbecks are such sound sleepers that they may not hear her dinner bell? What if there is a blizzard which would make it impossible for her voice to carry across? Are the Steinbecks going to stay in always to be available in an emergency? Steinbeck's sympathy and understanding are admirable, and preferable, too, if the teleological approach would mean ridicule of an old woman's fears. As a first step, Steinbeck's approach is right, but does the

[7]Ibid., pp. 146-147.

step suffice? His assurance does not solve the problem and the situation is--and continues to be--a problem. Steinbeck does not give pragmatic action the importance it deserves.

Steinbeck apparently intends the non-teleological viewpoint to include not only situations like unemployment but evils like starvation of children, filth, disease, despair and bleakness of total existence. With such evils only action would be a viable course. Acceptance and understanding would have no meaning here unless accompanied by constructive action.

Non-teleology, however, has a signal advantage--the catholicity of mind that goes with understanding-acceptance. Woodburn O. Ross comments: "It is here that Steinbeck becomes most eloquent and, so far as I know, makes his only contribution to the subject."[8] Steinbeck explains:

> Non-teleological methods more than any other seem capable of great tenderness, of an all-embracingness which is rare otherwise. Consider, for instance, the fact that, once a given situation

[8]"Johan Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," in Tedlock, p. 168.

> is deeply understood, no apologies are required. There are ample difficulties even to understanding conditions "as is." Once that has been accomplished, the "way" of it (known now to be simply a relation, though probably a near and important one) seems no longer to be preponderantly important. It needn't be condoned or extenuated, it just "is."[9]

Parallels in Hinduism

This attitude of understanding-acceptance has a parallel in Hinduism, though Hinduism has no doctrine parallel to that of non-teleology. The doctrine of karma, rebirth according to one's actions, has implications very similar to those of non-teleology. The theory of karma is the law which governs the kind of birth every man gets in his next life. The nature and caste-status of an individual in his present life is the inevitable result of his actions in his previous life. This theory has two important implications: looked at from the point of view of the individual himself, all his present sufferings and his nature are to be traced to his own past actions, and nobody else is to be held responsible for them. Looked at from the point of view of others, every person has to be accepted for what he is since he is not responsible in the present life for the actions of his previous life. So every individual has to accept himself and

[9] The 'Log', p. 146.

is to be accepted by others for what he is. This non-blaming attitude is essentially the same as the understanding-acceptance of non-teleology, though there is nothing common between the doctrine of karma and that of non-teleology.

An even more fundamental idea is expressed in a passage at the end of the chapter on non-teleological thinking: "This deep underlying pattern inferred by non-teleological thinking crops up everywhere....The whole picture is portrayed by is, the deepest word of deep ultimate reality, not shallow or partial as reasons are, but deeper and participating, possibly encompassing the Oriental concept of being."[10] The Sanskrit word for "being" is sat which has several meanings, two of which are "being," or "existing," that is, "is," and "reality," or "Brahman."[11] The deep underlying pattern of the universe which Steinbeck describes as "is" is the same as the Upanishadic sat--another example of close correspondence between Steinbeck's and Oriental thought. Steinbeck has arrived at this profound concept by an unmetaphysical and circuitous path indeed. He

[10] Ibid., pp. 150-151.

[11] V.S.Apte, The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary (Bombay, 1912), p. 951.

rejects teleology as something anthropomorphic and therefore misleading; he therefore advocates non-teleology; he calls both teleology and non-teleology "attitudes"; and by some mystic leap associates and identifies the non-teleological "is" with the "deep underlying pattern" or the Over-Soul and the Brahman.

Non-teleology Implies Getting As Wide a Picture As Possible

Steinbeck makes other claims for non-teleology. According to him, non-teleology tries to get as wide a picture as possible. It acts as a challenge to widen the relational picture of "why" and "because" provided by teleology and to "envision the whole picture as well as can be done with given abilities and data."[12] He gives an example to illustrate how a wider study reveals the naïvety of an answer presumed correct:

> At one time an important game bird in Norway, the willow grouse, was so clearly threatened with extinction that it was thought wise to establish protective regulations and to place a bounty on its chief enemy, a hawk which was known to feed heavily on it. Quantities of the hawks were exterminated, but despite such drastic measures the grouse disappeared actually more rapidly than before. The naïvely applied customary remedies had obviously failed. But instead of becoming discouraged and quietistically letting this bird go the way of

[12] The 'Log', p. 142.

> the great auk and the passenger pigeon, the authorities, enlarged the scope of their investigations until the anomaly was explained. An ecological analysis into the relational aspects of the situation disclosed that a parasitic disease, coccidiosis, was epizootic among the grouse. In its incipient stages, this disease so reduced the flying speed of the grouse that the mildly ill individuals became easy prey for the hawks. In living largely off the slightly ill birds, the hawks prevented them from developing the disease in its full intensity and so spreading it more widely and quickly to otherwise healthy fowl. Thus the presumed enemies of the grouse, by controlling the epizootic aspects of the disease, proved to be friends in disguise. 13

A desire to get as wide a picture as possible is a fine ideal, but Steinbeck himself fails, as I shall demonstrate later, to observe it in his fiction.

Steinbeck considers non-teleology of fundamental importance. To him, it is the new gospel:

> And the non-causal or non-blaming viewpoint seems to us very often relatively to represent the "new thing," the Hegelian "Christ-child" which arises emergently from the union of two opposing viewpoints, such as those of physical and spiritual teleologies, especially if there is conflict as to causation between the two or within either. The new viewpoint very frequently sheds light over a larger picture, providing a key which may unlock levels not accessible to either of the teleological viewpoints. 14

[13] Ibid., pp. 144-145.

[14] Ibid., p. 148.

This new gospel according to John Steinbeck, however, is not a philosophical concept since it does not deal with ultimate Reality or the principles of things: it is concerned more with certain problems of human behaviour which would be better expressed by terms like "tenderness," "tolerance," and "acceptance." It is interesting and significant that these terms indicate the similarity between Steinbeck's and Hindu thought.

Non-teleology As a Controlling Point of View in Fiction

If non-teleology has limitations as a metaphysical concept, it has even more limitations as the controlling point of view in fiction. The principle of non-teleology takes away the right to choose the material. Warren French points out the conflict between the teleological and non-teleological approaches to subject-matter. He writes:

> Differences arising from teleological and non-teleological approaches have been at the root of many quarrels between science and theology; yet even the scientist cannot be entirely non-theological if he is to do anything at all. Since he cannot hope to observe everything that <u>is</u>, he must choose to observe some phenomena at the expense of others. As soon as he makes a selection, he opens himself to the question, "Why did you choose this instead of that?" Even if he answers only, "I prefer

> this to that," he expresses faith in a pleasure principle. Even the non-teleological thinker, in short, must choose a theology (even if just a consistent opposition to any other theology) to give his work direction. 15

So when Jim Casy declares that there is no sin and no virtue, it is difficult to see why he proceeds to say that "'some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice.'"[16] From the purely non-teleological point of view, things can be neither "nice" nor "not-nice." Steinbeck tries to keep his judgments to the minimum, but, as we shall see, they cannot be entirely absent from his fiction.

Not only does the principle of non-teleology take away the right to choose the material, but precludes the reordering of the material chosen. This is in conflict with the very opening statement of The 'Log': "The design of a book is the pattern of a reality controlled and shaped by the mind of the writer."[17] That is, the artist has the right to recreate imaginatively the reality he observes. Steinbeck is here seen to be in two minds: the desire to be utterly dispassionate and

[15] French, Preface.
[16] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 19.
[17] The 'Log', p. 1.

objective, and the desire to exercise the artist's right to control and reorder his material. The result has been that he has failed to be non-teleological in his novels except in In Dubious Battle.

The Non-teleological Point of View in Steinbeck's Fiction

It is easy to see that Steinbeck does not use the term "non-teleology" in a competent philosophical sense. And as an artist, he does not and cannot keep to the non-teleological point of view. The objective and large-hearted approach of non-teleology sometimes deteriorates into fuzzy and sentimental thinking. Steinbeck's weakness lies in his pretensions to be objective and all-embracing instead of frankly admitting to be sentimental. Though he fails to be non-teleological in a strictly philosophical sense except in In Dubious Battle, the ideal of non-teleology remains his platform.

Steinbeck is so much concerned and occupied with the idea of non-teleology that he has not only made it the central message of The 'Log' from the Sea of Cortez, but creates in several of his novels a character who expresses the non-teleological point of view--Cour de Gris in Cup of Gold, Doc in Cannery Row, Juan Chicoy in The Wayward Bus, a nameless old man in The Short Reign of

Pippin IV, and Lee in East of Eden. This is not to say that Steinbeck has succeeded artistically to an equal extent in writing all these novels from the non-teleological point of view. Of these the two novels which are more successful than the rest are Of Mice and Men and The Wayward Bus, but even these are not without blemishes. Of Mice and Men is marked by a sweeping pessimism which, like that of Thomas Hardy, suggests the inevitable failure of every man, and such a sweeping generalization could not be said to be descriptive of things as they "are." Again, Steinbeck, in the words of Warren French, "editorializes occasionally."[18] When Curley's wife is killed, Steinbeck comments: "And the meanness and the plannings and the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face."[19] Even more importantly, the detachment with which Steinbeck views the plot of In Dubious Battle is missing in Of Mice and Men. As F. W. Watt says,

> It is almost as though the feelings controlled by the fierce non-teleological discipline of In Dubious Battle were allowed to vent themselves freely in Of Mice and Men. In both cases the action centres on the relationship between two men, but whereas Mac and Jim are

[18] French, p. 73.

[19] Short Novels, pp. 275-276.

> linked together by a loyalty to the radical cause which leaves little room for personal sentiment, George and Lennie are bound by feelings more articulate beings would have to call love, even though it may often seem the kind of love that joins master and dog. In Dubious Battle forces the reader to stand aloof from the drama and observe with awe; Of Mice and Men invites one to draw near, to sympathise and pity. 20

The Wayward Bus, on the other hand, suffers from a vein of satire which is out of keeping with non-teleological objectivity and acceptance. The portrayal of Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard is marked by satire. Steinbeck's intense dislike of the middle class in post-war America appears to make it difficult for him to keep his detachment.

Failure of the Non-teleological Point of View in The Grapes of Wrath

Before In Dubious Battle is examined, it would be profitable to see what has happened to non-teleology in his best movel, The Grapes of Wrath. In his controlling metaphors, Steinbeck's point of view is non-teleological, but when he depicts the action of certain groups of human beings, sentiment takes over and he lapses into denunciations. The phenomenon of the struggle for existence that goes on everywhere is for him a subject for awe. The

[20] Watt, p. 58.

unswerving movement of the turtle toward some instinctively known goal symbolizes all the movements of men and animals for survival. It is symbolic of the migration of birds in winter to warmer climes, of the exodus of the Jews from Egypt to Canaan, of the Okies to California, of the modern migrations from the undeveloped countries to the technologically advanced, and of all the other migrations that have ever taken place in the history of mankind. Steinbeck sees migrations not merely as historical occurrences but as natural facts. And in these migrations he sees the large flow of life which loses parts but retains its integrity, and the mystery of human life that man in spite of all obstacles will come through.

Again, Steinbeck suggests that nature has a harmony of its own. As I have pointed out in an earlier chapter, he sees a balance between life and death, growth and decay. The older and weaker of the migrants die, while the younger and stronger ones survive. Rose of Sharon's baby dies, but the mother's milk does not go waste--she gives it to save an unknown old man dying of hunger. The flood at the end of the novel drives out the migrants from their shelter, but there would be no crops to harvest later if there were no rains now. The trucks and automobiles are sunk in the mud of the waters and the

means of transportation is gone, but it does not matter much, for the different families have become one unit. The unity is symbolized by their attempt to dam the flood and, to a lesser extent, by the engagement of Al Joad and Aggie Wainwright. This balancing of life and death has a parallel in the Hindu concept of Shiva who is both Creator and Destroyer, the two antagonistic processes of creation and destruction ultimately proving to be a cooperative function.

Steinbeck is non-teleological, too, in his depiction of the phenomena of the industrial development that has changed the American way of life so radically in modern times. The tractor which pushes the Okies off the land and the automobile which takes them to the promised land are both a product of the modern age. Steinbeck depicts driving a car or repairing an engine as a sacred ritual and a mark of proficiency. Of Sim's ability to drive horses (Of Mice and Men), he has written admiringly: "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."[21] Steinbeck has similar admiration

[21] Short Novels, p. 232.

for Tom and Al Joad for driving the family safely across to California in a dilapidated jalopy, though not for the driver of the tractor which industrializes the farming of the Okie homesteads.

Steinbeck is bitter about the tractor. To him it represents the breakdown of the mystic relationship between man and land. Steinbeck holds that to possess a piece of land which he can call his own is one of man's most deep-seated desires, and he considers to be evil anything which acts as a hindrance to the fulfilment of this mystic love. In farming with a tractor, love has become lust, and the creation of new life only a bye-product of rape:

> The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust-mask over nose and mouth, he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat....He did not know or own or trust or beseech the land. If a seed dropped did not germinate, it was nothing. If the young thrusting plant withered in drought or drowned in a flood of rain, it was no more to the driver than to the tractor.
>
> He loved the land no more than the bank loved the land. 22

Steinbeck sees and even mentions once that the banks, to whom the tractors belong, are helpless, since they are

[22] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 30.

caught in something larger than themselves. He sees, too, that there is not much to be said in favour of many of the Okies who are ignorant and selfish. Though they love the land, some of them had got it in an unethical manner: "Grampa took up the land, and he had to kill the Indians and drive them away."[23] This does not appear to be an unusual occurrence. Tom Joad narrates an incident of how one Albert Rance takes his family to town for Christmas, and "'When Albert come back a week later there wasn't a thing lef' in his house--stove was gone, beds was gone, winda frames was gone, an' eight feet of plankin' was gone off the south side of the house so you could look right through her.'"[24] This is not theft--they think that Alfred has left and they take whatever they like, and when Alfred comes back, he collects most of it. Grampa Joad takes a pillow from Alfred's property, but refuses to return it. He declares, as Tom Joad narrates it to Casy, "'If Albert wants this pilla so bad, let him come an' get her. But he better come shootin', 'cause I'll blow his goddam stinkin' head off if he comes messin' around' my pilla.'"[25] Again, it cannot be claimed for the Okies that they know scientific farming. They grew cotton year after year and so starved the land that it became a dust bowl. Steinbeck's sympathy

[23]Ibid., p. 28.
[24]Ibid., p. 37.
[25]Ibid., p. 37.

for the oppressed, however, is so palpable that he has nothing good to say about the banks or about the land-owners in California who illtreat the Okies. If it is natural for the Okies to desire to have land of their own, is it not natural for the land-owners to keep for themselves the land they own? They lower wages, but they are forced to do so by prices prevailing in the world market. Steinbeck wants the reader to accept the Okies with all their faults. Why not then show the same tolerance towards the land-owners?

Again, in The 'Log' he has argued, as I have pointed out above, that the hawks which destroyed the diseased willow grouse in Norway were actually doing a service to them, and that the hawks and the grouse together formed the ecology of the region. Then why not accept the land-owners whose harassment was responsible, directly or indirectly, for the death of the older and weaker migrants as benefactors, since the death of the weaker persons made it easier for others to survive on their limited means for a longer time? Why should not Steinbeck accept the migrants and the land-owners as forming one picture? Instead, he denounces the brutality of the system. The diatribes could be justified for a moralist but not for one who claims to be a non-teleologist.

In Dubious Battle As a Non-teleological Novel

In Dubious Battle, published three years before The Grapes of Wrath, is Steinbeck's one completely successful non-teleological novel. Steinbeck himself remarked, "I guess it is a brutal book, more brutal because there is no author's moral point of view."[26] One finds in the novel no prescription for spiritual regeneration, no fatalistic pessimism. There can be little doubt that Steinbeck's sympathies would be with the strikers, but there are no denunciations, no rhetoric, no flinging up of one's hands to high heaven in protest or despair, and no expression of hatred against the fruit-growers who follow the same callous and strong-man methods of the Californian land-owners in The Grapes of Wrath. Nor are there any editorial comments even against Mac who exploits human beings, something about which Steinbeck holds strong views. It is not only Steinbeck the writer whose point of view is non-teleological--the novel has a character who is a non-teleologist. Doc Burton is Steinbeck's spokesman and is the perfect embodiment of what he considers to be the ideal point of view. He is a complete contrast to Mac, but so broadmineded is he that he accepts the teleological

[26]Quoted in Lewis Gannett, "John Steinbeck's Way of Writing," in Tedlock, p. 29.

Mac as a part of the whole picture. He refrains from comment and does not object to the actions of Mac and Jim though he does not approve of them. He acts as a medical adviser to the workers, not because they are right but because they are in need of help as human beings and because they have to be helped if they are not to be exploited by the fruit-growers. As Mac says, "'The health authorities are going to do plenty of snooping. If they can catch us off base, they'll bounce us. They let us live like pigs in the jungle, but just the minute we start a strike, they get awful concerned about the public health.'"[27] There is little doubt that if any person from the party of the fruit-growers had been in need of medical help, Burton would have taken care of him with the same efficiency and non-attachment as he does the strikers. As he tells Mac, "'I have some skill in helping men, and when I see some who need help, I just do it.'"[28] This is in contrast to the doctor who "'said he wouldn't treat a God-damn red, and Joy lay there three full days with a broken jaw.'"[29]

Being a non-teleologist, Burton wants to get as

[27] In Dubious Battle, p. 112.
[28] Ibid., p. 177.
[29] Ibid., p. 18.

complete a picture of things as possible without the blinders of "good" and "bad." He tells Mac, "'I want to be able to look at the whole thing.'"[30] And he also points out why Mac's approach to the problem of poverty and labour is wrong: "'There've been communes before, and there will be again. But you people have an idea that if you can establish the thing, the job'll be done. Nothing stops, Mac. If you were able to put an idea into effect tomorrow, it would start changing right away. Establish a commune, and the same gradual flux will continue.'"[31]

Mac, a Teleological Figure

As opposed to Doc Burton, Mac, the organizer of the workers, represents the teleological point of view. According to Mac, there is social injustice because of the profit system, and the remedy lies in destroying the profit system and building up communes. He thinks he knows the cause and he presumes he knows the remedy. He is incapable of seeing beyond the cause of, and the remedy for the immediate situation. He is not even prepared to reexamine his assumptions to see whether he could be wrong. As he tells Doc, "'If you see too darn much, you don't get anything done.'"[32] He believes, too, that

[30]Ibid., p. 130.
[31]Ibid., p. 129.
[32]Ibid., p. 132.

ends justify the means. He assumes that he knows all about the men and that he can direct their energies toward a particular desired end. In other words, he has decided what the desired end is and now only seeks ways and means to exploit the weaknesses of the men for the sake of that end. The tension between the non-teleological and the teleological approaches to the situation serves as an occasion for Steinbeck to advocate values which resemble those of Hinduism — that the dignity of man is more important than a Cause, that partisanship in a Cause precludes the search for truth, that the means are not less important than the ends, and that violence can breed only violence.

Exploitation of Human Beings

These values, it is easy to see, are natural corrollaries from the non-dualistic concept of the universe, which posits that every individual soul is identical with the Over-Soul, and that all individuals and all forms of life are equal expressions of the divine. The sacredness and dignity of the individual are fundamental since every individual soul is identical with the Brahman. The non-dualistic concept, however, has not prevented the growth of such social aberrations as the caste system in India, where a sect of people, the "Outcastes," were condemned

to menial duties all their life. That this was the most outrageous example of trampling down the dignity and self-respect of an individual was recognized by Mahatma Gandhi, and, in order to restore them their self-respect, he called them "Harijans" or the people of God. Steinbeck, too, protests against the exploitation of the workers, but in this novel it is not so much against their being exploited by the fruit-growers as by one of their own. The exploitation is not economic or social but psychological, and it is worse, for the workers do not see that they are being exploited and hence do not protest. Mac can twist them round his little finger. He explains to London, the elected leader of the workers, how to make them vote in any way he wants them: "'If you want 'em to vote for something, you say, "Do you want to do it?" and if you want to vote down somethin' just say, "You don't want to do this, do you?" and they'll vote no.'"[33] He becomes a kind of king-maker, getting London or Dakin appointed leader just as he pleases. He has no respect for the life of an individual. He does not mind risking the lives of Lisa (London's daughter-in-law) and her child by pretending to be a doctor and helping in the delivery of the child

[33]Ibid., p. 91.

though he knows nothing about it in order to get into the good books of London whom he can later use for the sake of the Party. He is not unhappy that old Dan falls from a tree and breaks his hip ("'The old buzzard was worth something after all'"[34]); not too unhappy either when Joy, one of his old comrades, is shot ("'He's done the first real, useful thing in his life'"[35]). He is sorry when Jim is killed but he does not mind exploiting the faceless body to rouse the workers for further violence.

Though Mac is aware that he is exploiting the workers for the sake of an ideology, he is not aware that he is really exploiting them for himself. He thinks the Party is more important than the workers, and himself more important than the Party. Jim tells Mac, "'And sometimes I get the feeling you're not protecting me for the Party, but for yourself.'"[36]

Jim As a Teleological Figure

Mac's disciple, Jim, starts as a novice, but he soon surpasses the master. When Mac beats up a young

[34]Ibid., p. 90.
[35]Ibid., p. 148.
[36]Ibid., p. 307.

strike-breaker to make a billboard of him, he feels it more than does Jim. This is evident from Mac's confession to Jim: "'I couldn't of done it if you weren't here, Jim. Oh, Jesus, you're hard-boiled. You just looked. You didn't give a damn.'"[37] Jim loves ideology for its own sake, and, as F. W. Watt rightly points out, "The man who devotes himself utterly to an ideology, who goes to the ultimate stage in 'wanting nothing for himself,' becomes nothing, literally, a faceless inhuman being."[38]

Steinbeck's and Hindu Catholicity

In his refusal to support any ideology which suppresses the right of an individual to think and act on his own or which refuses to consider whether anybody who does not agree with it could be right, Steinbeck approaches the catholicity of Hinduism. No "religious wars" have ever been fought in the name of Hinduism and Buddhism. If these two religions spread to distant countries, it was without the support of the sword and the fire. Again, there are numerous sects in Hinduism the followers of which follow independent paths, but all of them live together in amity. This amity is the

[37] Ibid., p. 248.
[38] Watt, p. 57.

recognition of the fact that it is the birthright of every individual to choose his own path to salvation and that all paths are equally valid. In the Gita Krishna tells Arjuna:

> "Whatever path men travel
> Is my path:
> No matter where they walk
> It leads to me." 39

And coming to modern times, Mahatma Gandhi made a sort of definitive statement on the subject of ideology, action and non-violence: "Man may and should shed his own blood for establishing what he considers to be his 'right.' He may not shed the blood of his opponent who disputes his 'right'."[40] The statement places in proper perspective the relative importance of ideals and man's dignity.

Charity and Individual Dignity

Mahatma Gandhi saw, too, that nothing could deprive a man of his sense of dignity quicker than being forced to ask for charity or being given charity. So on the eve of a strike at a cotton weaving mill at Ahmedabad (India),

[39] Gita, p. 51.

[40] Quoted in Louis Fischer, The Life of Mahatma Gandhi (New York, 1950), p. 345.

he told the strikers never to resort to violence, never to molest blacklegs, never to depend upon alms, to remain firm, no matter how long the strike continued, and to earn bread during the strike by any other honest labour.[41] An opinion on charity similar to this was held by Thoreau: "If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life."[42](Walden)

Steinbeck, too, holds similar views on charity. Here charity should not be confused with hospitality. Hospitality is the gift of oneself; as Thoreau says, "Objects of charity are not guests."[43](Walden) Hospitality ennobles and uplifts; charity demeans and humiliates. Steinbeck depicts, as I have pointed out in an earlier chapter, beautiful scenes of hospitality, but he is highly critical of hand-outs. We should note here that though the concept of Christian charity implies the "gift of the self," Steinbeck's view of the Salvation Army is perhaps legitimate since in practice the "gift

[41]Vide M. K. Gandhi, The Story of My Experiments with Truth, translated from the Gujarati by Mahadev Desai, (Washington,D.C., 1960), pp. 521-522.

[42]The Writings of Henry David Thoreau, (Boston and New York, 1906), II, 82; cited hereafter as Writings.

[43]Ibid., 168.

of the self" often deteriorates into a contemptuous hand-out. One of the characters in The Grapes of Wrath describes what damage the charitable acts of the Salvation Army have done to the spirit of her husband:

> "Las' winter, an' we was a-starvin'--me an' Pa an' the little fellas. An' it was a-rainin'. Fella tol' us to go to the Salvation Army." Her eyes grew fierce. "We was hungry--they made us crawl for our dinner. They took our dignity. They--I hate 'em.' An'--maybe Mis' Joyce took charity. Maybe she didn' know this ain't charity. Mis' Joad, we don't allow nobody in this camp to build theirself up that--a-way. We don't allow nobody to give nothing to another person. They can give it to the camp, an' the camp can pass it out. We won't have no charity!" Her voice was fierce and hoarse. "I hate 'em," she said. "I ain't never seen my man beat before, but them--them Salvation Army done it to 'im." 44

In In Dubious Battle the workers are forced to live on charity, and the food is procured for them in dubious ways. Mac and Jim get a meal from Al Anderson's lunch wagon, but the way Mac wheedles the meal from Al is very much unlike the indescribably beautiful scene in The Grapes of Wrath where Tom is invited by strangers to share breakfast with them. Mac, on the other hand, flatters Al and "Al beamed importantly, as though he were receiving a gift instead of being bummed for a meal."[45]

[44] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 290.
[45] In Dubious Battle, p. 40.

(Italics added.) As for Dick, "'That Dick uses the bedroom for political purposes,'" Mac tells Jim approvingly.[46] Steinbeck does not want charity for the workers primarily because he feels, like Mahatma Gandhi, that it cuts at the root of the sense of dignity and self-respect. In In Dubious Battle, he asks only for honest labour for the workers. When Jim ironically asks old Dan why he does not "'get into some charity racket and make the county take care'" of him,[47] Dan replies with chill contempt,

> "I'm a top-faller. Listen, punk, if you never been in the woods, that don't mean nothing to you. Damn few top-fallers ever get to be my age. I've had punks like you damn near die of heart failure just watchin' me work; and here I'm climbin' a lousy apple tree. Me take charity! I done work in my life that took guts. I been ninety foot up a pole and had the butt split and snap my safety-belt. I worked with guys that got swatted to pulp with a limb. Me take charity! They'd say, "Dan, come get your soup," and I'd sop my bread in my soup and suck the soup out of it. By Christ, I'd jump out of an apple tree and break my neck before I'd take charity." 48

In Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck argues for a piece of land for the workers, not as a source of sustenance but as a source of dignity. As Candy says, "'Everybody wants a

[46]Ibid., p. 17.
[47]Ibid., p. 61.
[48]Ibid., pp. 61-62.

little bit of land, not much. Jus' som'thin' that was his. Som'thin' he could live on and there could't nobody throw him off of it.'"[49] The idea is echoed in The Grapes of Wrath: "'If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle it and be sad when it isn't doing well, and feel fine when the rain falls on it, that property is him, and some way he's bigger because he owns it.'"[50]

Steinbeck's Dislike of Institutional Religions

Strange as it may seem, the indifference of Mac and Jim to the dignity of human beings is shared by institutional religions. Again, like institutional religions, Mac and Jim have fixed ideas which they are not prepared to reexamine. They serve the Cause by inciting the workers to violence and then try to rationalize their exploitation by an appeal to the importance of the Cause above everything else. Institutional Hinduism rationalized the caste system by relating it to the theory of karma and most Christian sects betray their disregard for the dignity of man by calling him a depraved creature. Evangelism flourishes by playing upon the emotions of hope and fear and of

[49] Short Novels, p. 263.
[50] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 32.

salvation and damnation. Steinback sees a similarity between Jim's ecstasy on the one hand and acute religious fervour on the other. Doc Burton says, "'I mean you've got something in your eyes, Jim, something religious. I've seen it in you boys before.'"[51] Another time he tells Jim, "'Pure religious ecstasy. I can understand that. Partakers of the blood of the Lamb.'"[52] It is apparent from the ironic tone that Burton does not mean to be complimentary. In fact, the doubtful compliment appears to be a double-edged weapon--he is criticising Mac and Jim as much as institutional religions and their theology.

It is known that Steinbeck has little respect for institutional Christianity. As a young man, when a friend took him to church, he "embarrassed his host by taking vociferous objection to the preacher's sermon, breaking out from the congregation with 'Feed the body and the soul will take care of itself,' and 'I don't think much of preaching....Go on....You're getting paid for it.'"[53] Steinbeck should not be misunderstood to mean that he was denying the existence of the soul or that he was placing material values above the spiritual,

[51] In Dubious Battle, p. 181.
[52] Ibid., p. 231.
[53] Lisca, p. 25.

but that he was rightly emphasizing the idea that a sermon about the soul to a starving man is a sort of hypocrisy and exploitation. He was probably implying that the Church was more interested in serving itself than the poor. Catholicism, by claiming that the Church is an intermediary between man and God, suggests, as Floyd H. Ross says, that "he who disobeys the will of the priest disobeys the will of God."[54] Steinbeck is opposed to this attitude on the part of the Church for various reasons: first, it imposes a kind of spiritual and intellectual slavery; second, it amounts to coercing the poor into remaining poor. The Catholic priest in The Pearl preaches to the poor pearl-divers that it is God's will that they should remain poor: "'And the Father made it clear that each man and woman is like a soldier sent by God to guard some part of the castle of the Universe. And some are in the ramparts and some far deep in the darkness of the walls. But each one must remain faithful to his post and must not go running about, else the castle is in danger from the assaults of Hell.'"[55] That is, institutional religions do not show any inclination

[54] The Meaning of Life in Hinduism and Buddhism (London, 1952), p. 34.

[55] Short Novels, p. 537.

to develop in the poor and the oppressed a sense of personal dignity.

It is pertinent to mention here that the value of human dignity, to which Steinbeck gives great importance, has a basic correspondence with Upanishadic values. The Upanishads endow everyone with dignity with their conception of the Brahman which posits that man contains within himself the essence of the divine. Like the writers of the Upanishads and the Transcendentalists, Steinbeck believes that men might like to do good rather than evil. Pippin says, "'People are good--just as long as they can be. Everybody wants to be good.'"[56]

The Right to Happiness

Steinbeck believes, too, that the right to happiness is as much a right as equality, liberty and opportunity. Samuel (East of Eden) declares, "'And I made a promise to myself that I would not consider enjoyment a sin.'"[57] Here, again, there is a parallel between Steinbeck's and Hindu thought. Hinduism does not consider enjoyment a sin, though it gives greater importance to asceticism.

[56] The Short Reign of Pippin IV, (New York, 1957), p. 101.
[57] East of Eden, p. 232.

The Upanishads call the Brahman Sachchidananda, Sat (Existence), Cit (Consciousness), and Ananda (Bliss). Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss are the very essence of the Brahman, and what constitutes one of the essences of the Brahman, namely, Bliss, cannot be evil. On a more mundane level, "the Laws of Manu give the general dictum that 'no sin is attached to eating flesh or drinking wine, or gratifying the sexual urge, for these are the natural propensities of men; but abstinence from these bears greater fruits.'"[58] The opposition to happiness is an opposition to life itself. Steinbeck makes this point clear by juxtaposing, in The Grapes of Wrath, the pure pleasure of song and dance, Mrs. Sandry's condemnation of song and dance as sin, and a typical revivalist meeting. At the Weedpatch camp, the younger migrants are enjoying themselves with music and dance:

> Look at that Texas boy, long legs loose, taps four times for ever' damn step. Never seen a boy swing aroun' like that. Look at him swing that Cherokee girl, red in her cheeks and' her toe points out. Look at her pant,

[58]Radhagovinda Basak, "The Hindu Concept of the Natural World," in The Religion of the Hindus, ed. Kenneth W. Morgan (New York, 1953), p. 111. Manu was a famous law giver who lived some time between 1200 and 300 B.C.

> look at her heave. Think she's tired? Think she's winded? Well, she ain't. Texas boy got his hair in his eyes, mouth's wide open, can't get air, but he pats four times for ever' darn step, an' he'll keep a-goin' with the Cherokee girl.
>
> The fiddle squeaks and the guitar bongs. Mouth-organ man is red in the face. Texas boy and the Cherokee girl, pantin' like dogs an' a-beatin' the groun'. Ol' folks stan' a-pattin' their han's. Smilin' a little, tappin' their feet. 59

Mrs. Sandry, one of the older women in the camp, calls the dance sinful and all the people sinners who should be wailing and moaning instead of dancing. The manager of the camp speaks the truth when he tells Ma Joad, "'Try not to hit her. She isn't well. She just isn't well'. And he added softly: 'I wish she'd go away, and all her family. She brings more trouble on the camp than all the rest together.'"[60]

The joy and happiness of the dancing scene is contrasted also with the whining groans of the participants of a revival meeting:

> Beside an irrigation ditch a preacher laboured and the people cried. And the preacher paced

[59] The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 301-302.
[60] Ibid., p. 294.

like a tiger, whipping the people with his voice, and they grovelled and whined on the ground. He calculated them, gauged them, played on them, and when they were all squirming on the ground he stooped down and of his great strength he picked each one up in his arms and shouted, Take 'em, Christ! and threw each one in the water. And when they were all in, waist-deep in the water, and looking with frightened eyes at the master, he knelt down on the bank and he prayed for them; and he prayed that all men and women might grovel and whine on the ground. Men and women, dripping, clothes sticking tight, watched; then gurgling and sloshing in their shoes they walked back to the camp, to the tents, and they talked softly in wonder:

We been saved, they said. We're washed white as snow. We won't never sin again.

And the children, frightened and wet, whispered together:

We been saved. We won't sin no more.

Wisht I knowed what all the sins was, so I could do 'em.

The migrant people looked humbly for pleasure on the roads. 61

Rejection of the Doctrine of Original Sin

Steinbeck, again, considers preoccupation with sin a sickness. Christian theology of certain sects has burdened

[61] Ibid., p. 302. Steinbeck has not used quotation marks for dialogue in the passage. He usually omits the quotation marks when he wants to universalize the dialogue.

Christians with a sense of sin. The New Testament religion, following the Pauline premises, seems to posit that man is born in sin and lives in sin. That Steinbeck does not believe in Original Sin is quite obvious. This fact may be seen in his not making the feeble-mindedness of his characters symbolic of the inevitable defect with which men are supposed to be born, as earlier American writers had done. The practice of making some physical defect characteristic of depravity had become a literary convention. The birth-mark on the face of the heroine in the short story of that name by Nathaniel Hawthorne and the fact of Jack Chase's being without a finger in Melville's White-Jacket, are marks of Original Sin. Steinbeck probably has more feeble-minded characters in his novels and short stories than any other novelist, but nowhere does he suggest that their feeble-mindedness is a mark of depravity. On the contrary, some of the feeble-minded have, as suggested in an earlier chapter, finer sensibilities than normal people and are meant to symbolize the relationship between man and nature. (Hetty in J. F. Cooper's The Deerslayer is an earlier example in American literature of a character's bearing the mark of Original Sin and at the same time being a symbol of the relationship between nature and man.) The only character in Steinbeck who may be said to suffer from

Original Sin is Cathy who has the mark of a wound on her forehead. "It looked like a huge thumbprint, even to whorls of wrinkled skin."[62] And she is the only character in Steinbeck's fiction who is pure evil.

It is significant to note here that Steinbeck appears to hold that a preoccupation with sin only makes a man a worse sinner. Ramakrishna Paramahansa once said, "The wretch who constantly says, 'I am bound, I am bound,' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night, 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' verily becomes a sinner."[63] The man who hates evil too much becomes evil himself. The same idea is expressed by Steinbeck in The Grapes of Wrath. Years before the action of the novel opens, we are told, Uncle John's wife had once a stomachache and she suggested that he call in a doctor. He told her that the pain must be due to something she had eaten and gave her a pain-killer. It was a case of appendicitis and next day she died. Ever since Uncle John has taken that ignorant act as a sin on his part and has never been able

[62] East of Eden, reprinted (London, 1958), p. 137.

[63] "M", The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, translated by Swami Nikhilananda, 4th ed. (Madras, India, 1964), p. 272.

to get over it. Pa Joad's half-humorous and half-sardonic treatment of Uncle John's sense of guilt puts it into proper perspective:

> "I'm gettin' bad," he said. "I feel sin."
> "You can't sin none," said Pa. "You ain't got no money. Jus' sit tight. Cos' you at least two bucks to sin, an' we ain't got two bucks amongst us."
> "Yeah! But I'm a-thinkin' sin."
> "Awright. You can think sin for nothin'."
> "It's jus' as bad," said Uncle John.
> "It's a whole hell of a lot cheaper," said Pa.
> "Don't you go makin' light of sin."
> "I ain't. You jus' go ahead. You always gets sinful jus' when hell's a-poppin'."
> "I know it," said Uncle Joh. "Always was that way. I never tol' half the stuff I done."
> "Well, keep it to yaself." 64

Steinbeck's idea of sin will be seen to be close to the Upanishadic concept. He appears to hold sin to be more a point of view than a fact. Uncle John quotes Casy as saying, "'A fella's sinned if he thinks he's sinned.'"[65] Catholicism with its practice of "confession" appears to have made a sound move towards overcoming any preoccupation with the idea of sin, but the Church believes in its absolute Reality. The Upanishads, however, do not accept

[64] The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 328-329.
[65] Ibid., p. 244.

that evil is absolutely Real. It should be conceded that "the Hindu concept of sin is indeed very comprehensive and includes several views which range all the way from the most primitive belief that sin is a disease to the most elevated one which holds that sin is a denial of the soul or a betrayal of the self."[66] The metaphysical concept of the Upanishads is that sin is avidya or ignorance--ignorance of the Atman within oneself, the immanent Brahman in the universe, and the transcendent Brahman above it. S. Radhakrishnan explains:

> Sin is the product of the shallow insight, breeding selfish egoism, that hugs its own narrowness and shrinks from all sacrifice. The Upaniṣads do not say that evil is illusion or that evil is permanent. In either case it will be the duty of man to bow submissively to it. Evil is unreal in the sense that it is bound to be transmuted into good. It is real to the extent that it requires effort to transform its nature. 67

Sin lies in egoism and differentiation. In other words, occupation with sin is merely an occupation with the egoistic self, and man has to overcome his preoccupation

[66] R. N. Dandekar, "The Role of Man in Hinduism," in The Religion of the Hindus, ed. Kenneth W. Morgan (New York, 1953), p. 152.

[67] Indian Philosophy, (London, 1923), I, 242.

with himself before he can realize the unity of the whole. S. Radhakrishnan says in another context, "Sin is not so much a defiance of God as a denial of soul, not so much a violation of law as a betrayal of self."[68] An obsession with sin is a refusal to see the divine aspect of oneself. This concept is echoed by Jim Casy when he declares that there is no virtue and no vice. The man who has attained self-realization is beyond good and evil. When a man is said to be beyond good and evil, it does not mean that the man who has realized the self need not do good or that even if he does bad, he will not be evil. What it means is that because his egoism has been destroyed, he cannot perform an evil action. He is free, not to do evil, but to do good. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says, "Evil does not overcome him, he overcomes all evil. Evil does not burn (affect) him, he burns (consumes) all evil. Free from evil, free from taint, free from doubt he becomes a knower of Brahmā."[69] This description fits Jim Casy after he has attained self-realization and come to the conclusion that there is no virtue and no sin.

[68] The Hindu View of Life, 4th impression (London, 1965), p. 53.

[69] Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, IV, 4, 23.

There is no incongruity, as it may superficially appear to be, between Casy's being beyond good and evil and his resisting the power structure. The course of action he follows is in accordance with Krishna's statement to Arjuna in the Gita: "'I am not bound by any sort of duty. There is nothing, in all the three worlds, which I do not already possess; nothing I have yet to acquire. But I go on working, nevertheless.'"[70] Krishna is an incarnation of God and is, therefore, a self-realized person. There is nothing that he desires, but still he has to go on fighting the ignorance that results in evil. A self-realized person cannot be indifferent to phenomenal evil, even when he knows that it is only phenomenal.

Steinbeck and the Upanishads recognize the existence of phenomenal evil. Steinbeck does not accept that men are born evil but that they are affected by the phenomena of evil as they grow up. This is made clear in a piece of dialogue between Samuel and Adam:

> "And I will warn you now that not their blood but your suspicion might build evil in them. They will be what you expect of them."

[70] Gita, p. 47.

> "But their blood--"
> "I don't very much believe in blood," said Samuel. "I think when a man finds good or bad in his children he is seeing only what he planted in them after they cleared the womb." 71

The idea that men learn evil as a result of coming into contact with evil is suggested in other novels, too. Mac had been beaten up for making a speech; Jim's father had been illtreated: "'He always got the hell beat out of him. He used to come home all covered with blood;'"[72] and Sam sets fire to the property of a fruit-grower because Anderson's property was burnt down by the vigilantes. Mac, Jim and Sam have, as a result of their experiences, become confirmed believers in violence.

Steinbeck, however, is non-teleological enough to see that not all the phenomena of evil can be explained or explained away. The exploitation of the workers by the fruit-growers, of the Okies by the land-owners, and the sufferings of the migrant labourers in Of Mice and Men are accepted as true of the total picture of the world.

The idea of the depravity of man is, as seen above, fundamentally opposed to the idea of the dignity of man.

[71] East of Eden, p. 228.
[72] In Dubious Battle, p. 5.

And any religion which places emphasis on the sinful nature of mankind is denying his goodness and depriving him of his dignity. The Upanishads give man not only dignity but divinity. Rather, dignity through divinity.

Non-violence and Non-attachment

Doc Burton, Steinbeck's spokesman in the novel, stands in his own person for two of the highest values advocated by Hinduism--non-violence and non-attachment. Non-violence is, as pointed out in an earlier chapter, an ideal recommended in the Upanishads. It was left to Mahatma Gandhi to apply the theory of non-violent non-cooperation on a large scale to political problems. Thoreau advocated this method almost a hundred years earlier, but he is known to have offered his non-cooperation on only one occasion and the method does not appear to have appealed to the common man in America. Burton recommends it to Mac and Jim, telling them that violence breeds only violence, but, characteristically enough, they reject it.

Burton is also "at once a detached, impersonal observer and a humane, fully-committed worker."[73] He embodies, in fact, the ideal of non-attachment taught in the Gita:

[73]Watt, p. 55.

"'Perform every action with your heart fixed on the Supreme Lord. Renounce attachment to the fruits. Be even-tempered in success and failure; for it is this evenness of temper which is meant by yoga.'"[74] Non-attachment and the happiness of detached study appear to have appealed to Steinbeck, and he makes them an important characteristic of Doc (Cannery Row) and Pippin (The Short Reign of Pippin IV). Doc is a detached scientific worker whose chief interest is the study of marine zoology. Pippin's chief interest is astronomy, but when he is compelled by circumstances to become king, he submits to it. And when later he is dismissed, he is happy that he can go back to his study of the stars.

Conclusion

I have stated earlier in the chapter that in In Dubious Battle there is not only a successfully drawn non-teleological character, but that the author's point of view itself is purely non-teleological. This we can see in Steinbeck's refusal to idealize the fruit-pickers, who are seen to be cowardly and violent by turns, careless, illiterate, and suspicious. It may also be seen in the manner of the deaths of Jim and Doc Burton. Jim begins

[74] Gita, p. 40.

as an idealist, but under Mac's unfortunate tutelage his ideals are replaced by violent partisanship. His corruption and death indicate the futility of idealism in a world where things do not always happen according to a moral order. Doc Burton disappears, perhaps is killed by the vigilantes, and through his disappearance Steinbeck seems to suggest that non-teleology, too, has little scope in a world ruled by partisan passions. What is of particular interest in the novel is that Steinbeck's spokesman and non-teleological figure, Doc Burton, should be putting forward values like the dignity of the individual, non-violence, and non-attachment--values which have basic correspondences with Hindu values. And it is in the light of Hindu thought that some of the ideas of Steinbeck attain clarity and dimension.

CHAPTER — IV

The Problem of Reality and Illusion

Though some critics have recognized that illusion is one of Steinbeck's important themes, none has explored the theme fully. Blake Nevius, for example, holds that Steinbeck "both cherishes and rejects...[illusion]," and that "although [the characters] are victimized by their illusions, which are ultimately powerless in the face of reality, it is clear that through them they have realized whatever beauty, grace and meaning life holds for them."[1] Joseph Fontenrose, in a discussion of Cannery Row, remarks that Steinbeck is "opposing a cosmic reality to the appearance of success and failure in a transitory system."[2] No critic, however, has stressed sufficiently the fact that Steinbeck treats of illusion and reality at several levels of complexity, his idea of the highest reality corresponding to the Upanishadic concept of ultimate Reality.

Types of Illusion

Steinbeck brings out the difference between various levels of reality and illusion by juxtaposition of stories

[1]"Steinbeck: One Aspect," in Tedlock, pp. 197-198.
[2]Fontenrose, p. 107.

in The Pastures of Heaven. The commonest kind of illusion, Steinbeck suggests, is the deception which the physical eye, as contrasted with the eye of spiritual insight referred to in an earlier chapter, perpetrates on us and which our minds are only too willing to believe. He points out the discrepancy between the appearance of things and their real nature through irony. The title of the book, The Pastures of Heaven, is itself a superb piece of irony. Discovered by a Spanish corporal in his pursuit of some fugitive Indian Christians to bring them back to the bosom of Mother Church and to forced labour, the place has extraordinary natural beauty. To tourists it appears to be a haven of innocence, peace and beauty, but the reader knows that it has more than its share of heartaches, business failures and sick people. This discrepancy between appearance and fact, illusion and reality is due not only to the inclinations of the human mind which has a tendency to believe that the grass on the other side of the fence is greener, but to ignorance as well.

Steinbeck demonstrates that the tendency for self-deception is to be seen in all children and many grown-ups when they indulge in make-believe. Molly Morgan who as a child had believed her father to be a wonderful man who

would give her presents and tell her stories learns that he is an irresponsible alcoholic, but refuses to open her eyes to that unpleasant fact, and rather than face reality leaves the village to nurse her happy illusion. Steinbeck, however, is clear-eyed enough to see that illusion is real in its effects and can, therefore, give happiness though for a limited time only. A man suffering from thirst in his dream can quench his thirst with water in the dream. It is beside the point to argue that the water in the dream is unreal. As far as the thirst in the dream is concerned, the water is real, as real as the water in life. Steinbeck demonstrates this idea clearly in one of the stories of The Pastures of Heaven. Shark Wicks is interested in creating an illusion of wealth in order to gain respectability in society. He is not wealthy, nor does he have the talents to become wealthy. He plays at the game of becoming rich by making imaginary transactions, but his joys and anxious moments in this game of make-believe are not less intense than they could have been if the transactions had been real. He makes an imaginary investment of ten thousand dollars in the Southern County Oil Company. "From that day on he watched the stock lists feverishly. When the price rose a little, he went about whistling monotonously, and when the price dropped, he

felt a lump of apprehension forming in his throat."[3] When the price of his imaginary shares goes up, he "was so elated that he went to the Pastures of Heaven General Stores and brought a black marble mantel clock with onyx columns on either side of the dial and a bronze horse to go on top of it."[4] Though such illusion may give happiness for a brief space of time, it cannot and does not by its very nature last long, as Steinbeck makes it clear in the story, in the same way as a dream by its very nature cannot last long.

Steinbeck treats in his fiction of another kind of illusion, that which is built on greed. The hero of Cup of Gold builds up his whole life on the illusion that wealth brings happiness. He becomes a pirate, sacks Panama and accumulates immense wealth only to become disillusioned.

Steinbeck is more concerned with the hope for better material circumstances and the disillusionment that follows. The hopes of the migrant labourers in Of Mice and Men and the fruit-pickers of In Dubious Battle are dashed to pieces. For the Okies in The Grapes of Wrath California

[3]The Pastures of Heaven, p. 26.
[4]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

itself is a major metaphor for illusion. The Joads are representative not only of the migrants who hope to reach a land of milk and honey where all their problems would be solved, but of all human beings who hope to find the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. When Grampa Joad says that he cannot wait until he reaches California where he can pick an orange off a tree or a whole bunch of grapes off a bush and squash it on his face, he is expressing the dream of all people for a comfortable life. The first sight of the promised land is awe-inspiring:

> They drove through Tehachapi in the morning glow, and the sun came up behind them, and then--suddenly they saw the great valley below them. Al jammed on the brake and stopped in the middle of the road, and: "Jesus Christ! Look!" he said. The vineyards, the orchards, the great flat valley, green and beautiful, the trees set in rows, and the farm-houses.
>
> And Pa said: "God Almighty!" The distant cities, the little towns in the orchard land, the ~~the~~ morning sun, golden on the valley. A car honked behind them. Al pulled to the side of the road and parked.
>
> "I want ta look at her." The grain-fields golden in the morning, and the willow lines, the eucalyptus trees in rows.
>
> Pa sighed: "I never knowed they was anything like her." The peach trees and the walnut groves, and the dark green patches of oranges. And red roofs among the trees, and barns--rich barns. Al got out and stretched his legs.
>
> He called: "Ma--come look. We're there!"
>
> Ruthie and Winfield scrambled down from the car, and then they stood, silent and awestruck, embarrassed before the great

> valley. The distance was thinned with haze, and the land grew softer and softer in the distance. A windmill blades were like a little heliograph, far away. Ruthie and Winfield looked at it, and Ruthie whispered: "It's California." 5

Steinbeck confronts the Joads with a reality even harsher than that of being dusted off and tractored off: they are not welcome in this land of eternal fruitfulness. Yet these tribulations, which destroy the illusion of a promised land, liberate them, under the guidance of Jim Casy and Tom, from the shackles of a greater illusion, namely, that it is only what happens to their family that matters. Even at the moment of their first glorious sight of California, Ma Joad's statement is: "'Thank God! The fambly's here.'"[6] And through this movement of the Joads towards a larger universe Steinbeck introduces modes of treating reality which correspond to the Oriental.

The opposite of "reality" is "illusion" or "maya", but maya also means, in Hindu philosphy, energy. It is both the cause and the effect, the creative power and the cosmic flux. Maya is the energy through which an artifact or appearance is produced. In Hindu myths and art, maya is symbolized by water since water is believed to be the source as well as the grave of all creation. To bathe in

[5] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 207.
[6] Ibid., p. 208.

the waters of a river (the Christian counterpart is baptism) is to delve into the secret of maya. Water may symbolize death; it may equally appropriately symbolize birth, and, by extension of meaning, spiritual birth. Steinbeck significantly uses water as an ambiguous symbol in several of his novels: the old Chinaman (Cannery Row) who represents Vishnu and who symbolizes both death and birth (as I have pointed out in an earlier chapter) sleeps on the waters; it rains heavily at the moment of Joseph Wayne's death, but it is also the moment of self-realization. Junius Maltby (The Pastures of Heaven) ruminates sitting on the branches of a sycamore tree with his feet dangling in water; and George (Of Mice and Men) shoots Lennie on the bank of a pool, an act which marks the end of all their dreams. Steinbeck uses water as one of the controlling metaphors in The Grapes of Wrath. When the Joads start on their journey to California, Steinbeck makes them forget to take water with them, suggesting thereby that the Joads lack spiritual values, that their interests do not extend beyond the family. The first service-station they come to marks for them the initial step in their progressive disillusionment and spiritual evolution. The attendant looks at them with suspicion and invites them to make use of the water there only after he learns that they have cash with them with which to purchase gas.

They meet the Wilsons shortly after and Grampa Joad dies in the tent of the Wilsons. But all this is not without some spiritual significance, for the Joads and the Wilsons begin to travel as one unit. At the next camp where they stay for the night and where there are water facilities, the Joads meet a man who is returning from California and who tells them that the migrants are not at all welcome there. This information is the first step in their progressive disillusionment about their dream of prospering in California. Later, at Needles the Joads have a whole river in which to bathe and they are only further disillusioned by another person who is returning from California. Later still, Casy is shot while wading a river, but Tom takes his place--it is the physical death of one person and the spiritual birth of another. The most significant episode for this kind of ambiguous symbolism is the concluding part of the novel. It is highly significant that the scene of the rains and the flood precedes the scene of Rose of Sharon's breastfeeding an unknown starving old man, an act which is symbolic, as we have seen, of accepting the whole of humanity as one's family.

Further Steinbeck protests against the illusion that material things are real and therefore indispensable. He

directs his attacks against the absorption of man in material things to the exclusion of spiritual values. Here his thought is an echo of Transcendental thought. Emerson had warned against a preoccupation with material things: "I find men victims of illusion in all parts of life. Children, youths, adults and old men, all are led by one bawble or another."[7] ("Illusions") So, too, had Thoreau: "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind."[8] (Walden)

Levels of Reality

Like the writers of the Upanishads and the Transcendentalists, Steinbeck posits that there are two kinds or levels of reality, one represented by the empirical objects which appear diversified and separate from each other, and the other by the reality which underlies these empirical objects. These two together form the universe. He writes:

> The whole is necessarily everything, the whole world of fact and fancy, body and psyche, physical fact and spiritual truth, individual and collective, life and death,

[7] Works, VI, 313.
[8] Writings, II, 15.

> macrocosm and microcosm (the greatest quanta here, the greatest synapse between these two), conscious and unconscious, subject and object. The whole picture is portrayed by is, the deepest word of deep ultimate reality, not shallow or partial as reasons are, but deeper and participating, possibly encompassing the Oriental concept of being. 9

Reality, Steinbeck appears to be saying, does not consist of matter alone; nor does it exclude matter as mere illusion. Physical facts and spiritual truths together make one whole and the purpose of religion is to make one comprehend the relationship of man to the whole. "It is a strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable."[10] The man who has a glimpse of spiritual reality is not likely to be deceived by, or satisfied with mere actuality, in the same way as the man who knows the desert is not likely to be deceived by a mirage. Steinbeck describes such a situation in The 'Log':

[9] The 'Log', pp. 150-151.
[10] Ibid., pp. 216-217.

> Tony [the skipper of the boat] grew restive when the mirage was working, for here right and wrong fought before his very eyes, and how could one tell which was error? It is very well to say, "The land is here and what blots it out is a curious illusion caused by light and air and moisture," but if one is steering a boat, he must sail by what he sees, and if air and light and moisture--three realities--plot together and perpetrate a lie, what is a realistic man to believe? Tony did not like the mirage at all. 11

Steinbeck does not state explicitly that the reality of spiritual truths is of a higher order than the reality of empirical things, but that he appears to imply the higher reality of the former I shall shortly demonstrate from his novels. He sees more than one order of reality. The less substantial the reality, the more easily does it dissolve and fade at the touch of something relatively more real, though each level of reality has a certain validity. A dream, for example, is less real than life and life less real than absolute Reality, but the validity of the dream is real on that level of reality. Shark Wicks' pleasure in his imaginary wealth is, as I have shown above, real. The difficulty is that his imaginary wealth cannot stand the test of empirical reality. When he is put under a ten thousand dollar bond

[11] Ibid., p. 81.

by the deputy sheriff in the belief that he is rich, he cannot produce the amount. He is forced to give up the dream-reality he has been indulging himself in and face the empirical reality that he is a poor person.

Empirical Reality

Empirical reality cannot stand the test of absolute Reality any better than dream reality can empirical reality. Steinbeck demonstrates the idea of various levels of reality through the agency of the Munroes who act as a touchstone to test the depth of reality in each episode of The Pastures of Heaven. In a letter to his agents which he wrote when he was still writing The Pastures of Heaven, Steinbeck referred to the Munroes as having "a flavor of evil,"[12] but as the writing progressed, a change appears to have taken place in his conception of the Munroes. They cease to act as a curse on the people with whom they come into contact. In some of the stories, they come to be, as suggested above, a touchstone to destroy the illusion of certain of the characters. The more insubstantial the reality, the less is the interference

[12]Quoted in Lisca, p. 57.

required on the part of the Munroes to destroy it. In the story of Shark Wicks, an adolescent kiss given by Bert Munroe's son to Wicks' incredibly beautiful and incredibly stupid daughter is enough to set in motion the events that end in Shark's disillusionment. In the story of Molly Morgan discussed above, Bert's reference to his hired hand is enough to disillusion Molly. In both these cases, Steinbeck implies, the illusions are so airy that the merest touch of empirical reality is enough to destroy them. In the story of Richard Whiteside, Steinbeck makes it clear that the illusion to be destroyed is more substantial than dreams. Richard believes that empirical things are ultimately Real and his building a magnificent house of redwood for his descendants is his way of assuring immortality for himself. He tells his wife about the new house, "'It's the new soul, the first native of the new race.'"[13] The house also becomes a status symbol: "It embodied authority and culture and judgment and manners."[14] Richard begets one son, John, who "did not think of the house exactly as his father had. He loved it more. It was the outer shell of his body."[15] John, in turn, begets one son,

[13] The Pastures of Heaven, p. 194.
[14] Ibid., p. 197.
[15] Ibid., p. 203.

Bill, who marries Bert Munroe's daughter, Mae. Bill and Mae leave the ancestral mansion and go to live in town. After Bill has left, Bert Munroe suggests to John that the brush around the house should be burnt and offers him help to do it. The fire, however, spreads from the brush to the house and it is burnt down to the ground. That the burning down of the house is meant to be more a ritualistic act of purification than an act of destruction, Steinbeck makes it clear. The house had been a body to John's soul and he says, "'I think I know how a soul feels when it sees its body buried in the ground and lost.'"[16] He has seen through the illusion of empirical reality and hence has no regrets. As may be expected of any person who discards the flesh and retains only the spirit, he says, "'I don't think I want to save any of it [the house].'"[17]

The story is clear evidence that Steinbeck makes a distinction between the soul and the body and that he holds the soul to have the greater reality. Here Steinbeck's idea of the reality of the soul corresponds to that of the Upanishadic concept. According to the

[16]Ibid., p. 217.
[17]Ibid., p. 216.

Upanishads, the Brahman is the one absolute Reality. Material objects have empirical reality only, and whatever reality they have is derived from the Reality of the Brahman who created them, in the same way as the apparent reality of a mirage is derived from the reality of the desert. Since the highest Reality is unchangeable and the world changes, the world cannot be as real as the highest Reality. However, just because the world is not completely real, it does not follow that the world has no significance. As S. Radhakrishnan points out, "He [Shankar] warns us, however, against the temptation to regard what is not completely real as utterly illusory."[18] It is one thing to say that the world is unreal and another to say that it is illusory. The description in the Upanishads of the creation of the universe as a lila, sport, on the part of the Brahman is meant to suggest the "free overflow of the divine into the universe. It does not mean that there is nothing real or significant going on all the time."[19] The world is not as real as the Absolute; nor is it an illusion. Compared with the

[18] Eastern Religions, p. 86.
[19] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

Absolute, it is unreal; compared with an illusion, it is real. In other words, it has relative reality.

The Evil Power of Social Conventions

Steinbeck has demonstrated, as I have shown above, that the soul has a greater reality than the body or other empirical objects. Steinbeck is even more concerned that the main obstacle to the realization of the superiority of the soul on the part of individuals is social forces. The story of Junius Maltby, probably the best in The Pastures of Heaven, deals with the irresistible forces of the conventions of society and their power to bring about the fall of a philosopher. Junius is apparently lazy, unkempt, carelessly dressed and ignorant of bringing up a child in the conventional way. People "outlawed him from decent society and resolved never to receive him should he visit them."[20] Junius, however, is serenely innocent of such intentions on the part of society. He "knew nothing about the dislike of his neighbours. He was still gloriously happy. His life was unreal, as romantic and as unimportant as his thinking."[21] Steinbeck's description of Junius' thinking as unimportant and unreal should not mislead

[20] The Pastures of Heaven, p. 92.
[21] Ibid., p. 92.

the reader into thinking that Steinbeck means that Junius' life is a waste and his thinking useless. Steinbeck is suggesting here how his life and thinking appeared to his middle class neighbours. That Junius embodies Steinbeck's thought is borne out by the manner in which the thinking of Junius reflects that of Ed Ricketts and Steinbeck. Steinbeck writes:

> We had a game which we playfully called speculative metaphysics. It was a sport consisting of lopping off a piece of observed reality and letting it move up through the speculative process like a tree growing tall and bushy. We observed with pleasure how the branches of thought grew away from the trunk of external reality. We believed, as we must, that the laws of thought parallel the laws of things. In our game there was no stricture of rightness. 22

Compare with this Steinbeck's description of Junius' method of speculation: "They didn't make conversation; rather they let a seedling of thought sprout by itself, and then watched with wonder while it sent out branching limbs. They were surprised at the strange fruit their conversation bore, for they didn't direct their thinking, nor trellis nor trim it the way so many people do."[23]

[22] The 'Log', p. xlv.
[23] The Pastures of Heaven, p. 90.

Again, Steinbeck depicts Junius as a philosopher. Persons who can discuss "whether there is a symbology in nature,"[24] as Junius and his hired servant do, are not likely to be anything less than philosophers. Junius sees the underlying unity behind the multiplicity of things in the universe. He expresses the idea of this unity in his own way when he says, "'You mean that water is the seed of life. Of the three elements water is the sperm, earth the womb and sunshine the mould of growth.'"[25] He has an insight into the transcendental truth that every natural fact is a symbol of a spiritual fact. Junius is a free spirit who is neither bound by a love of property nor limited by a sense of middle-class respectability. He has the catholicity of wisdom, though not the knowledge of systematic study (and here he is like the Upanishadic seers who give greater importance to intuition than systematic knowledge); he has spiritual freedom, though not logical learning. Though social pressures have not deterred all philosophers and artists from being themselves, Junius finds the conventions of society irresistible and he is forced to submit to them. By

[24]Ibid., p. 88.
[25]Ibid., p. 91.

himself Junius could never have gone under, but the people of The Pastures of Heaven try to be kind by giving a bundle of new clothes to Robbie, his little son, who is always dressed unconventionally. Society wants the father and son to dress in clothes like those of the others, though why some clothes are less respectable than others it is difficult to say. Only a philosopher like Thoreau who said, "No man ever stood the lower in my estimation for having a patch in his clothes,"[26] (Walden) could have appreciated Junius. The thoughtless present of new clothes makes Robbie realize for the first time that he is poor, and it is for his son's sake that Junius goes to town so that the boy could lead a more conventional life, though he fully knows that a life subject to conventions is a life of shams.

The ending of the story must have gone against the grain of Steinbeck's philosophy. The social pressures have proved a hindrance to the spiritual progress of Junius Maltby. This evil feature of human society, Thoreau recognized: "The greater part of what my neighbours call good I believe in my soul to be bad, and

[26] Writings, II, 24.

if I repent of anything, it is very likely to be my good behavior."[27] (Walden) Dissatisfied with the ending of the story, Steinbeck published the story separately with an epilogue under the title Nothing so Monstrous in 1936. Steinbeck assumes in the epilogue that though Junius had been worsted by social forces, he had not been utterly vanquished and suggests significantly that he probably came back to the Pastures of Heaven, a victor at last:

> It is some years now since Junius Matby and Robbie climbed on the bus to go to San Francisco to get a job. I've often wondered whether Junius got a job and whether he kept it. He was strong in spirit when he went away. I for one should find it difficult to believe he could go under.
>
> I think rather he might have broken away again. For all I know he may have come back to the Pastures of Heaven. Somewhere in the brush-thick canyons there may be a cave looking out on a slow stream, shaded by sycamores....
>
> I don't know that this is true. I only hope to God it is. 28

Steinbeck's suggestion in the story that the liberation of the soul has to be preceded by a liberation from the clutches of social respectability which is basically dependent on material possessions is expressed

[27] Ibid., II, 11.

[28] Nothing So Monstrous (New York, 1936), pp. 1936.

also in Cannery Row and Tortilla Flat. So he makes Mack and his friends and the paisanos reject material possessions.

The Idea of Maya

Cannery Row probably contains Steinbeck's clearest expression of the idea of maya. Cannery Row is a microcosm that contains within itself everything that goes to make up the macrocosm:

> Cannery Row in Monterey in California is a poem, a stink, a grating noise, a quality of light, a tone, a habit, a nostalgia, a dream. Cannery Row is the gathered and scattered, tin and iron and rust and splintered wood, chipped pavement and weedy lots and junk-heaps, sardine canneries of corrugated iron, honkey-tonks, restaurants and whore houses, and little crowded groceries, and laboratories and flophouses. Its inhabitants are, as the man once said, "Whores pimps, gamblers, and sons of bitches," by which he meant Everybody. Had the man looked through another peephole he might have said, "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men," and he would have meant the same thing. 29

The beauty and ugliness, good and evil, cupidity and wisdom, and the contradictory experiences which are associated with the old Chinaman are all meant to symbolize the identity of opposites, which is the secret

[29] Short Novels, p. 379.

of maya. As Heinrich Zimmer explains:

> Māyā is the simultaneous-and-successive manifestation of energies that are at variance with each other, processes contradicting and annihilating each other: creation and destruction, evolution and dissolution, the dream-idyll of the inward vision of the god and the desolate nought, the terror of the void, the dread infinite. Māyā is the whole cycle of the year, generating everything and taking it away. This "and," uniting incompatibles, expresses the fundamental character of the Highest Being who is the Lord and Wielder of Māyā, whose energy is Māyā. Opposites are fundamentally of the one essence, two aspects of the one Vishnu. 30

The Chinaman, "the hour of the pearl,"[31] and maya are closely associated with each other, as we have seen in an earlier chapter. The novel is not about the Chinaman but the fact that his presence is associated with the two crucial episodes in the novel--the dismal failure of the first party given to Doc and the glorious success of the second--gives him a significance beyond all proportion to the role he actually plays.

The image of the hour of the pearl used in Cannery Row in association with the old Chinaman becomes the

[30] Myths, p. 46.
[31] Short Novels, p. 459.

central image of the next novel, The Pearl. On the story level, it is a realistic narrative of a poor pearl-diver who finds a magnificent pearl: "There it lay, the great pearl, perfect as the moon. It captured the light and refined it and gave it back in silver incandescence. It was as large as a sea-gull's egg. It was the greatest pearl in the world."[32] His attempts to get a fair price for it end tragically, because such attempts are against the established way of life. He finally casts away the pearl into the ocean. Kino's act of throwing away the pearl is, on the moral level, a refusal to compromise his vision of the good with the world's penchant for corruption. To the doctor it represents Paris cafes, wine and women. To others who want to possess it, it represents the opportunity to gain wealth. To Kino it means in the beginning a marriage in church with his common law wife, Juana, a rifle, and above all a good education for his little son, Coyotito. Later in the story, it represents evil: "He looked into its surface and it was grey and ulcerous. Evil faces peered from it into his eyes, and he saw the light of burning. And in the surface of the pearl he saw the frantic eyes of the man in the pool. And in the surface of the pearl he saw

[32]Ibid., p. 519.

Coyotito lying in the little cave with the top of his head shot away. And the pearl was ugly; it was grey, like a malignant growth."[33] In other words, he sees it in the beginning as a pure good and at the end as pure evil. He is not wrong in choosing good over evil, even if both good and evil are only phenomenal--he is wrong only in not seeing the phenomenal nature of good and evil. He thinks they are real and opposed to each other. So when he declares that the pearl has become his soul, he is associating phenomenon with Reality. That Steinbeck means the pearl to represent maya is suggested throughout the novel. When the pearl is found, Steinbeck makes the symbolic statement: "In this Gulf of uncertain light there were more illusions than realities."[34] Later, Juana tells Kino, "'Perhaps the dealers were right and the pearl has no value. Perhaps this has all been an illusion.'"[35] The pearl as a symbol of maya stands for the identity of all pairs of opposites--poverty and riches, misery and happiness, dreams and disillusionment, and life and death. It means the education of a child and its violent death, material prosperity and a broken boat. Again, the pearl is found in the sea, and water is the

[33]Ibid., p. 568.
[34]Ibid., p. 519.
[35]Ibid., p. 554.

traditional symbol in Hinduism for maya.. Kino believes in the pearl and is disillusioned: "The people say that the two seemed to be removed from human experience; that they had gone through pain and had come out on the other side."[36] Steinbeck appears to imply that Kino has been through the veil of maya, but the conclusion of the story is ambiguous. It is not clear whether Kino returns to a less corrupt life of the days before he had found the pearl or to a degraded and uninspiring life initiated by knowledge of good and evil. In either case it cannot be said that Kino has comprehended the principle of non-attachment.

The Theme of Non-attachment

Seeing through the veil of maya--Steinbeck's subject--represents the most difficult feat for the human mind. But when the human mind can turn this wisdom into action, it can establish non-attachment to the material world. Wisdom which sees through the multiplicity and relative reality of empirical objects cannot be attracted by them. Non-attachment, as Aldous Huxley suggests, is not a negative virtue:

[36]Ibid., p. 567.

> The ideal man is the non-attached man. Non-attached to his bodily sensations and lusts. Non-attached to his craving for power and possessions. Non-attached to the objects of these various desires. Non-attached to his anger and hatred; non-attached to his exclusive loves. Non-attached to wealth, fame, social position. Non-attached even to science, art, speculation, philanthropy. Yes, non-attached even to these. For like patriotism, in Nurse Cavell's phrase, "they are not enough." Non-attachment to self and to what are called "the things of this world" has always been associated in the teachings of the philosophers and the founders of religions with attachment to an ultimate reality greater and more significant than the self. Greater and more significant than even the best things that this world has to offer....the ethic of non-attachment has always been correlated with cosmologies that affirm the existence of a spiritual reality underlying the phenomenal world and imparting to it whatever value or significance it possesses. [37]

Non-attachment should be distinguished from renunciation. The two words are often used as synonyms creating some confusion of thought. Renunciation is giving up the things of the world and leading a life of poverty. Non-attachment is not the renunciation of the things of the world but renunciation of attachment to the world. As S. Radhakrishnan puts it, "The question is not, What shall I <u>do</u> to be saved? but In what <u>spirit</u> shall I do? Detachment of spirit and not renunciation of the world

[37] <u>Ends and Means</u> (London, 1938), pp. 3-4.

is what is demanded from us."[38] Asceticism without the spirit of non-attachment has been condemned by the Gita:

> "The abstinent run away from what they desire
> But carry their desires with them:
> When a man enters Reality,
> He leaves his desires behind him." 39

Other schools of philosophy in Hinduism, too, have condemned spurious asceticism. Kularnava Tantra, one of the Tantric texts, says, "If the mere rubbing of the body with mud and ashes gains liberation, then the village dogs who roll in them have attained it."[40] True non-attachment calls not for giving up physically the things of the world but for not being slaves to desires and possessions.

The paisanos of Tortilla Flat are non-attached in the sense that they are not in love with possessions and do not try to own anything for its own sake. If they take without permission food or drink belonging to others, it is to satisfy their hunger and thirst,

[38] Eastern Religions, p. 101.
[39] Gita, p. 42.
[40] Quoted in Chandradhar Sharma, Indian Philosophy: a Critical Survey (New York, 1962), p. 379.

especially thirst. When they get anything which can be consumed, they have no intention of preserving it for future use. They do not equate themselves with material objects. They stay non-attached and get no ulcers. When, after Danny's death, his house catches fire, they allow it to burn without making any attempt to save it for themselves. The comic tone of the novel conceals Steinbeck's satire against the middle class, which in Steinbeck represents the love of materialistic values: "Through the streets of the town, fat ladies, in whose eyes lay the weariness and the wisdom one sees so often in the eyes of pigs, were trundled in overpowered motorcars toward tea and gin fizzes at the Hotel del Monte."[41] He protests, too, against the seriousness with which the go-getter sacrifices his happiness for baubles.

The most perceptive comment upon the paisanos of Tortilla Flat is probably made by Burton Rascoe, who says, "The paisano, in fact, is your better self."[42] The paisanos are charitable and generous. They commit petty thefts of fowl for themselves but do not mind stealing four sacks of pink beans for Senora Teresina to feed her

[41] Short Novels, p. 29.
[42] "John Steinbeck," in Tedlock, p. 58.

brood of eight. And when they commit thefts, they are likely to pick on those who can afford the loss. They lend their clothes to the Pirate so that he can go to church to present a golden candle to St. Francis. Being simple, they talk not of Original Sin, God's grace and Judgment Day, but being wise, they keep their souls untramelled by the tawdry things of the world.

The one characteristic of the paisanos which is perhaps difficult to explain in terms of Upanishadic Orientalism is what may be called the extremely casual nature of their sex activities. One explanation may be that their behaviour is natural, natural in the sense that it is not the result of ennui, not an escape from the worries of the world, and not a sign of assertiveness arising out of a sense of insecurity. A second explanation is that they know that an attachment to one person may prove to be a trap, involving the person in a permanent liaison or marriage. So when Danny's interest in Sweets Ramirez does not abate, his friends carefully plan to bring about a rupture by stealing the vacuum-cleaner which Danny had given her. The paisanos' attitude to sex makes sense in the context of non-attachment as explained by Alan W. Watts:

> The texts [of Mahayana Buddhism] say repeatedly that the bodhisattva is free to enter into the relationship of love because he is unattached. This does not mean that he enters into it mechanically, with feelings as cold as ice. Nor is this the sort of subterfuge whereby some religious libertines have justified anything that they do by explaining that all physical states are illusory, or that their "spirit" is really above it all. The point is rather that such sexuality is completely genuine and spontaneous (sahaja); its pleasure is detached in the sense that it is not compulsively sought out to assuage anxiety, to prove one's manliness, or to serve as a substitute for liberation. 43

Tortilla Flat is an allegory and a tragedy. It is the allegory of a soul being slowly caught up in the meshes of a material civilization and finally defeated. On the realistic level, the story revolves round Danny's inheritance of two houses and the losing battle he fights against the spectre of possession. When he first hears of his inheritance, "he was a little weighed down with the responsibility of ownership. Before he ever went to look at his property he bought a gallon of red wine and drank most of it himself."[44] He is not celebrating his inheritance, but bracing himself as if he is required to

[43] Psychotherapy East and West, 3rd printing (New York, n.d.), p. 75.

[44] Short Novels, p. 6.

face a scarcely bearable calamity. When he gets possession of the houses, "Pilon noticed that the worry of property was settling on Danny's face. No more in life would that face be free of care. No more would Danny break windows now that he had windows of his own to break. Pilon had been right--he had been raised among his fellows. His shoulders had straightened to withstand the complexity of life. But one cry of pain escaped him before he left for all time his old and simple existence."[45] Pilon rents one of the houses from Danny but the rent was neither paid nor expected. When the house catches fire through the carelessness of one of the friends of Pilon, Jesus Maria hastens to Mrs. Morales' where Danny is taking his pleasure:

> Danny sounded irritable. "What the hell do you want?"
>
> "Your other house is on fire, the one Pablo and Pilon live in."
>
> For a moment Danny did not answer. Then he demanded, "Is the fire department there?"
>
> "Yes," cried Jesus Maria.
>
> The whole sky was lighted up by now. The crackling of burning timbers could be heard. "Well," said Danny, "if the fire department can't do anything about it, what does Pilon expect me to do?" 46

At first it would appear that Danny's rhetorical outburst

[45]Ibid., p. 11.
[46]Ibid., pp. 35-36.

is due to his being disturbed in his pleasure with Mrs. Morales. However, it is seen shortly after that disinterest in the possession of property is equally responsible for the outburst. In the morning

> he had indulged in a little conventional anger against careless friends, and mourned for a moment over that transitory quality of earthly property which made spiritual property so much more valuable. He had thought over the ruin of his status as a man with a house to rent; and, all this clutter of necessary and decent emotion having been satisfied and swept away, he finally slipped into his true emotion, one of relief that at least one of his burdens was removed.
>
> "If it were still there, I would be covetous of the rent," he thought. "My friends have been cool toward me because they owed me money. Now we can be free and happy again." 47

The burning of the house is a symbol of ritualistic purification.

Danny, however, continues to suffer from the weight of ownership of even one house. "Gradually, sitting on the front porch, in the sun, Danny began to dream of the days of his freedom....Always the weight of the house was

[47] Ibid., p. 37.

upon him."[48] He finds the honour of possession something he could well do without. His friends try to pamper him. However, "it was not coddling Danny wanted, it was freedom,"[49] but there is no escape. He who touches pitch is defiled. Even when he runs away to the forest, he does not become free. His life can end only in a ceremonial death. At the height of a great party which his friends give him, he goes out roaring to fight the enemy worthy of him and falls down a gulch and dies. The enemy he tries to fight is not the "spectre of civilization within him,"[50] as suggested by Maxwell Geismar, but more probably the spectre of possession.

It would be a mistake to think that Steinbeck is recommending the way of the life of the paisanos as a whole. He is only pointing out that in these days when success and personal distinction are usually considered to be the only values worth having, only non-attachment can save men from a lust for power and wealth. It is not possible for modern society to go back to the way of life represented by Danny and his friends. That is neither

[48] Ibid., p. 120.
[49] Ibid., p. 120.
[50] Writers in Crisis: The American Novel Between Two Wars (Boston, 1942), p. 255.

necessary nor desirable. The paisanos do not create wealth but enjoy it at somebody else's expense. They want to find easy wealth, as one sees in Pilon's search for hidden gold on Saint Andrew's Eve. They are bums and parasites, and if all people become bums, no one would survive.

Non-attachment continues to be the theme in Cannery Row. Joseph Fontenrose's statement that the moral of the story is that "the acquisitive society simply is, and there is no remedy except for the individual who can escape into idleness or creative activity or fun"[51] appears to have missed the point. Warren French seems to sense the author's intention more correctly when he writes, "Steinbeck's failure to put across his points in his previous novels may be attributable simply to his audience's not reading carefully enough to realize that a complex and subtle novel like Cannery Row was written in praise of detachment."[52] Mack and his friends are described as intuitively wise, and wisdom lies in non-attachment. "Mack was the elder, leader, mentor, and to a small extent the exploiter of a little group of men who had in common no families, no money, and no ambitions

[51]Fontenrose, p. 108.
[52]French, p. 167.

beyond food, drink, and contentment. But whereas most men in their search for contentment destroy themselves and fall wearily short of their targets, Mack and his friends approached contentment casually, quietly, and absorbed it gently."[53] Steinbeck repeats the idea a number of times as if he were afraid that the reader might miss the point. Once he says, "They did not measure their joy in goods sold, their egos in bank balances, nor their loves in what they cost."[54] The most definitive statement about the wisdom of Mack and the boys comes from Doc who is Steinbeck's spokesman in the novel:

> Doc said, "Look at them. There are your true philosophers. I think," he went on, "that Mack and the boys know everything that has never happened in the world and possibly everything that will happen. I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad souls, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their appetites without calling them something else." 55

Steinbeck sees that man cannot live without material

[53] Short Novels, p. 384.
[54] Ibid., p. 453.
[55] Ibid., p. 468.

things. In fact they may be useful to give him a sense of self-respect. Mack and the boys rent a shack from Lee Chong, though they never pay any rent for it. They acquire some furniture. Then they get a stove for eighty cents with an I.O.U. which the owner "probably still has."[56] "With the great stove came pride, and with pride, the Palace became home."[57] They are, however, wise enough not to go beyond sensible limits, as Mrs. Malloy does, for example. She lives in an old boiler discarded by the Hediondo Cannery. It has no windows, but she wants to have window-curtains.

Mack and the boys show an advance over the paisanos of Tortilla Flat. The paisanos owe a loyalty to one another but to nobody outside the group. They take pleasure in cheating Torrelli of his goods. They take even greater pleasure in cheating him of his wife, for "Torrelli had, Pilon knew, the Italian's exaggerated and wholly quixotic ideal of marital relations."[58] On the other hand, Mack and his friends are aware of the implications of their acts. Mack, for example, "never visited the Bear Flag professionally. It would have seemed

[56]Ibid., p. 403.
[57]Ibid., p. 403.
[58]Ibid., p. 31.

a little like incest to him."[59] Again, unlike the paisanos, they cannot think of cheating Lee Chong who has given them a shack to live in: "One further bond is established--you cannot steal from your benefactor."[60] The commensal group recognized by Mack and his friends as the one to which they belong is larger than the one recognized by the paisanos. Steinbeck seems to imply here that the size of the community recognized as one unit depends upon the degree of non-attachment attained. In other words, the greater the degree of non-attachment, the larger the size of the commensal unit. And the man who has attained perfect non-attachment would see the universe as one whole.

Steinbeck appears to be aware, too, that the ideal of non-attachment is something difficult to achieve and even more difficult to retain. It is only too easy to slip back, and the temptations are many. He writes, "A soul washed and saved is a soul doubly in danger, for everything in the world conspires against such a soul. 'Even the straws under my knees,' says Saint Augustine, 'shout to distract me from prayer.'"[61] The paisanos

[59]Ibid., p. 473.
[60]Ibid., p. 386.
[61]Ibid., p. 17.

have no attachment to property, but when Danny inherits two houses, he suffers from a sense of pride. He has no money but he does not want to go and work. He tells his friends, "'It would not look well for a man who owns two houses to cut squids. But perhaps if a little rent were ever paid--.'"[62] At the best of times the paisanos did not work for more than a day or two at a time, but now that he is a man of property, Danny thinks respectability forbids him from working altogether. It is true that he is finding an excuse to avoid work, but the fact that Danny finally dies fighting an unsuccessful battle against the spectre of possession proves that his soul has started being corrupted.

Steinbeck's treatment of the idea of maya and non-attachment appears to be vitiated by a tendency to equate to some extent the life of primitives with the life of philosophers who have seen through the veil of maya. He seems to be in Thoreau's position: "I found in myself, and still find, an instinct toward a higher, or, as it is named, spiritual life, as do most men, and another toward a primitive rank and savage one, and I reverence them both."[63] (Walden) But, unlike Thoreau, Steinbeck cannot

[62]Ibid., p. 23.
[63]Writings, II, 232.

or does not distinguish between the two. It is like equating some primitives with Thoreau because neither the primitives nor Thoreau used locks on their doors, without taking into consideration the fact that the primitives did not use locks because they did not understand the value of property, while Thoreau did not use a lock because he had transcended the love of material possessions. It is true that the paisanos are not primitives and that Tortilla Flat is not a novel written in praise of primitivism. Steinbeck is not so much in favour of a primitive way of life as in the disinterest of the primitives in personal distinctions; not so much in their lack of thinking as in their freedom from harassing cares; and not so much in their not having bolts and locks on the doors as in their not being slaves to property. The primitive is one who has not tasted the fruit of good and evil, while the paisanos have transcended both. Still Steinbeck's inability to distinguish between the primitive way of life and that of a philosopher who has attained the ideal of non-attachment may be seen in his making the paisanos both wise and easy-going, physically dirty and spiritually clean at the same time. Or perhaps this illustrates the difficulty which Steinbeck as a writer of fiction has in rendering Oriental ideas in a Western context.

Steinbeck's love of the care-free life of the primitives appears to have influenced his treatment of the idea of non-attachment in another way, too--non-attachment seems possible only for those who refuse to undertake the responsibility of family life. Such non-attachment as we see seems to be the result of a selfish refusal to be concerned about any aspect of the world other than comfort or pleasure. There are exceptions like Jim Casy or Tom Joad, but there are not many such figures.

Conclusion

It is seen from the examination of The Pastures of Heaven, Tortilla Flat, Cannery Row, and The Pearl that Steinbeck does not consider the material world as ultimately Real, but, as he makes it amply clear, that is no excuse to reject humanity or take up an attitude of resignation or avoid one's responsibilities as a human being or as a member of society. Life is meant to be lived, but an attachment to the material objects of the world results in disappointment and misery, separateness and egoism. The ideal of non-attachment is not opposed to enjoyment but to addiction. It is only through non-attachment that a non-teleological point of view is possible and an understanding-acceptance of humanity can

be achieved. One's sense of separateness and egoism can be overcome and the implications of one's actions in the system of cosmic relations seen only through non-attachment. And perfect non-attachment is possible only for those who are able to see the distinction between ultimate Reality and the empirical world.

CHAPTER — V

The Problem of Time and Immortality

Ideas of time and immortality are corollaries to the conception of the divine. The Christian concept of God and the universe supports the linear idea of time, that the creation of the universe, the birth of Christ and the Day of Judgment are historical events in a particular order of time, and that there will not be a recurrence of such events. And the Christian idea of immortality implies the existence of souls as individual entities for ever. On the other hand, the non-dualistic conception of the divine in the Upanishads considers time to be cyclic and immortality to mean the complete identification of the individual soul with the universal soul. We will see that Steinbeck's ideas of time and immortality have a correspondence with Upanishadic rather than with Christian concepts. He does not concern himself with these ideas at length in his novels but rather refers to them in passing. Nevertheless, a consideration of these views will help us to get a fuller picture of the parallels between Steinbeck's and Oriental thought.

Concept of Time

Steinbeck writes that people have different ideas of time and that new scientific discoveries have made it necessary to discard limited conceptions:

> It is strange how the time sense changes with different peoples. The Indians who sat on the rail of the Western Flyer had a different time sense--"time-world" would be the better term--from ours. And we think we can never get into them unless we can invade that time-world, for this expanding time seems to trail an expanding universe, or perhaps to lead it. One considers the durations indicated in geology, in paleontology, and, thinking out of our time-world with its duration between time-stone and time-stone, says, "What an incredible interval!" Then, when one struggles to build some picture of astro-physical time, he is faced with a light-year, a thought-deranging duration unless the relativity of all things intervenes and time expands and contracts, matching itself relatively to the pulsings of a relative universe. [1]

The conception of time depends to some extent upon our knowledge of space. With an expanding universe, the conception of time, too, has changed. The conception of geological time is related to that of space measured in light-years. To comprehend the infinity of space, it is necessary to conceive of time not as something which is to be measured by the life-span of an individual human

[1] The 'Log', pp. 85-86.

being or of the human race, but by the time-consciousness of nature itself.

Steinbeck makes it clear, too, that his conception of time is not linear but cyclic. He mentions it more than once. In his essay on Ed Ricketts, he writes, "He would say that nearly everything that can happen to people not only does happen but has happened for a million years. 'Therefore,' he would say, 'for everything that can happen there is a channel or mechanism in the human to take care of it--a channel worn down in prehistory and transmitted in the genes.'"[2] This is of course Ed Ricketts' opinion, but since Steinbeck uses the prototypes of Ricketts as his spokesmen in some of his novels, it may be assumed that Steinbeck agrees with him in his opinion about time.[3] Steinbeck holds that history repeats itself:

> John Whiteside always remembered how his father read to him the three great authors, Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon...."All history is here," Richard said. "Everything mankind is capable of is recorded in these three books. The love and chicanery, the stupid dishonesty, the shortsightedness

[2]Ibid., p. xix.

[3]The prototypes of Ricketts are Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle, Doctor Phillips in "The Snake" (The Long Valley), Doc in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, Doctor Winter in The Moon is Down, and Friend Ed in Burning Bright.

> and bravery, nobility and sadness of the race. You may judge the future by these books, John, for nothing can happen which has not happened and been recorded in these books. Compared to these, the Bible is a very incomplete record of an obscure people. 4 (Italics added.)

That is, events are not treated by these historians as though they were incidents which had no significance except that they had happened, but as typical situations which are likely to be repeated in history and from which therefore useful lessons can be learnt. For them history is not the record of a linear movement but a cyclic repetition of events.

The cyclic conception of history and time does not consider things in terms of ends or purposes. In this respect it is quite unlike teleology. B. Bosanquet writes: "In the sense of aiming at the unfulfilled it [teleology] gives an unreal importance to time, and to the part--it may be a relatively trivial part--which happens to come last in succession."[5] Steinbeck appears to suggest that there are no "ends" by making In Dubious Battle and The

[4] The Pastures of Heaven, pp. 200-201.

[5] The Meaning of Teleology, [from the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. II], (London, 1906), p. 2.

Grapes of Wrath end in medias res. The title In Dubious Battle (drawn from Milton's Paradise Lost, I, 104) is significant, since it is meant to indicate that the battle between the fruit-growers and the labourers is "dubious," though it is clear that the labourers have no chance against the organized fruit-growers at the present juncture. Their supply of food is exhausted, many of the labourers have deserted, Anderson on whose land they have been camping has asked them to leave, and Doc Burton whose presence is necessary to keep at bay the health authorities is missing, but the struggle has to go on for the simple reason that the human race can survive only through struggle against odds. Steinbeck explained the conclusion of the story to his agents: "A story of the life of a man ends with his death, but where can you end a story of man-movement that has no end. [Sic] No matter where you stop there is always more to come. I have tried to indicate this by stopping on a high point but it is by no means an ending."[6] Men die, but man lives. Similarly he appears to imply that old ideas and conceptions die but reappear in some changed form. There has been, for example, communes before, as Doc Burton tells Mac, and there will be again. The struggle may assume different

[6]Quoted in Lisca, p. 127.

forms but the struggle itself will always be there.

Like In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath ends on an equivocal note. The novel ends, on the story level, on a note of tragedy--Jim Casy is dead, Tom leaves the family, Al is about to leave, Connie has deserted, Rose of Sharon's baby is still-born, the Joads have nothing left--no cash, no food, and no transport. They have, however, not lost everything, for even as they have been losing their material possessions, they have been evolving spiritually. And so they live to fight another day buttressed by their recognition of the brotherhood of man. Though the novel records the spiritual progress of the Joads, the idea of the cyclic pattern of events in the universe is hinted at again and again. I have shown in an earlier chapter how Steinbeck makes use of myths to suggest the recurrence of migrations in all ages and in all countries. A cyclic pattern of events is also seen in the fact of the earlier generations of the Okies driving out the Indians and occupying their lands and the present Okies being deprived of those very lands by more powerful forces, namely, the banks. A similar cycle of events may be seen in the suggestion that the rich land-owners of California who lead an easy life will get soft and fall a prey to the aggression of the Okies. Ma Joad tells Tom, "'Rich fellas come up

an' they die, an' their kids ain't no good, an' they die out. But, Tom, we keep a-comin'.'"[7] But the Okies, too, will become soft if they lead an easy life. This theory of his has been explained by Steinbeck in The 'Log'. He thinks that the fiercer the competition, the healthier it is for the animals, and the greater the odds they have to fight against, the greater is the toughness they build up. He writes:

> There was an exuberant fierceness in the littoral here, a vital competition for existence. Everything seemed speeded-up; starfish and urchins were more strongly attached than in other places, and many of the univalves were so tightly fixed that the shells broke before the animals would let go their hold. Perhaps the force of the great surf which beats on this shore has much to do with the tenacity of the animals here. It is noteworthy that the animals, rather than deserting such beaten shores for the safe cove and protected pools, simply increase their toughness and fight back at the sea with a kind of joyful survival. 8

When the conditions for survival become easy, animals as well as men become soft. Steinbeck continues:

> Perhaps the pattern of struggle is so deeply imprinted in the genes of all life conceived in this benevolently hostile planet that the removal of obstacles automatically atrophies

[7] The Grapes of Wrath, p. 257.
[8] The 'Log', p. 58.

> a survival drive. With warm water and abundant food, the animals may retire into a sterile sluggish happiness. This has certainly seemed true in man. Force and cleverness and versatility have surely been the children of obstacles. Tacitus, in the Histories, places as one of the tactical methods advanced to be used against the German armies their exposure to a warm climate and a soft rich food supply. These, he said, will ruin troops quicker than anything else. If these things are true in a biologic sense, what is to become of the fed, warm, protected citizenry of the ideal future state? 9

It should, however, be mentioned here that Steinbeck is not consistent about this theory, for in The Grapes of Wrath the Joads survive not only because they are hardy, but because they are good. Nevertheless, there appears to be some truth in Steinbeck's theory, for if we look at the history of the world, we find that there has not been any empire which has lasted for more than two hundred years.

The idea suggested by Steinbeck that birth and death, growth and decay are only a part of the universal process and that history follows a kind of cyclic movement is similar to Hindu thought. In India

> The wheel of birth and death, the round of emanation, fruition, dissolution, and re-

[9] Ibid., p. 227.

> emanation, is a commonplace of popular speech as well as a fundamental theme of philosophy, myth and symbol, religion, politics and art. It is understood as applying not only to the life of the individual, but to the history of society and the course of the cosmos. Every moment of existence is measured and judged against the backdrop of this pleroma. 10

The cyclic concept of time and history in Hinduism may also be seen in its idea of incarnations. "Incarnation" is the word used to describe the act of God being born as a human being or animal and living in this world suffering vicissitudes like anybody else. Hinduism believes that God incarnates himself whenever necessary. The Gita explains why God assumes the form of human beings:

> "When goodness grows weak,
> When evil increases,
> I make myself a body.
>
> In every age I come back
> To deliver the holy,
> To destroy the sin of the sinner,
> To establish righteousness." 11

Krishna tells Arjuna that whenever evil begins to predominate and endanger the moral order of the world, he incarnates himself to destroy evil and restore the balance. He assumes the form most suitable for the purpose of destroying the

[10] Heinrich Zimmer, Myths, p. 13.
[11] Gita, p. 50.

particular evil that is to be overcome. That is, the predominance of evil and its destruction are cyclic recurrences, and, in the words of Floyd H. Ross, "an incarnation that happened only 'once for all' would have no real value."[12] There is a parallel to the repeated incarnations of Hinduism in the Christian lives of the saints which recapitulate the aspects of the life and the passion of Jesus, though Jesus is accepted generally as the only incarnation of God. Steinbeck, unlike Christianity, appears to believe that there is more than one incarnation. This may be seen from Rama's description of Joseph:

> "I do not know whether there are men born outside humanity, or whether some men are so human as to make others seem unreal. Perhaps a godling lives on earth now and then....I tell you this man is not a man, unless he is all men. The strength, the resistance, the long and stumbling thinking of all men, and all the joy and suffering, too, cancelling each other out and yet remaining in the contents. He is all these, a repository for a little piece of each man's soul, and more than that, a symbol of the earth's soul." 13

The passage indicates that Joseph is to be understood as something more than an ordinary human being. He is above good and evil, pleasure and pain. To him, all things are

[12] The Meaning of Life in Hinduism and Buddhism (London, 1952), p. 74.

[13] To a God Unknown, p. 121.

one and all are a part of him. He fits the concept of more than one incarnation in Hinduistic rather than Christian terms.

Concept of Immortality

With the cyclic idea of time, as I have pointed out earlier, the wheel of death and birth is conceived of as constantly turning. Death is only a temporary pause before a man is born again according to his karma. This process goes on until a person has achieved liberation. In this respect Steinbeck's idea of immortality appears to resemble Upanishadic and Transcendental thought rather than the Christian. The death of Joseph makes it clear that the individual soul is the same as the Over-Soul. The transcendental concept implies that the soul of an individual, once liberated, does not continue to exist as a separate entity. Emerson writes, "I confess that everything connected with our personality fails. Nature never spares the individual."[14] ("Immortality") Joseph's statement that he is both the rain and the land and Jim Casy's identification of the self with the universe imply the end of their separative tendencies. Joseph and Casy achieve immortality the moment they attain

[14] Works, VIII, 342-343.

the sense of one-ness with the universe. Joseph achieves it at the moment of his death, and Casy when he has still some months to live, but in both cases it is the extinction of their ego that allows their escape from personality. In other words, their immortality begins with the end of their sense of separateness.

It is here that the similarity between Steinbeck's thought and Hindu thought may be seen. The Upanishadic point of view is well stated by Swami Prabhavananda:

> Immortality as taught in the Upaniṣads does not imply a survival to all eternity of the individual self, of what we know in this world as an individual man or personality. This self has no absolute reality, and can therefore have no absolute or permanent existence. When mokṣa is achieved, it altogether disappears. Furthermore, the immortality of the Upaniṣads, in contrast with a common Western conception, cannot properly be regarded as in any sense a continuance in time. 15

Tom Joad's assurance to his mother that he will be wherever people are hungry, where there is injustice, and where children laugh, are attempts to put into concrete terms the non-dualistic conception of immortality.

[15] The Spiritual Heritage of India (London, 1962), p. 62.

The Human Desire for Immortality

The Upanishadic conception of immortality, it is to be admitted, runs counter to the common human desire for separate individualistic existence for all time. To a person suffering from maya, his separate identity is the most coveted of things. Christianity and the dualistic school in Hinduism are perhaps more in accordance with human desire when they give permanent existence to individual souls. Parallel to the immortality of the individual soul is the survival of personality in some form in the temporal world.[16] Steinbeck feels that this desire for survival, a wish to leave something for posterity to be remembered by, is a universal human weakness. Molly Morgan (The Pastures of Heaven) makes a sort of definitive statement about it:

> "After the bare requisites to living and reproducing, man wants most to leave some record of himself, a proof, perhaps, that he has really existed. He leaves his proof on wood, on stone, or on the lives of other people. This deep desire exists in everyone, from the boy who writes dirty words in a public toilet to the Buddha who etches his image in the race mind. Life is so unreal. I think that we seriously doubt that we exist and go about trying to prove that we do." 17

[16]The word "survival" has been used to denote temporal immortality so as not to confuse the idea with theological immortality.

[17]The Pastures of Heaven, pp. 56-57.

Human beings go to extraordinary lengths to achieve temporal immortality or survival, anything from constructing pyramids to committing crimes. Some scientists try to achieve it by naming some little fish of a new species they have discovered after themselves. Steinbeck writes, "There are some marine biologists whose chief interest is in the rarity, the seldom seen and unnamed animal. These are often wealthy amateurs, some of whom have been suspected of wishing to tack their names on unsuspecting and unresponsive invertebrates. The passion for immortality at the expense of a little beast must be very great."[18] Others try to achieve this survival by establishing dynasties. The story of Richard Whiteside (The Pastures of Heaven) who builds a mansion of redwood for posterity has been discussed in an earlier context, but while constructing a house is of no harm to others, his desire to achieve survival through having a number of children almost leads to disaster. His wife is too weak to have children and the birth of the first child almost kills her. The doctor firmly advises him against having more children, but after a few years Richard and his wife think that they can have another child. The result is that she barely pulls through and becomes a permanent invalid.

[18]The 'Log', pp. 215-216.

The desire for survival through biological propagation is probably the most common, and Joe Saul's (Burning Bright) anguish when he realizes that he cannot have children of his own is understandable, but when he comes to see, with Friend Ed's help, that this is a form of egoism and that all men are fathers to all children, he accepts his wife's child as his own.

Steinbeck feels that a more viable form of survival than through biological propagation is the place a deceased man occupies in the heart of a living person. He apparently gives much importance to this kind of survival, as may be seen in his statement about Ed Ricketts: "He will not die. He haunts the people who knew him. He is always present even in the moments when we feel his loss the most."[19] And he says a little later, "It wasn't Ed who had died but a large and important part of oneself."[20] Similar things are said about Samuel Hamilton (East of Eden) by Adam and Lee. Adam tells Will Hamilton, "'Such a man doesn't really die. I can't think of him as dead. He seems maybe more alive to me than before.'"[21] And Lee tells Adam,

[19]Ibid., p. xi.
[20]Ibid., p. xiii.
[21]East of Eden, p. 285.

"'Maybe both of us have got a piece of him. Maybe that's what immortality is.'"[22]

Immortality and De-individualization

Like Hinduism, Steinbeck feels that the ideal should be not the preservation of individuality, but the ultimate identification of the individual soul with the universal soul. It is significant that in The Grapes of Wrath one of the ways in which Steinbeck indicates the spiritual growth of the Joads is by a progressive detachment towards the manner of the burial of the persons who fall by the way. There are four incidents of death--of Grampa Joad, Granma Joad, Jim Casy, and Rose of Sharon's still-born child. All these deaths and burials have a certain significance in terms of the story. Grampa Joad's death signifies the heartache that is involved in the family's leaving for ever the land on which they had lived for generations. This is suggested by Casy who tells Pa Joad, "'He died the minute you took 'im off the place.'"[23] His death also serves to bring together the two migrant families of the Joads and the Wilsons. The Joads overcome some of their clannishness and the two families, as I

[22]Ibid., p. 288.
[23]The Grapes of Wrath, p. 131.

have pointed out earlier, become one. The manner of Grampa's burial is important, too. They do not report his death to the County authorities, for they have no money to pay for a regular burial. They dig a grave in a field and bury him with a bottle in his hands which contains a slip of paper giving his name and the cause of death, but no mound or cross marks the spot. They do not want the spot to be recognized as a grave since they have not reported his death and they might come into trouble with the law. The note in the bottle is the only thing that will preserve the mark of his individuality. With each successive death and burial the marks that preserve individuality progressively disappear.

Granma Joad dies in the truck and Ma Joad lies with her all night without telling anybody else about it for the sake of the family. She wants to avoid all delay so that the family can reach the Promised Land as early as possible. The death of Granma demonstrates the strength of Ma Joad: "The family looked at Ma with a little terror at her strength."[24] It also shows how poor they have become, and as Tom says, they are going to start clean.

[24]Ibid., p. 208.

Their straitened circumstances force them to give up Granma's body to be buried at the expense of the County, with no embalming, no coffin, no preacher, and no plot in a grave-yard.

Jim Casy is killed by some unknown persons, probably by the vigilantes. In terms of the story it is the manner of his death and the exposition of his philosophy to Tom just before his death which are instrumental in making Tom follow in the footsteps of Casy. Nothing is said about the funeral rites of Casy, but it may be assumed that he would be buried in some unknown grave by the persons who had killed him. One can be fairly certain that no headstone would mark Casy's last resting-place. His body would become without delay one with the elements, in the same way as his individual soul has become one with the Over-Soul.

The death of the child of Rose of Sharon is symbolic of the death of the migrants' hopes of finding their dreamland. Setting the child adrift in an apple-box on the waters of a stream is similar to the Biblical myth of the child Moses' being set adrift on a river. Moses grew up and gave a message to the world, and Uncle John want Rose's child, though dead, to carry a message:

"'Go down an' tell 'em. Go down in the street an' rot an' tell 'em that way. That's the way you can talk.'"[25] Grampa Joad is buried with a note; Granma Joad with nothing to mark the remains of her existence; Casy is buried, nobody knows where; and the child is not buried at all. These four different ways of the disposal of the bodies indicate progressive de-individualization, the ideal of Upanishadic philosophy.

In Hinduism the individual soul and the individual body are expected to lose their personality. Just as the individual soul becomes one with the universal soul, the individual body is meant to become indistinguishable from the elements. The body of the deceased person is therefore buried in a grave rarely indicated by a distinguishing mark, like a headstone. More commonly the body is cremated and the ashes cast on the waters of a river. This would appear to be a conscious attempt to destroy as completely as possible any individuality the body might have had. Steinbeck's treatment of death, therefore, is, in its larger symbolic significance, a parallel to Hindu thought.

[25]Ibid., p. 410.

So it is seen that Steinbeck's idea of time tends to be cyclic rather than linear. He appears to see history as a repetition of events or recurrent waves of happenings. He suggests that true temporal immortality lies in being missed by living persons rather than in continuing to exist in lifeless monuments. And theological immortality consists of not retaining the individuality of separateness and egoism, but of the complete identification of the individual soul with the universal soul. In all these tendencies, Steinbeck shows greater similarity to Oriental and Hinduistic thought than the Western and Christian.

CHAPTER — VI

Conclusion

No single word can describe a man, and using a single word to describe the novels of a writer like John Steinbeck would be too facile to be true. Some of his novels have different levels of meaning, the story level, the social protest level and an allegorical level, the interpretations of which are "limited only by the ingenuity of the audience."[1] Like many other American novelists, Steinbeck often deals with certain social problems that rise out of contemporary issues. In Dubious Battle is the outcome of Steinbeck's personal experience of lettuce-packing shed workers in the Salinas valley; Of Mice and Men is the result of his knowledge of agricultural labour; The Grapes of Wrath is a protest against the illtreatment of the migrants in California; Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row are a depreciation of the commercial culture of the times; and The Winter of Our Discontent shows his disapproval of the decay of moral standards in all walks of life in America. The novels, however, are not proletarian in the ordinary sense of the term. Steinbeck makes no claims that the labourers

[1]Lisca, p. 139.

are always good and always right, and even while he is condemning the exploitation of labour, he is concerned with the moral[2] improvement of the labourers. He does not approve of clannishness or any form of extreme radicalism that violates human dignity. His solutions to problems are transcendental rather than pragmatic.

Steinbeck, however, does not give us a complete system of philosophy. Various strands of thought have gone into Steinbeck's philosophy, but he does not integrate them into one organic whole. He gives more importance to intuitive thought than to reason, more to religious than material solutions. Along with this goes a weakness for sentiment which often destroys the intended effect of realistic situations.

In spite of these weaknesses, it is seen that Steinbeck makes a serious enquiry into the eternal problems of mankind--the nature of the divine, man's relationship to that divinity and the corollaries which follow from them. He examines various concepts of God and finds them wanting in one respect or another, and finally posits as the most valid a concept of the divine

[2]Moral in the fundamental sense.

which very closely approximates to the Brahman or the Over-Soul. This concept is not stated explicitly since Steinbeck is not a metaphysician, but is implied clearly in his novels, as I have tried to demonstrate. Every metaphysical concept implies certain viable values, and the concept of the Brahman implies the divinity of everything in nature, the sacredness of all life and the brotherhood of man. All things are subject to the cosmic laws of nature and all things exist in their own right and not for the benefit of man. The Upanishads posit, too, that real as the world is for all practical purposes, it is not real judged by the norms of ultimate Reality. Non-attachment to material things is the principle strongly advocated by the Upanishads.

When Steinbeck says that all life is holy, he is not merely being sentimental. When Casy asserts that there is no virtue and no sin, Steinbeck is not being trite. When Casy advances the view that all men may be having one big soul of which everybody is a part, Steinbeck is not giving utterance to a platitude. And when the old man in The Short Reign of Pippin IV says that "'there's just people--just what people do,'"[3] Steinbeck is not taking refuge in non-teleological

[3]The Short Reign of Pippin IV, p. 147.

thinking to avoid thinking. He sees that all human beings are subject to the biological heritage of instincts and that before he can be understood as man, he has to be understood as an animal. Steinbeck's emphasis on the non-teleological point of view is not merely for the sake of objectivity but for non-blaming acceptance of human beings with all their weaknesses. The paisanos of Tortilla Flat and Mack and his friends of Cannery Row are in a sense born philosophers who refuse to be trapped by a material civilization. Theirs is an attitude of non-attachment to material things. Their rationalization of acts of petty larcency is an ironic comment on the self-deceptions practiced by people. They are honest enough to satisfy their instinctual drives without calling them something else.

Steinbeck finds religious institutions harmful, an anthropomorphic god unsatisfactory, evangelism evil and pantheism as leaving something to be desired. He has faith in instincts but is not in favour of primitivism. He wants all men to have material comforts but recommends non-attachment to them. He prefers reforms to revolutions. He is in favour of greater social and economic equality, but he puts means above ends.

Whether Steinbeck learnt of the Upanishadic philosophy directly from Hindu literature (for which there is little external evidence) or through Emerson or plucked it from the air, so to speak, or conceived of these ideas himself is of no great importance. What is important is the philosophy itself and its implications in Steinbeck's Weltanschauung. The approach adopted in this study of Steinbeck is not the only method of interpreting his work, but the thesis, it is hoped, demonstrates how he gains in depth when interpreted in the context of the correspondences one finds between Steinbeck's and Upanishadic thought.

Appendix

'A'

The Vedas

There are four Vedas, the Rik, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva. Each one of them is divided into four sections, Mantra, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishad. They were written at different times. The Mantras consist of hymns and songs used at sacrifices. The Brahmanas are concerned with details of sacrificial rites, duties and rules of conduct in daily life, but soon "the sacrifices themselves often took the place of a living religion."[1] Even the gods were supposed to owe their position to sacrifices. The priests and the rites became more important than the gods. It was during the age of the Brahmanas that Brahmins became powerful and exploited the people belonging to other castes. They introduced the caste system.

The Aranyakas are a corrective to the Brahmanas in that they started interpreting the Mantras instead of

[1]Swami Prabhavananda, The Spiritual Heritage of India (London, 1962), p. 36.

mechanically reciting them at the time of ~~the time of~~ the sacrifices.

The Upanishads develop into a philosophy what has been only suggested in the Mantras. The spirit of the Upanishads is by its very nature opposed to ritualism. A parody of the priests going round the sacrificial fire is to be found in the Chandogya Upanishad: "(They [the dogs] sang), 'Aum, let us eat, Aum, let us drink, Aum, may the god Varuna, Prajapati, and Savitṛ bring food here. Aum.'"[2] The fruit reaped from a sacrifice is said to be of an inferior type, too. The whole process of sacrifice is, therefore, spiritualized and interiorized in the Upanishads. The shift is from the objective to the subjective, from natural phenomena to the inner nature of things. According to the Upanishads, the Brahman is the one Absolute and the world is a creation of the Brahman out of Itself. In other words, the finite world is the result of Its subjecting Itself to dismemberment. The Brahman may be said to be the "inner man" and the empirical ego the "outer man," but man's ignorance prevents him from seeing the Brahman in himself. At the time of the sacrifice, when the man pours soma (a kind

[2] Chandogya Upanishad, I, 12, 5.

of wine) into the fire as into God's mouth, he is, so to speak, building up the dismembered Brahman through surrendering his own egoism. He is destroying the "outer man" and creating the "inner man," or, in other words, he is realizing the Atman or the Brahman in himself.

'B'

The Tantras

Of the innumerable gods and goddesses who adorn the Hindu pantheon, Shiva, Shakti, and Vishnu are the most popular. Almost all the Hindus worship one or the other of these three. The Shaiva cult is essentially an ascetic cult and claims the largest following. Shiva's consort is Shakti, and She symbolizes the supreme primordial energy. Her followers are called Shaktas, and their scriptures, Tantras.

The Tantras are mainly concerned with the practical side of religion, like rites and observances. Their authorship is unknown, but they must be quite old, since Buddha refers to them. The great texts of this doctrine, however, begin to appear from the seventh century onwards.

The original Tantras are divided into different groups, dealing with Shiva, Shakti, and Vishnu. There are Buddhistic Tantras, too, but the Shakti Tantras were the only ones which were popular and "Tantras" came to mean only those dealing with Shakti worship. Tantric sadhana (spiritual practice) emphasizes sexual rituals as a vehicle for attaining transcendence. Of the Tantric cults, the "left-handed" cult indulged in the ritual of "five M's"--wine, flesh, fish, parched grain and sexual intercourse. (In Sanskrit all these five words begin with "M" and hence are called the "five M's.") It should, however, be understood that not all the Tantras deal merely with sex rituals, but with theology and metaphysics. "The philosophy of the Tantras is based on the Upaniṣads. It is non-dualistic, upholding the identity of the individual soul with Śiva-Śakti--that is, in the language of the Upaniṣads and of Śankara, the identity of the individual self with Brahman, or the Universal Self."[3]

Tantrism was one of the attempts to reconcile the dichotomy between asceticism and eroticism that is to be found in all religions. The sexual ritual they indulge in is not the end but only the means to an attainment of

[3]Swami Prabhavananda, The Spiritual Heritage of India (London, 1962), p. 144.

the blissful state of pure abstraction from all things physical, a state of samadhi (a deep state of meditation where one's identity is lost.) In the sexual union, according to the Tantras, the human couple becomes a divine couple. Because the Tantras are written in a language deliberately made obscure, it is difficult to understand what they actually mean. It is not easy to judge whether a particular statement in their scriptures is to be taken literally or symbolically. And it is even more difficult to state categorically whether the Tantrics came to terms with the problem of sex.

'C'

The Upanishads

The Founding of Hinduism

Hinduism was not founded by a single person as was Christianity or Islam, but is the result of the religious experience and insights of a number of sages and saints accumulated in Talmudic fashion. It is, therefore, natural that there should be systems of thought within the whole which differ from each other to some extent. There is, however, an essential unity underlying them all, since all

the systems have their roots in a core of documents, the Vedas. There are three important systems: advaita (non-dualism), dvaita (dualism), and vishistadvaita (qualified non-dualism). Since Steinbeck's conception of God and the universe is non-dualistic, the advaita system alone may be examined here.

The Basic Hindu Beliefs

The Upanishadic philosophers searched for a reality which was not subject to change and decay as were natural phenomena. This reality behind natural phenomena they called the Brahman. The Brahman is described as having two aspects: the one without a form, and the other with a form. "Verily there are two forms of Brahman, the formed and the formless, the mortal and the immortal, the unmoving and the moving, the actual (existent) and the true (being)."[4] The "formless" Brahman is nirvishesha (without any qualifying characteristics), nirguna (without attributes), and nirvikalpa (unconditioned). The Brahman with "form" is endowed with qualifications (saguna), and has characteristics (savishesha). The Nirguna Brahman is called para (supreme) Brahman, and the Suguna Brahman, apara (inferior) Brahman.

[4]Bridaranyaka Upanishad, II, 3, 1.

When the Brahman is said to be characterless, it is meant that the Brahman cannot be described in any positive terms known to man. It can be described only in negative terms, neti, neti, not this, not this. It has been described in a series of negative epithets:

> It is neither gross nor fine, neither short nor long, neither glowing red (like fire) nor adhesive (like water). (It is) neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste, without ears, without voice, without mind, without radiance, without breath, without a mouth, without measure, having no without. It eats nothing and no one eats it. 5

While the above description is meant to be a denial of all empirical attributes, there are descriptions of the Brahman which juxtapose contradictory and irreconcilable attributes: ""Sitting, he moves far; lying he goes everywhere."[6] Or, again: "It moves and moves not; It is far and It is near; It is within all this and It is also outside all this."[7] These contradictory predicates are evidence of the seers' rich imagination in describing the indescribable. Ordinary categories of thought cannot apply to the Brahman, but It is not a void. It is beyond the empirical order of things, and is not subject to the laws of space, time and causality.

[5]Ibid., III, 8, 8.
[6]Katha Upanishad, I, 2, 21.
[7]Iśa Upanishad, 5.

The Attributes of the Brahman

The Upanishadic seers ran into a practical difficulty when they realized that the Brahman could not be defined or described, for It had to be described if an enquiry into Its nature was to be made. S.Radhakrishnan writes:

> As no enquiry into its nature can be instituted without some description, its svarūpa or essential nature is said to be sat or being, cit or consciousness and ananda or bliss. These are different phrases for the same being. Self-being, self-consciousness and self-delight are one. 8

Sat means Truth, Reality, Being or Existence, and it is a term applied often to the Brahman. "In the beginning, my dear, this was Being alone, one only without a second," says the Chandogya Upanishad.[9] This does not mean that the Brahman exists as an empirical object does, but that "the empirical reality of things is derived from the Absolute Reality of Brahman, as the apparent reality of a mirage is derived from the reality of the desert."[10] The Brahman alone exists and It appears as various objects in

[8] S.Radhakrishnan ed., The Principal Upanisads (London, 1953), Introduction, p. 69.

[9] Chandogya Upanishad, VI, 2, 1.

[10] Swami Nikhilananda ed., The Upanishads (New York, 1949), I, Introduction, 39; cited hereafter as Swami Nikhilananda.

the universe. The objects are different only in form and name, but in reality they are all the Brahman. "All things are forms of one immutable being, variable expressions of the invariable reality."[11]

The Brahman is also Cit or Consciousness. It is the knowing subject, but it cannot be known. It sees but cannot be seen. It hears but cannot be heard. In man, It manifests Itself through the mind, but it should not be identified with the mind. It perceives objects through the senses which are its instruments, but It should not be identified with them.

The Brahman is Ananda or Bliss, in the same way as It is Existence and Consciousness. It does not possess bliss--It is Bliss itself. The Bliss of the Brahman cannot be conceived by the human mind. The Taittiriya Upanishad gives a scale to measure the immeasurable, and, according to it, the highest human bliss is only a hundred trillionth of the Bliss of the Brahman.[12]

[11] S.Radhakrishnan ed., The Principal Upanisads (London, 1953), Introduction, p. 70.
[12] Taittiriya Upanishad, II, 8, 1.

The Saguna Brahman

If Nirguna (attributeless) Brahman is one aspect, and the superior aspect of the Brahman, the Saguna (with qualities) Brahman is the other and inferior aspect. However inferior, the conception of Saguna Brahman or a God with a person appears to be a necessity to the human mind.

> The seers of the Upanishads felt the necessity of a Personal God as an important factor in man's spiritual development. A man attached to the body, and influenced by love and hate, cannot meditate on the Impersonal Absolute. For his benefit, therefore, the Upanishads describe Saguna Brahman as the Providence who determines the course of the universe. 13

The Gita holds the same view: "But the devotees of the unmanifest have a harder task, because the unmanifest is very difficult for embodied souls to realize."[14] Even Shankar, the most outstanding champion of non-dualism, realized this and said,

> O Lord, pardon me three sins.
> I have in contemplation clothed in form Thee who art formless:
> I have in praise described Thee who art ineffable:
> And in visiting temples I have ignored Thine omnipresence.[15]

[13]Swami Nikhilananda, I, Introduction 62.

[14]Gita, p. 98. The Gita is not regarded as scriptural or revealed teaching, Shruti, but only as Smriti, "what is remembered," or body of sacred tradition.

[15]Quoted in A.C.Bouquet, Comparative Religion, 6th ed. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1962), p. 15.

The Saguna Brahman creates the universe, preserves it, and destroys it. He is given different names--as the creator He is called Brahma, as the preserver, Vishnu, and as the destroyer, Shiva.

It may be said, that the universe was created, according to the Upanishads, in two stages. In the beginning, there was the Brahman alone. It accepted the limitations of maya and became the Saguna Brahman or Maheshvara, as He is also called. Maya hides the true nature of the Brahman and, therefore, becomes the "upadhi," or limiting adjunct, of Brahman.[16] Maya should not be understood as something external to, or independent of the Brahman. "It is the inscrutable power of Brahman, resting in Brahman and having no existence independent of Brahman."[17]

Then the Saguna Brahman decided to multiply Himself and created the universe through maya. The Brahman created the universe out of Himself: "As a spider sends fourth and draws in (its thread), as herbs grow on the earth, as the hair (grows) on the head and the body of a living person, so from the Imperishable arises here the universe."[18]

[16]Swami Nikhilananda, I, Introduction, 57.
[17]Ibid., 55.
[18]Mundaka Upanishad, I, 1, 7.

"Emanation" or "manifestation" would describe the action better than creation. After creating the universe, we are told, the Brahman entered into it. So the Brahman pervades the whole universe, but since He did not exhaust Himself in creating the universe, He is not only immanent in the universe but transcendent. This is amply made clear in a stanza of the Katha Upanishad:

> The sun shines not there, nor the moon and stars,
> These lightnings shine not, much less this (earthly) fire!
> After Him, as He shines, doth everything shine,
> This whole world is illumined with His light. (V, 15)[19]

The Atman

The Brahman was the name the Upanishadic seers gave to the Absolute Reality which lies behind the changing phenomena of nature. They looked at man and to the Absolute Real in him they gave the name of Atman. The Brahman and the Atman are not two distinct things. What is called the Brahman from the objective side is called the Atman from the subjective. The thesis of the Chandogya Upanishad is that the universe is the Brahman, and that the Brahman is the Atman. It says, "Verily, this whole world is Brahman,"[20]

[19] The Thirteen Principal Upanishads, trans. Robert Ernest Hume, 6th impression (Madras, 1965), p. 358.
[20] Chandogya Upanishad, III, 14, 1.

and "This [the Brahman] is my self [the Atman] within the heart."[21] That is, there is no distinction between the Brahman, who is creator, preserver, and destroyer and who resides in all things, and the Atman, who is our innermost and essential being, our individual soul.

While the Brahman and the Atman are identical, a distinction is made between the Atman and the jivatman or atman (with a small "a"). The atman is the empirical ego of modern psychology. It is identified with the body and is an aggregate of feelings, sensations, etc. The Upanishads speak of the Atman and the atman as two inseparable friends dwelling side by side in man.[22] The atman enjoys the fruits of its actions. It feels helpless under the sorrows of this world. It, however, rids itself of its limitations when it recognizes the Atman. True knowledge consists of not confusing the Atman and the jivatman.

Higher and Lower Knowledge

The Upanishadic seers speak of two kinds of knowledge, the lower and the higher. The lower knowledge is primarily

[21]Ibid., III, 14, 3.
[22]Vide Svetashvatara Upanishad, IV, 6-7.

of the senses and the intellect, and the knowledge gained through them is of the empirical world, and hence is called aparavidya, the knowledge of this world. The higher knowledge, the knowledge of the Brahman, is paravidya, the knowledge of the other (world). Intellect, while it has a practical utility, is incapable of acquiring the higher knowledge. Logical arguments have a limited application. Unlike the West which is generally satisfied with the instrument of logic, the East believes that intuition can serve the more important purpose of attaining higher knowledge. Intuition is called bodhi, deeper consciousness. This subtle power of the mind can be awakened and intensified through self-control and concentration. Intuition is the only means of achieving the ultimate end of human life, which is moksha or liberation.

Moksha, the End for Which Life was Created

The Upanishads consider the ultimate end of human life and endeavour to be moksha. It is a liberation from one's egoism and from one's ignorance which sees things in the universe as separate entities, and a realization that all things are parts of one whole. It means the recognition of the identity of the Brahman and the Atman.

The liberation is not something which follows the realization of the identity of the Brahman and the Atman--the realization is itself the liberation. The knowledge of the self "does not lead to emancipation but is emancipation itself."[23] The liberation is not the result of knowledge but knowledge itself.

'D'

The Puranas

There are innumerable Puranas, but they have been divided into eighteen Maha (major) Puranas and eighteen Upa (minor) Puranas. Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism have all their own Puranas. All the Puranas are sectarian, with the result that some extol Vishnu at the cost of Shiva, some others extol Shiva at the cost of Vishnu and so on.

The story of Markandeya is one of the twenty-five lilas (sports) of God Shiva and as such is very prominent

[23]Surendranath Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, reprinted (Cambridge, 1957), I, 58.

in all the Shaiva works. In Sanskrit it is traced for the first time in Shivagamas which go back to about 600 B.C. For instance, there is an Agama called Sukshmagama where in the second chapter the story of Markandeya is narrated while describing the twenty-five lilas of Shiva. This story is apparently of Shaiva origin.

'E'

The Lingam

Many scholars have assumed that the Lingam is the phallic emblem of Shiva. There are other scholars who do not accept this view at all. Sir John Marshall rejects the idea of the Lingam as a phallic symbol. He writes, "It is necessary to guard against the mistake of seeing a phallic meaning in sacred stones where none in reality exists."[24] A.Barth (Member of the Societe Asiatique of Paris) holds a similar opinion, namely that the Lingam is a pure symbol, neither indecent nor offensive to look at.[25]

[24]"Religion," in Mohenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization, ed. Sir John Marshall, (London, 1931), I, 58n.

[25]Vide The Religions of India, trans. Rev. J. Wood, reprinted (Varanasi, India, 1963), pp. 261-262.

Even if it is accepted for the sake of argument that the origin of this symbol was phallic, nobody knows it or is conscious of it. As Mahatma Gandhi says, "It has remained for our Western visitors to acquaint us with the obscenity of many practices which we have hitherto innocently indulged in. It was in a missionary book that I first learned that Shivalingam had any obscene significance at all."[26] To the Shaiva worshippers, the Lingam is a sublime and spiritual symbol.

[26]Quoted in: Will Durant, The Story of ~~Our~~ Civilization, Part I: Our Oriental Heritage, 13th printing, (New York, 1954), ~~pp.~~ 519-520.

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