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The Biological Naturalism of John Steinbeck.

Horace Platt Taylor Jr
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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THE BIOLOGICAL NATURALISM OF JOHN STEINBECK

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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in

The Department of English

by

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B.A., Stetson University, 1952
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ABSTRACT

The seeds of Steinbeck's biological naturalism were sown in his childhood in his romantic sense of wonder over the panorama of nature and germinated in his teens with his many-sided outdoors life and omnivorous reading. These seeds, however, remained largely dormant until Steinbeck's meeting with the late Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist, who became not only Steinbeck's closest friend but also the greatest single influence on his fiction. For it was the friendship of Ricketts and the intellectual stimulus of his profession that helped Steinbeck to develop his biological view of life and it is important to note that the period of its strongest influence on Steinbeck's fiction curiously coincides with the time of Steinbeck's friendship with Ricketts, 1930-1948.

In four distinct ways this biological naturalism can be shown to motivate Steinbeck's fiction: in ideology,
characterization, language, and structure. In ideology Steinbeck's biological naturalism is the key to his thought; it is the indicator of man's nature, function, and purpose; the source of Steinbeck's value judgments, and the explanation of man's history. Biological naturalism plays an important role in Steinbeck's handling of character in its confining his people largely to a plane of sensation; psychological nuances, the usual character-developing tool of most novelists, seem largely to be absent in the determination of Steinbeck's characters. Perhaps the strongest linguistic evidence of the role biological naturalism plays in Steinbeck's work lies in his use of analogy which is almost always biological in reference, relating man to animal activities.

In three structural relationships, theme, recurrent symbols, and plot Steinbeck's biological naturalism has made strong inroads. Steinbeck's major themes owe much to his naturalism as do his recurrent symbols. The biological influence on Steinbeck's plots is best seen in his nature vignettes or animal fables which appear to relate human activity to the natural processes of the universe in an ecological fashion.
The most important conclusion to be drawn from Steinbeck's biological naturalism is the limitation it places upon his art. It limits his definition of man largely to a plane of sensation. Thus, most of man's faculties, if not taken from him or else ignored, are placed in jeopardy. Furthermore, by confining man severely, Steinbeck effectively reduces the significance of man's greatest achievements, technology, and civilization. Indeed, Steinbeck seems to regard civilization as more harmful than beneficial to man since it generally circumscribes man's biological fulfillment by limiting his adaptability. Finally, Steinbeck's biological naturalism largely rules out any effective code of morals or ethics for man that would restrict his instinctive life, for only desire and need are normally permitted in Steinbeck's naturalistic ethic.
PREFACE

Although at least four critics, Edmund Wilson, Frederick Bracher, Woodburn Ross, and Peter Lisca, have dealt with Steinbeck's biological point of view in some detail, as yet no systematic study has been made. This dissertation is an attempt to supply that need. Admittedly the dissertation does retrace some familiar ground; however, it possesses sufficient originality as these contributions will show.

First, no critic, not even Lisca, attempts to show how this biological naturalism runs through Steinbeck's fiction. Lisca alludes to it frequently and often with telling insight in his book *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, but only in passing, for his concern is securely upon evaluating Steinbeck's work as literature and not as ideology. His primary focus is the art of Steinbeck's fiction; he must of necessity deal with Steinbeck's ideas in only a general way. Moreover,
Wilson, Bracher, and Ross fail to show adequately how Steinbeck's biological point of view is demonstrated in his fiction because of their concern in isolating his Weltanschauung and, more importantly, because of the inherent limitation of the critical article as to length.

The critical limitations of these critics is best seen in their obvious omission in dealing with the sources of Steinbeck's biological ideas. Outside of Lisca, who stresses the general influence of Ricketts, no critic seeks to trace the philosophical origins of Steinbeck's biological naturalism. This writer has attempted to do in so far as it has proved possible. Each of Steinbeck's major biological ideas--group man, non-teleological thinking, and racial memory--is found to be an amalgam of other ideas, sometimes non-biological, or else appear to stem inexplicably from entirely different sources. Group man is traced to two possible sources, Allee's biological idea of cooperation among life forms as a prime factor in the evolutionary process, and Tolstoy's idea of history as a group movement. Non-teleological thinking proved much more difficult to isolate, for here we are dealing with a paradox. Non-teleological thinking,
a mixture of nature mysticism and scientific empiricism, could easily be attributed to many sources, but perhaps the best is Heisenberg's principle of indeterminancy that Steinbeck appears to associate it with in *Sea of Cortez*. Racial memory, an offshoot of the old idea of immortality, appears to be derived primarily from the speculation that if the body can be regarded as an index of its physical evolution, then in a like fashion the mind can be regarded as an index of its psychic evolution.

While similarity of content and even phraseology of ideas are not absolute proof that they have been derived from each other, they certainly indicate that the possibility does exist even if no direct connection can be established.

The primary source of Steinbeck's biological ideas, however, can be traced to Edward F. Ricketts as Lisca, himself, has noted. But Lisca does not examine the influence in the detail that the dissertation does. In the dissertation the game of "speculative metaphysics" in which Steinbeck and Ricketts exchange and discuss ideas fully is shown to be the likely immediate source of Steinbeck's biological ideas.
The most derivative part of the dissertation is the section on language which relies heavily upon Lisca's findings, but even here an original contribution is made in stressing the influence of scientific writing upon Steinbeck's prose which hitherto appears to have been ignored. This scientific influence on Steinbeck's writing is discernable in three ways: (1) in Steinbeck's habitual use of biological jargon, (2) in his naturalistic essays which often prefigure the action in his novels, and (3) in his general avoidance of analogy.

On the other hand, the sections on characterization, recurrent symbols, and theme are for the most part original. No one previously appears to have examined the Steinbeck character as a biological symbol or to have studied the possibility that Steinbeck individualizes people well adapted biologically and generalizes those with poor biological adaptation. While a few of Steinbeck's recurrent symbols have been pointed out—the tide pool is the one most frequently noted—most of the others such as the town, the car, and the boat remain untouched. The writer has made an attempt to evaluate them in terms of their biological implications. Finally, Steinbeck's
themes are largely an unworked area. The dissertation has dealt with those having biological implications, such as the class struggle, the group versus the individual, and the free life of instinct.

Conclusively, for all the writer's debts to Steinbeckian criticism, particularly to Lisca, his focus is entirely his own since the present work is largely an expansion of published work that he has done on Steinbeck since 1952.
CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

It would almost seem to be an act of folly to write a biographical essay on a man who has ridiculed biography as much as has John Steinbeck. That Steinbeck has derived no end of amusement in giving false information concerning his life (a tendency well observed in his attitudes toward critics and scholarship in general) can be seen in this bibliographical card which once graced the files of the California State Library until its imposture was discovered:

Name: John Ernst Alcibiades Socrates Steinbeck.
Born: Magna Graece, 1902.
Father: Herodotus Xenophon Steinbeck.
Mother: Chloe Mathilde Lopez.
Married: Joe Alfreda Jones, in Tia Juana.

If the above is not enough to daunt the prospective biographer, then Steinbeck spells out his ridicule for biography and the critical apparatus of scholarship in these caustic comments to Lewis Gannett, Steinbeck's first biographer:

You know as much about me as I do, and your information is more interesting than mine. Say anything you like. Make up things. Biography by its very nature must be half fiction. Autobiography is all fiction... the fact that I have housemaid's knee or a fear of yellow gloves has little to do with The Grapes of Wrath or any book. The whole purpose or, rather, one of the purposes of the book is to make the reader forget that there is any writer and to participate in the incidents.  

Here are the trenchant opinions of an author who feels as the new critics feel, that the work and not the artist is the important consideration and the less said about the latter the better. Yet, not withstanding all of Steinbeck's forceful eloquence concerning the unimportance of his life in the fathoming of his works, it is clearly evident from the outset that what kind of man Steinbeck is and what kind of life he has led have played perhaps as great a role in determining what kind

of fiction he has produced as that of any other major contemporary American writer. As will be seen, there is quite often a very explicit relation between the events of Steinbeck's life and the literary matter of his novels. Steinbeck in a very real way is in the vast majority of his works, his pleas for autobiographical anonymity notwithstanding. The fact remains that Steinbeck is a particular kind of naturalist, a biological naturalist, and while he undoubtedly is something of a nature mystic as well and has a rudimentary if sharp sense of good and evil, his literary focus because of his naturalism is bound to the sensory flux of life, often to its systematic interpretation according to the science of biology. Thus, because of his focus upon material phenomena, Steinbeck's life is particularly important in that it can show in part how his literary philosophy of biological naturalism developed.

Perhaps, as Lisca and others have observed, the most important link between Steinbeck the man and his works is that he was born and matured in Salinas County in California. Freudian notions about the formative influences of the early years upon the mature man being put
aside--it is clear that the Salinas valley, its geography and people, has held a strong and lasting fascination over Steinbeck since the greater majority of his novels has taken place there. While Steinbeck has not created a mythic land of Salinas in the way that Hardy did with Wessex and Faulkner with Yaknapatawpha, it can still be contended that Salinas held no less fascination for Steinbeck and, in a way, perhaps even more since Steinbeck is so closely committed to the physical reality of his settings. In any number of ways in any number of places in his fiction Steinbeck has impressed the physical fact of Salinas upon the reader's sensibility. Its bums and ne'er-do-wells are affectionately observed in *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and *Sweet Thursday*; its migrant workers and strikers in *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*; its farmers and ranchers in *The Pastures of Heaven*, *To a God Unknown*, *The Long Valley*, and *East of Eden*; its geological and ecological phenomena can be seen in most of his fiction.

John Ernst Steinbeck was born in the town of Salinas on February 27, 1902. His father was John Ernst Steinbeck, Sr., for a number of years treasurer of
Monterey County. Steinbeck's mother, nee Olive Hamilton, was a school teacher for many years in the Salinas Valley area.

An extreme and wondering sensitivity to the physical makeup of his boyhood surroundings is the dominant characteristic of Steinbeck, the boy. The boy Jody of The Long Valley, as Lisca and Moore have observed, is a vivid recall of Steinbeck's own boyhood. Lisca has graphically caught the almost Wordsworthian wonder of the young Steinbeck to the exciting sensory gamut of nature in his literary biography of Steinbeck:

Steinbeck's childhood must have been much like that of the boy Jody in The Red Pony, whose love for the Galibian Mountains to the east and fear of the Santa Lucia range toward the ocean Steinbeck acknowledged as a personal childhood experience on the opening page of East of Eden. Like the Jody who made a death symbol out of the black cypress trees under which the pigs were scalded and a life symbol out of the mossy tub which caught the spring water, Steinbeck was a sensitive boy.3

This Wordsworthian sensitivity toward nature was combined with an un-Wordsworthian love of books, for Steinbeck was decidedly a bookish lad for all his love

of nature. Evidence of extensive reading as a child and as a youth can be seen in a number of autobiographical echoes in Steinbeck's works. There is Molly Morgan's reading to the boys from Treasure Island in The Pastures of Heaven. But it must be noted that Steinbeck's juvenile reading was not confined to tales of adventure; he read avidly more serious fiction as well: "Steinbeck once wrote that he remembered 'certain books that were realer than experience--Crime and Punishment was like that and Madame Bovary and parts of Paradise Lost and things of George Eliot and The Return of the Native. I read all of these when I was very young and I remember them not all as books but as things that happened to me.'"4

But for all his adolescent bookishness Steinbeck was clearly an extrovert teen-ager. His high school period is somewhat reminiscent of Hemingway's. Like Hemingway Steinbeck owed his high school eminence--he was president of his senior class--more to athletic

4Ibid., p. 5.
prowess than to academic, and like Hemingway he was by no means an athletic tramp. For, like that of Hemingway, Steinbeck's varied athletic prowess did not preclude extensive intellectual interests, but rather worked with them to give necessary expression to the multifold interests of a gifted teen-ager. Thus, it is not surprising to find that Steinbeck's time in his high school days was not totally devoted to his athletic or academic interests since he spent many of his holidays working as a hired hand on ranches around Salinas. Then, too, we can begin to see something of the "jack of all trades" characteristic of the later Steinbeck at this time in that along with his ranching, Steinbeck worked as an assistant chemist in a sugar beet factory in the year after graduating from high school but before matriculating at Stanford.

Although Steinbeck attended Stanford over a period of five years, from 1920 to 1925\(^5\), he did not take a degree. Nominally an English major during his periods

\(^5\)See Lisca's footnote at the end of his biographical chapter on Steinbeck in Steinbeck and His Critics for a discussion of the confusion concerning the time Steinbeck spent at Stanford.
of residence, Steinbeck nonetheless took mainly only those courses he was interested in.\(^6\) Thus, it is not surprising to find Steinbeck signing up for courses in biology and play writing. Moreover, since a degree in English required taking courses that were either uninteresting or repugnant, Steinbeck could never bring himself to finish the course work for his degree, and so he left Stanford without one after some five odd years of desultory residence.

In spite of the fact that Steinbeck appeared to have frittered away most of his time at Stanford, this five year period of his life is significant for a number of reasons. During the times when he was not in residence at Stanford, normally in the spring and summer of each year, Steinbeck worked on ranches and road gangs or otherwise led something of a vagabond existence. This outdoor life, begun in his teens and continued in his early twenties, gave Steinbeck "an intimate knowledge of the working man--his attitudes, habits, and language,"\(^7\) and a ready sympathy for and a championing

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\(^6\)Moore, op. cit., p. 78.

\(^7\)Lisca, op. cit., p. 6.
of the life close to nature. Certainly this periodic escape from the confines of the academic world for the release of the outdoors, culminating in Steinbeck's leaving college for good, can be said to mark the beginning of his repudiation of the urban life. Furthermore, it is curious to note, assuming that this speculation has validity, that Steinbeck began his repudiation of the urban life with the university, perhaps one of the most pervading symbols of that way of life. Indeed, there is even a bit of literary evidence of this repudiation to be found in an obscure and allegorical satire of the academic life that Steinbeck wrote while at Stanford, "Adventures in Academy: A Journey into the Ridiculous." In the work, as Lisca notes, "various fruit trees seem to symbolize courses of study, and penguins, pigeons, buffaloes, and other animals seem to represent the faculty."\(^8\) Already Steinbeck had begun to show a well-developed sense of burlesque and satire as the titles of other college literary efforts show: "Fingers of Cloud: A Satire on College [Protervity],"

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 6.
"If Eddie Guest Had Written the Book of Job: Happy Birthday," "If John A. Weaver Had Written Keat's Sonnet in the American Language: In Looking at a New Book by Harold Bell Wright," and "Atropos: Study of a Very Feminine Obituary Editor." Already Steinbeck had decided to become a writer and had written a short story, "A Lady in Infra Red," which when expanded would ultimately appear as his first novel, Cup of Gold. Perhaps the final legacy bequeathed by Steinbeck's years at Stanford was his belief, soon to be shattered, that New York was the place for the aspiring young writer, and that newspapers were great schools of writing.

Steinbeck's romantic illusions about New York's being the place for the budding young writer and newspaper work's being his proper discipline were rudely shaken by his bitter experiences in New York as he

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9 Ibid., p. 6.
10 Moore, op. cit., p. 12.
11 Gannett, op. cit., p. 8.
has related in an autobiographical reminiscence. He found newspaper work bewildering: "I didn't know the first thing about being a reporter. I think now that the $25 a week they paid me was a total loss." Having been fired from his reporter's job, and having failed at both laboring—he had grown "soft" from his newspaper work—and marketing his short stories, Steinbeck beat "an ignominious retreat to California as a deck-hand via the Panama Canal." The experience was undoubtedly catastrophic, and doubtless seemed a confirmation of his views of the greater virtue of the rural life over that of the city so that even fifteen years later when he returned to New York in minor triumph as a successful writer, Steinbeck still regarded New York with the suspicions of a "St. Anthony" and quickly fled "the whore of Babylon with relief and virtuous satisfaction."


14 Lisca, op. cit., p. 7.

15 Steinbeck, op. cit., p. 66.
On his return to California Steinbeck became a caretaker of a rich man's estate on Lake Tahoe. Here he spent the next two winters alone, and wrote *Cup of Gold*, besides snowshoeing down to civilization once a week for supplies and chopping wood to keep warm. When he allowed a giant pine to crash through the roof of the estate house, he was fired, but promptly secured another job in a nearby fish hatchery the next day, a job more congenial to his taste. (Perhaps his rancor over his firing and his failure of his jobs in New York explain something of Steinbeck's strong antipathy toward rich men in general). However it must be noted that perhaps Steinbeck feels differently: "the solitude of those two mountain winters refined all the malice out of his system."17

Although *Cup of Gold* was published, it was a relatively unsuccessful effort, both financially and artistically, as so many first efforts are. Appearing early in 1929 it sold only some 1500 copies before it

was "remaindered." Reasons for its lack of success are not too difficult to ascertain. For one thing, Steinbeck was then an unknown; in a sense he was fortunate even to have achieved publication at all on this, the brink of the Depression. But perhaps a more satisfactory cause of its failure is that one suggested by Lewis Gannett: "Cup of Gold is the only one of Steinbeck's books which did not grow out of his own experience..." Yet, as Gannett goes on to suggest, Cup of Gold, though it did not grow out of Steinbeck's experience, nonetheless expressed a part of Steinbeck's artistic makeup that has appeared from time to time in his later works: his sense of wonder.

The comparative failure of Cup of Gold only strengthened Steinbeck's resolve to become a writer. Poverty which had helped to drive him out of New York could not now dissuade Steinbeck from writing; for, as Gannett has said, "he could always earn a living with his hands." In addition to becoming a writer Steinbeck

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18Gannett, op. cit., p. 9.
19Ibid., p. 10.
20Gannett, op. cit., p. 10.
also took up marital responsibilities. He was married in 1930 and lived in Pacific Grove for the next two years in a small house owned by his father who further provided him with $24 a month to live on. 21

The two years spent by Steinbeck at Pacific Grove perhaps exercised a greater influence on the nature and development of his art than that of any comparable time to follow. Not only was the period extremely productive—here Steinbeck revised To a God Unknown and wrote The Pastures of Heaven in addition to two other works discarded, "Dissonant Symphony" and "Murder at Full Moon"—but more importantly it saw the establishment of his literary ideology of biological naturalism, for it was here at Pacific Grove that Steinbeck first met Ed Ricketts, who was to become Steinbeck's closest friend and who exercised a profound influence on Steinbeck's subsequent work. 22 From the Pacific Grove period, this

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22 The influence of Ricketts on Steinbeck and Steinbeck's work can scarcely be overestimated. For a tribute to Ricketts, who was killed in an automobile accident in 1948, see "About Ed Ricketts," the introduction to The Log from the Sea of Cortez. An estimate will be made in a later chapter concerning the influence of Ricketts on Steinbeck's work.
semi-scientific theorizing, biological naturalism, was to permeate Steinbeck's work. His nature mysticism stemming from his childhood days, and his adolescent and adult time spent in the outdoors found a felicitous formulation under the stimulus of a professional biologist like Ricketts. But even more important than the explicit statement of the biological weltanschauung in such a work as the Sea of Cortez is its implicit statement in Steinbeck's fiction as the basis of his value judgments.

This biological weltanschauung is strongly present in Steinbeck's second novel To A God Unknown. At an obvious level this biological undercurrent manifests itself in the fertility symbolism that forms the main design pattern of the book, for To a God Unknown is clearly Steinbeck's attempt to create a modern fertility myth. Already present in this early work are two of Steinbeck's major biological ideas: racial memory and "group" man. These can be seen by the tremendous

23To a God Unknown was the second novel written by Steinbeck, although it was the third published, being preceded by The Pastures of Heaven, which Steinbeck wrote while revising To a God Unknown.
emphasis placed by Steinbeck in the work on man's racial experiences. While these ideas are only present in *To a God Unknown* in germinal form, they will generally loom larger with each succeeding novel until they are given explicit formulation in *In Dubious Battle* and in *Sea of Cortez.*

In *The Pastures of Heaven* Steinbeck was to establish two literary conventions that he was to utilize in many succeeding novels. The first was the collection of short stories, loosely entitled a novel, unified by having a setting and characters in common. The second convention is by far the more important: here Steinbeck for the first time makes extensive use of what is to be the locale for most of his short stories and novels: Salinas. To be sure, *To a God Unknown* made certain topical uses of Salinas but only in a general way, and certainly not to the extent that *The Pastures of Heaven* did. For by that time Steinbeck had seized upon what he is to do best: the descriptive rendering of actual people and places. We really do not need Lisca, Gannett, and Moore to tell us that the people of *The Pastures of Heaven* are drawn directly from life with
little or no pretense at concealment. Here also is found Steinbeck's first interest in the paisanos, seen in the Lopez sisters, an interest which will result in a book-length treatment in his next novel, *Tortilla Flat.*

In addition to his novels Steinbeck wrote short stories as well during his Pacific Grove stay, and indeed had been writing them since before 1926, when he submitted a volume unsuccessfully to McBride and Company on his ill-fated New York stay. The *North American Review* was the first magazine to accept his short stories, publishing parts of *The Red Pony* toward the end of his Pacific Grove stay.

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24This technique of using scarcely disguised living people in his novels has been observed by many critics, the most notable being Lisca, Gannett, Bracher, Moore and Sexias. However, the reader has only to read either *Sea of Cortez* or *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* to realize quickly that many of the characters and situations of Steinbeck's work are, if anything, lifted from life. Compare "About Ed Ricketts" in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* with *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*. This contention will be taken up at greater length in the chapter on Steinbeck's characterization.

25Frequently Steinbeck introduces in one novel a symbol, character type, or idea that he will study at greater length, or come back to, in succeeding works, a tendency which gives his work a cyclical quality.


Forced by conditions of extreme poverty, Steinbeck left Pacific Grove for several months in the summer of 1932 for the Eagle Rock area of Los Angeles, where he tried to interest publishers in articles of local interest, but without success. At this time he had also received permission from the Mexican government to make a horse-back trip through parts of Mexico for background for some local color stories that he was contemplating then. By November he was forced to suspend his writing activities for the moment and return to Pacific Grove to seek odd jobs to live by. This chronic need to support himself and his wife by odd jobs was a periodic necessity for Steinbeck until the publication of Tortilla Flat and Of Mice and Men. Some idea of Steinbeck's extreme poverty at this time (1932-1933) can be seen in this autobiographical reminiscence that Gannett has recorded:

At that time Steinbeck was so poor that he could not even afford a dog. He had had a big dog named Omar as a companion when, as a hermit in the High Sierras, he wrote Cup of Gold....
But in 1933 he needed a dog..."I need a dog pretty badly. I dreamed of great numbers of dogs last night. They sat in a circle and looked at me and I wanted all of them. Apparently we are headed for the rocks. The light company is going to turn off the power in a few days but we don't care much. The rent is up pretty soon and then we shall move, I don't know where."27

At this time, the nadir of his fortunes, Steinbeck was engaged in writing Tortilla Flat, which strangely enough proved hard to market. A tradition, quoted by Gannett and Lisca, has it that as many as eleven publishers rejected the book before Covici-Friede accepted it. Most of the publishers regarded it as promising but were not inclined to take a chance on it during the uncertain years of the Depression, as the rejection for Knopf written by Louis Kronenberger states: "We cannot have the confidence in Tortilla Flat that I think a publisher should have nowadays when he backs a book against hard times."28 The fact that it was published at all seems a matter of luck:


28Ibid., p. 27.
That the book was published at all was the result of a happy accident. Pascal Covici visited Ben Abramson's book shop in Chicago and was pressed to read *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*, which Abramson felt to be the works of a very promising writer. When Covici got back to New York he telephoned McIntosh and Otis, who passed on to him the manuscript for *Tortilla Flat*. It was published by Covici-Friede in 1935, a year and a half after it was completed.29

Steinbeck's trip to Mexico, postponed earlier by his poverty, was not made possible by money advances from the success of *Tortilla Flat*. An additional reason for his going was the "considerable nuisance"30 of publicity seekers. For the first time in his life Steinbeck was being lionized and he did not care for the experience. The Mexican trip, made with a rattletrap car, did not measure up to his expectations as Steinbeck related: "Mexico fades very quickly. I can't remember it very well. I think possibly the people there live on a mental level about equal in depth to our dream level. The contacts I made there are all dreamlike."31


30Ibid., p. 9.

31Ibid., p. 9.
It is not surprising that Steinbeck found Mexico "dreamlike." An artist committed as closely as he is to the portrayal of the actual, would of necessity need a long acquaintance with his subject matter to understand it and to write about it meaningfully. However, as it will be seen, Mexico has held a curious fascination for Steinbeck as he has frequently visited it, and a number of his works deal with it. This dreamlike quality of Mexico, this living of life on a basic subsistence level in a trance-like state has exercised a tremendous pull over Steinbeck's imagination as The Pearl and Sea of Cortez later showed.

As was frequently the case with Steinbeck, one work was either nearing completion or else was finished before its predecessor hit the press. Such was the circumstances of In Dubious Battle, which was finished three months before the printing of Tortilla Flat. By concensus the finest strike novel written in America, In Dubious Battle, has a stark immediacy about it that wears well even more than a generation after its publication. Reasons for its durability are not hard to find. With its psychological realism In Dubious Battle reduces
other strike novels into pallid impotence by comparison, for Steinbeck saw the strike from the inside; he saw it from the standpoint of the strikers. In addition, the language of *In Dubious Battle* is that of the working man. Steinbeck felt so strongly about the matter of the book's language that he refused to delete any of the work's profanity: "A working man bereft of his profanity is a silent man...I've used only those expressions that are commonly used...To try to reproduce the speech of these people and to clean it up is to make it sound stiff, unnatural and emasculated..."  

But the chief importance of *In Dubious Battle* as far as Steinbeck's biography is concerned is that it represents his first book-length use of an explicit biological idea: "phalanx" man. Phalanx or "group" man, as the idea is more commonly known, is a study of man from the standpoint of social instinct. The idea, which Steinbeck probably got from Ed Ricketts, is based on biological analogy, particularly with *pelagic tunicates* or sponges.

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32 *ibid.*, p. 10.
If *Tortilla Flat* had removed Steinbeck's most pressing financial difficulties, *Of Mice and Men* did more—it made him a celebrity as well. Published in January, 1937, *Of Mice and Men* quickly became a best-seller, a Book-of-the-Month choice, and a Hollywood film. While being in the public limelight was distasteful to Steinbeck, it did have one good result as far as he was concerned: the publicity helped his agents to market some of his short stories previously unpublished.\(^{34}\)

*Of Mice and Men* was the first of Steinbeck's four attempts at the play-novelette form.\(^{35}\) The theme of "microcosm," while it was clear only to Steinbeck,\(^{36}\) shows that he was still thinking partly along the group man lines of *In Dubious Battle*. Here, however, the protagonists are not so abstract since Steinbeck individualizes them more. Yet if the group man motif is somewhat muted in *Of Mice and Men*, another biological

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\(^{34}\)Lisca, "John Steinbeck:A Literary Biography," p. 11.

\(^{35}\)For a discussion of the reasons why Steinbeck chose this form see the chapter on *Of Mice and Men* in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*.

\(^{36}\)Ibid., p. 134.
idea has made its presence felt, non-teleological thinking, in the sheer meaninglessness of the drama in terms of biological selection though his emphasis is still upon the group.

This phenomenon of class struggle with its intense biological overtones was Steinbeck's chief thematic concern in the middle and late thirties. In *In Dubious Battle* he studied it from the standpoint of a strike, seeing the violence of the strike as a manifestation of group man. In *Of Mice and Men*, in addition to further studying the effects of group man, Steinbeck begins to see class struggle as a form of social selection, a tendency that will be amplified in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

In the interim between the publication of *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck did some traveling before beginning work on the latter. In the spring of 1937 he sailed to New York from San Francisco by freighter via the Panama Canal. Remaining in New York only for a short stay to confer with his agents and publishers, Steinbeck then caught another freighter to England. In this his first European trip he visited his mother's birthplace in Ireland, and then went to Sweden,
finally ending up in Russia. (Steinbeck's impressions of Russia were as uncertain as those of Mexico had been earlier.37)

When the novelty of travel exhausted itself, Steinbeck returned to the States before the end of the summer (by freighter again) and finished the final stage version of Of Mice and Men. Without remaining in the East for the play to be produced, Steinbeck went to Detroit, bought a car, and drove to Oklahoma where he quickly immersed himself in the problems of a group of migrant workers, living their lives and working alongside them. He had already begun on The Grapes of Wrath. Lisca has brilliantly caught up the mounting excitement in Steinbeck's writing of The Grapes of Wrath:

When Life offered to send him into the field with a photographer to write about the migrants, Steinbeck informed his agents that he would accept no money other than expenses--"I'm sorry but I simply can't make money on these people... the suffering is too great for me to cash in on it."

Steinbeck was absorbing the material of his great novel at first hand, and he went into the field with no ready-made theory to substantiate... He was "simply listening to men talk and watching them act, hoping that the projection of the microcosm will define the outlines of the macrocosm."38

Needless to say, The Grapes of Wrath caused a national furor. Burned and banned by outraged citizens in Oklahoma and California, The Grapes of Wrath was angrily or sympathetically read--"but above all it was read."39 Today much of the furor seems as dated as does the book, but this is precisely a result of The Grapes of Wrath's tremendous immediacy, its partisan depiction of the ills and injustices of the dispossessed "Okie" sharecroppers.

While it is true in a literal sense that Steinbeck tried to see the plight of the Okies without any pre-conceived ideas--witness his determined attempts to live with and like them as he wrote the novel--still he could not succeed in doing so, for no writer ever really sees

38 I bid., p. 13.

his subject matter without the intrusion of some bias. The Grapes of Wrath is in its way an excellent demonstration of the failure to do so. Furthermore, it represents the culmination of an aesthetic contradiction in Steinbeck that had been growing in intensity with each succeeding work—one which he has yet to solve. This contradiction is that which must of necessity exist in a man who is a mystic of sorts and who is also a materialist. On the one hand, Steinbeck with his tremendously well-developed powers of observation sees the physical world in all its infinite, graphic detail which he records as faithfully as Hemingway. On the other hand, Steinbeck, perhaps even because of his keenness of observation, feels instinctively that there is a transcendent unity in all this variety he sees so vividly.

The writing of The Grapes of Wrath left Steinbeck so exhausted that he was unable to do then what he had previously done: to begin work on a new book before its predecessor was finished. In addition, the success of The Grapes of Wrath increased his fears of what publicity would do to his life: "I'm so busy being a writer
that I haven't time to write." Again, the fact of
the Second World War affected him profoundly. At the
end of the year Steinbeck wrote Pascal Covici the
following pessimistic appraisal of man: "So we go into
this happy new year, knowing that our species has
learned nothing, can as a race learn nothing--that the
experience of ten thousand years has made no impression
on the instincts of the million years that preceded." 

Probably for escape as much as for any other
reason Steinbeck made a biological expedition with his
friend Ed Ricketts to the Gulf of California. The
ostensible purpose of the expedition was "to collect
and preserve the marine invertebrates of the littoral." 
However, for Steinbeck at least and more than likely
for Ricketts as well, the expedition was not so much
scientific as it was recreational, if the accounts
given of it in Sea of Cortez and The Log from the Sea

41 Ibid., p. 179.
42 John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez, p. 1. The Log from the Sea of Cortez is the narrative
portion of Sea of Cortez reissued with a profile commemo-
rating Ed Ricketts.
of Cortez are to be taken at face value. Late in April Steinbeck returned to Monterey and almost immediately went back to Mexico again, this time to write the script for a documentary film on a Mexican village, The Forgotten Village. Steinbeck finished the script in January, 1941, and began reworking the collection of notes that he had taken on the biological expedition. This revising lasted until August of 1941 and resulted in Sea of Cortez.

Few books have ever revealed as much about a writer and his ideas as has Sea of Cortez. It is by no means an overstatement to say that the prospective reader of Steinbeck can learn more about him from reading Sea of Cortez than he can from any critical study of Steinbeck. Sea of Cortez is one of those compulsive works that a writer must sooner or later get out of his system. It represents a conscious attempt to examine the biological ideas that had occupied Steinbeck since The Pastures of Heaven.

As a book Sea of Cortez is difficult to characterize. Perhaps the term speculative journal would come as close as anything to describing the narrative portion of the
work, the only part that concerns us. Lisca gives an adequate working summary of the book in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*:

It is neither a piece of fiction nor a system of philosophy, but rather a leisurely journal of informal speculation (and often genial "spoofing") which makes explicit several working concepts which had been implicit in all Steinbeck's work thus far: nonteleological thinking, ecology, the possible individuality of a group-animal, "survival of the fittest," group psyche-memory, and the mystic unity of all life. These are germinal concepts in Steinbeck, but it would be misleading to discuss them as part of his world view without taking into consideration their modification in the context of his literary works.\(^{43}\)

The war which had filled Steinbeck with such anxiety after the completion of *The Grapes of Wrath* began for America the month that *Sea of Cortez* was published. Despite all his forebodings, Steinbeck was anxious to take part in it. An engaging account of the failure of Steinbeck's and Rickett's first attempt to help with the war effort is found on pages lvi-lxiii in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*. According to

\(^{43}\)Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 181. See Chapter II for an evaluation and discussion of the biological ideas of *Sea of Cortez*. 
Steinbeck, the military mind was skeptical of the advice of amateurs and turned them down. However, Steinbeck's eagerness to help in the war was not crushed by this setback, and if his proffered services in biology were rebuffed, those as a writer were quickly utilized. *Bombs Away*, a propagandistic but well-written account of the Army Air Force, was Steinbeck's chief effort in this direction. It is significant to note that when the book was filmed by Hollywood, Steinbeck refused to accept any royalties, turning them over to the Air Forces Aid Society Trust Fund.

A second and more personally rewarding bit of journalism during the war for Steinbeck was his service as a war correspondent for the New York *Herald Tribune*. Leaving the States early in 1943 aboard a troop ship for Europe, Steinbeck remained overseas until October. At first he reported from a Flying Fortress unit in England. By August he was in North Africa and the remainder of his tour found him in Italy. In his dispatches Steinbeck like Ernie Pyle concentrated on the human aspect of war—the war as seen by the
individual soldier fighting it. Thus because of "his ability to mix with the ordinary man," his reports often had a freshness about them that many of those of more celebrated correspondents lacked.

Despite the demands of his war contributions, Steinbeck managed to publish two novels during the war years, The Moon Is Down and Cannery Row, and finish a third, The Pearl, although it was not published until December, 1945. The Moon Is Down resulted from a number of conversations with Colonel William J. Donovan of the Office of Strategic Services on ways of "aiding resistance movements in the occupied countries of German-held Europe." Steinbeck apparently began work on The Moon Is Down shortly after finishing Sea of Cortez and evidently finished it before the end of the year since it was published in March 1942.

If The Moon Is Down represented Steinbeck's attempt to understand the biological interaction of groups in war, it is clearly apparent that his second novel of

44Ibid., p. 185.
45Gannett, "John Steinbeck's Way of Writing," p. 35.
the war period, Cannery Row, had nothing to do with the war, and in fact can be considered an escape from it. Evidently sick of the war and perhaps of the social protest writing he had been identified with since In Dubious Battle, Steinbeck in Cannery Row retreats to something of the spirit of Tortilla Flat. To be sure, there are numerous parallels between the two works. Both have a leisurely humorous tone; their structures are loose and episodic, Cannery Row in this respect showing a close resemblance as well to The Pastures of Heaven. Again both novels deal with social outcasts, or rather those who have voluntarily withdrawn from society and lead a tramp-like hand-to-mouth existence.

However, the resemblances between Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row should not be allowed to obscure the fact that Cannery Row is not a repetition of Tortilla Flat. Steinbeck may be dealing with much the same material in Cannery Row as he did in Tortilla Flat, but now his attitude toward it is appreciably different. Biology is used more explicitly now to show that social outcasts live more meaningful lives than their social betters. Many if not most of the biological
ideas of *Sea of Cortez* are given explicit treatment
even to the point of paraphrase in *Cannery Row*.46

*Steinbeck*'s third war novel, finished early in
1945 but not published until December,47 was *The
Pearl*. This novel, or rather novelette, also has close
affinities to *Sea of Cortez*. For example, the plot
of *The Pearl* with a few changes is found on pages 102-
103 of *Sea of Cortez* where *Steinbeck* mentions it as a
tale that "happened at La Paz in recent years."48
(However, the dreamlike atmosphere of the story suggests
that the story owes something to *Steinbeck*'s first trip
to Mexico.) An even closer affinity to *Sea of Cortez*

46 That the biological point of view of *Cannery
Row* is closely tied in with that of *Sea of Cortez* can
be demonstrated in a number of ways. To cite the most
obvious example: the discussion of paleontology on page
88 of *Sea of Cortez* is paraphrased in *Cannery Row* on
pages 148-149. The parallels with *The Log from the Sea
of Cortez* are even closer. In the preface "About Ed
Ricketts" *Steinbeck* mentions a number of episodes that
happened in the actual Cannery Row that take place in
the novel with scarcely any changes. See pp. xxxii-
xxxvi. For a discussion of the resemblances between
*Cannery Row* and *Sea of Cortez* see *The Wide World of
John Steinbeck* p. 200ff.

47 *The novel was first published in December,
1947. The text reference is to its serialized publi-
cation in *Woman's Home Companion*.

48 *Sea of Cortez*, p. 102.
is that the songs of Kino in *The Pearl* are but a literary metamorphosis of Steinbeck's idea of racial memory discussed at length in *Sea of Cortez*.\(^{49}\) A final tie-in of *The Pearl* to *Sea of Cortez* is that this "pattern of man's search for his soul"\(^{50}\) takes place in a context that is an amalgam of ecology and non-teleological thinking.

Steinbeck's next novel, *The Wayward Bus*,\(^{51}\) continues the literary exploitation of the biological ideas of *Sea of Cortez*. At its most obvious level this biological substratum manifests itself in *The Wayward Bus* in a subtle attack upon American middle-class culture, which seems to be the main purpose of the book. *The Wayward Bus* thus continues Steinbeck's examination of modern civilization begun in *Cannery Row*, which had shown that the civilization's outcasts and ne'er-do-wells

\(^{49}\)Since this literary use of racial memory is but seen in *The Pearl*, it is examined in detail in the next chapter which attempts to evaluate the significance of Steinbeck's biological naturalism.

\(^{50}\)Lisca, *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 224.

\(^{51}\)The *Wayward Bus*, although written after *The Pearl*, was published before *The Pearl* in novel form.
were better adapted biologically than their social betters. The Pearl showed the individual at the mercy of the economic interests of that civilization. The Wayward Bus shows the biological shortcomings of civilization as it is exemplified in the American middle class.

Although nearly four years elapsed between the publication of The Wayward Bus and the appearance of Steinbeck's next novel Burning Bright (1950), Steinbeck made a trip to Russia with the famous photographer Robert Capa. The account of this trip, A Russian Journal, was published in the spring of 1948. In the work, an excellent bit of reporting, Steinbeck found the Russian people to be much like those found everywhere else, but more depressed by the regimentation, and lack of personal freedom imposed by the Russian government.

Another development of this period was a sojourn in Hollywood for the scripts for The Red Pony and Viva Zapata. Both turned out well and evidently did much to ameliorate Steinbeck's long-standing distrust of Hollywood.
An event of far greater importance during this period was the death of Steinbeck's closest friend Ed Ricketts in an automobile accident in April, 1948. About Steinbeck's tribute to his friend's memory "About Ed Ricketts," something will be said later.

_Burning Bright_ has been the only novel of Steinbeck's maturity to be rejected from the time of its publication by the critics. The third example of Steinbeck's play novelettes, _Burning Bright_, was revised extensively before publication, but to no avail. The causes of its failure are not difficult to see. Easily the most important for our purpose is the empty universality of the work. To give the theme of sterility universal significance Steinbeck departed from his usual sources of literary strength, his ear for colloquial speech and his eye for physical detail. Devoid of these, it is no wonder that the abstract theme fails to carry _Burning Bright_. Certainly biology fails when it is turned into abstract argument without literary ballast.

In the interval between _Burning Bright_ and _East of Eden_ (1952) only one work stands out, _The Log from the_
Sea of Cortez, and it for non-literary reasons. The work is important primarily for what it can reveal about the relationship of Steinbeck and Ricketts. Even the circumstances of its publication are significant: The Log from the Sea of Cortez is a re-issuing of the narrative portion of Sea of Cortez with a commemorative preface dedicated to the memory of Ricketts, "About Ed Ricketts." This preface is clearly the most valuable bit of biographical information that Steinbeck has written. In addition, the preface has another significance, scarcely less valuable: it is a veritable storehouse of literary allusions pertaining to Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday and to the short story, "The Snake."

Steinbeck's literary disintegration already evident in Burning Bright continues in East of Eden (1952). In the book, his longest since The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck attempts to deal with the problem of evil, coming to the conclusion that man can make a free choice between good and evil. In attempting to carry out this thesis Steinbeck contradicts himself on numerous occasions in East of Eden as time after time he reverts to biological
determinism and denies his characters freedom of choice.

Much ink could be wasted over the causes of *East of Eden*'s failure, but a few explanations will be ventured. Perhaps the fact that Steinbeck led a nomadic existence during the period of composition had something to do with *East of Eden*'s changes in direction. An even more important reason could be that since 1950 Steinbeck made New York his home, the city which as a young writer he had regarded with extreme distrust. Finally, the death of Ricketts in April 1948 left him without a literary confidant and a close friend.

The writing of *East of Eden* left Steinbeck exhausted as had *The Grapes of Wrath* earlier. Again Steinbeck tried the healing balm of travel and in Italy quickly found himself under attack as "an American who countenanced war crimes and bacteriological warfare." 52

Angrily rising to the occasion, Steinbeck fought back with a long letter to the communists which was cut by one newspaper but published in its entirety by another. 53 In Ireland Steinbeck was disappointed to

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53 Ibid., p. 20.
find his mother's people humorless and suspicious of strangers—which might be an indication that Steinbeck was beginning to lose the common touch.

Returning to New York in the fall of 1952, Steinbeck began work on *Sweet Thursday*, which had been in mind while he was finishing *East of Eden*. It appeared in June of 1954. A sequel to *Cannery Row*, *Sweet Thursday* seems an attempt to exorcize the ghost of Ed Ricketts by apotheosis, for the Doc of *Sweet Thursday* is clearly not the Doc of *Cannery Row* however much he may resemble him in physical details. Doc has now lost the detachment, the humorous perspective toward the other denizens of *Cannery Row* that he possessed in the earlier novel. Now Doc has become human: he is proved to be subject to the fleshly ills after all, and after a time of discontent, is reconciled to the world of emotional relationships by marriage to a young prostitute. Obviously by any standards Steinbeck's conception of Doc has disintegrated, whether *Sweet Thursday* can be considered musical comedy or not. The moral force that constituted the
early Steinbeck, the tremendous earnestness toward his subject matter evident in all his works up through *East of Eden* has now crumbled and only a romantic *laissez-faire* sentimentality remains in its wake.

The twilight of Steinbeck's literary career is further deepened in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* (1957) which is but slick and superficial journalism by even a charitable estimate. The work is a melange of previous Steinbeck materials,54 but slapped together with the hand of a craftsman not seriously interested in his work. *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* is a farce, but a farce that perhaps resembles the tone of his sophomoric efforts more than anything else55 as it certainly is lacking in the serious humor of Steinbeck's biologically oriented work as seen in *Tortilla Flat*, *Cannery Row*, and *The Wayward Bus*.

In conclusion, Steinbeck today appears as an artist who has lost his *raison d'être*. While many

explanations of his literary decline can be suggested (and will be suggested in the course of the dissertation), the fact remains that after 1947 Steinbeck's work has shown a catastrophic decline in quality. If as Lisca suggests, and it seems too circumstantial to doubt, the death of Ricketts was a profound blow to Steinbeck, then this loss of certainty, companionship, and sympathetic criticism certainly hamstrung Steinbeck and he apparently never really overcame the loss. However, Steinbeck's great contemporary Hemingway recovered from the eclipse of his earlier work in Across the River and into the Trees to write The Old Man and the Sea, so there is a possibility, however doubtful, that Steinbeck once more will find himself.
CHAPTER II

THE BIOLOGICAL NATURALISM OF JOHN STEINBECK

While the biological naturalism of John Steinbeck has long been noted, it has been examined in detail only by four men, Edmund Wilson, Frederick Bracher, Woodburn Ross, and Peter Lisca. This chapter is an attempt to explore this area further, first sketching in the contributions made by Wilson, Bracher, Ross, and Lisca and then advancing a somewhat different estimate of the role that biological naturalism plays in Steinbeck's art.

I

Out of the welter of critical confusion that passed for early Steinbeck criticism only one critic has had anything to say that has proved of lasting merit, Edmund Wilson. In an essay entitled "The

\[1\]Peter Lisca in his recent book The Wide World Of John Steinbeck gives an admirable survey of the chaotic state of Steinbeck criticism.
Californians: Storm and Steinbeck" (1940)\(^2\), Wilson put his finger brilliantly on the vital core of Steinbeck's art:

> There is in Mr. Steinbeck's fiction a substratum which remains constant and which gives it a certain basic seriousness that that of the mere performer does not have. What is constant in Mr. Steinbeck's fiction is his preoccupation with biology...and it is one of the peculiarities of his vocabulary that it runs to biological terms.\(^3\)

He then devotes a lengthy section of his essay to citing numerous examples of Steinbeck's use of biology in his works. Among other things Wilson notes cogently that "Steinbeck almost always in his fiction is dealing with either the lower animals or with humans so rudimentary that they are almost on the animal level..."\(^4\)

For proof of this contention Wilson points out the close relationship that exists between such humans as the Pirate, Little Frog, and Lennie and the animal world, showing how that animal life forms a vital

\(^2\)Since reprinted in both The Boys in the Back Room and Classics and Commercials.

\(^3\)Edmund Wilson, Classics and Commercials (New York, 1950), p. 36.

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 36.
structural element in such works as *The Grapes of Wrath* and *The Long Valley*.

Having demonstrated Steinbeck's general biological indebtedness, Wilson next points out the uniqueness of Steinbeck's biological naturalism: "It is the habits and behavior of the animals, not the impression they make, that interests him." Thus to Wilson it is the perception of the animal's physical reaction to its environment, not the imaginative associations that it arouses in the human mind that is Steinbeck's primary concern.

Turning from the uniqueness of Steinbeck's biological naturalism, Wilson examines in some detail Steinbeck's most advanced biological idea to him, "group" man. Wilson gives an excellent discussion of the idea as it appears in *In Dubious Battle*:

There is developed in the course of the book--especially by a fellow-traveler doctor who seems to come closer than the Communist to expressing Mr. Steinbeck's own ideas--a whole philosophy of "group" man as an "animal."

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"It might be like this, Mac: When group-man wants to move, he makes a standard. 'God wills that we recapture the Holy Land'; or he says 'We fight to make the world safe for democracy'; or he says 'We will wipe out social injustice with communism.' But the group doesn't care about the Holy Land, or Democracy or Communism. Maybe the group simply wants to move, to fight, and raises these words simply to reassure the brains of individual men..."

"How asks Mac," do you account for people like me, directing things, moving things? That puts your groupman out." "You might be an effect as well as a cause, Mac. You might be an expression of groupman, a cell endowed with a special function like an eye. Your eye both takes orders from and gives orders to your brain."6

Thus it is apparent that Steinbeck's notion of "group" man is something more than mere mob hysteria to Wilson. To be sure, mob hysteria and social conformity are among the more frequently seen manifestations of "group" man. The real purpose of "group" man, it would seem, is to explain man's gregarious instincts. It appears to owe something to the evolutionary idea of cooperation among animals popularized

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6Ibid., pp. 40-41.
by Allee. "Group" man, judging from the attention that Wilson devotes to it, is for him Steinbeck's most significant idea, and there is something to be said for such a contention. For one thing, "group" man does give Steinbeck's biological naturalism a distinct shape: a study of man from the standpoint of social instinct.

In conclusion, Wilson's essay provides an excellent introduction to Steinbeck's biological naturalism. As a general argument, the essay is extremely convincing, giving penetrating examples of Steinbeck's biological bent of mind. However, it must be emphasized that Wilson has merely indicated Steinbeck's general biological indebtedness, sketching in brief the particular biological ideas he found to be the most prominent in Steinbeck's work. Moreover, there are several weaknesses to be found in Wilson's approach. For one thing, he stresses entirely too much Steinbeck's scientific detachment, appearing either to overlook or else to ignore Steinbeck's great sympathy for his people. In

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7 The influence of Allee's ideas of biological cooperation among the members of a species will be dealt with later in this chapter and in the next chapter.
addition, Wilson's designation of the use of certain biological material in *The Grapes of Wrath* as parody seems untenable. It is more probable that Steinbeck used it to show the Joad's close relationship with the processes of nature. Finally, Wilson's indictment of Steinbeck's biological naturalism as simple animalism, as will be seen, seems an oversimplification.

The influence of Wilson's essay can be traced through subsequent Steinbeck criticism "like a radioactive particle."8 Almost all later critics have either explicitly mentioned indebtedness to Wilson or else (what is usually the case) imitated him, as Lisca has shown, by "the similarity of phrasing and terminology."9

The first serious attempt to isolate Steinbeck's biological ideas in any detail was that of Woodburn Ross in his essay "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars" (1946). Ross, relying primarily upon Steinbeck's *Sea

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of Cortez as expository evidence, finds two ideas running through Steinbeck's work, non-teleological thinking and group man. He sees non-teleological thinking as a contradictory mixture of scientific observation and a mystical feeling for the natural world:

We appear almost to have finished a kind of circle. We began by finding Steinbeck laying down rigid rules of empirical thought, then found him thinking as his affections dictated anyway, and now hear him declaring the very limited effectiveness of reason.10

Ross sees group man as another example of Steinbeck's bent toward nature mysticism. The basis of group man and of Steinbeck's group ideas in general is "mystical ideas of unity."11

After showing how these ideas are operative in Steinbeck's fiction, Ross concludes his essay by offering some speculations as to their origins. Noting in passing that Steinbeck has been influenced "by the ideas of several thinkers--Hume, Emerson, Woodburn Ross, "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars," Steinbeck and His Critics, ed. E. W. Tedlock, Jr. and C. V. Wicker, (Alburquerque, 1957), p. 170.

11Tbid., p. 172.
and Rousseau, Ross then points out a number of parallel ideas existing between Steinbeck and Comte. For example, Steinbeck and Comte, Ross finds, "are similar in that both insist upon the necessity of thought based solely upon observation, both deny the power of reason to control man, both believe that the proletariat as a class is the principal repository of the social virtues, both are in some fashion inclined toward fetishism, and both believe in the real existence of entities which transcend and include the individual." 

Bracher's perceptive essay "Steinbeck and the Biological View of Man" (1949) in the light of Wilson's essay sums both a partial answer to and an extension of Wilson's thesis. The first important characteristic of Steinbeck's naturalism for Bracher is its biological orientation. To be sure, Bracher contends, other naturalists have looked at man scientifically and have also seen his kinship with the lower life forms, but only Steinbeck is specifically biological in the

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12 Ibid., p. 178. This portion of the essay will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter.

13 Ibid., p. 186.
application of his naturalism. This biological flavoring is seen in his allusions, metaphors, and analogies, "but mainly in the warmth of Steinbeck's enthusiasm for life in all its forms." Secondly, and more importantly, Bracher notes the mystical implications of Steinbeck's biological naturalism. Rather than holding that Steinbeck's naturalism limits his view of man to "animalism" as Wilson seemed to believe, Bracher showed that Steinbeck's naturalism was more likely a form of mysticism:

That Steinbeck is fascinated by biological mysteries - the "pulse" of plankton concentrations, the absence of marine life in certain "burned" areas, the existence of localities hostile to man - is made clear in almost every chapter of Sea of Cortez. Facts, unquestionable, but inexplicable in terms of accepted scientific concepts, excite him to semimystical speculations on the nature of life itself....Even though it may be a fact, it is probably impossible to prove the existence of supersensory emanations...which other animals can recognize. Fact or not, Steinbeck is so fascinated by the idea that the elaborates it in Sea of Cortez and uses it in various forms in the novels....What Steinbeck seems to be saying

is that life is more mysteriously wonderful than even the biologists have realized; and his insistence on the unity of all life invariably leads to a religious attitude.\textsuperscript{15}

Whereas Wilson only sketched in Steinbeck's biological debts in a general way, Bracher documents them in Steinbeck's works by showing the close relationship between the explicit biological speculations in Sea of Cortez and Steinbeck's social criticism and attitudes toward his people seen in his novels. The typical and archetypal hero for Steinbeck is the biologist, as Bracher points out. All of Steinbeck's protagonists, he contends, practice the non-teleological or "is" thinking described at great length in Sea of Cortez. The idea of "group" man, Bracher points out, has a far wider application in Steinbeck's works than that made of it by Wilson. The idea is discussed at some length in Sea of Cortez and is given extended literary treatment not only in In Dubious Battle but also in the short story "The Leader of the People," and in the novels The Moon Is Down, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, and The Wayward Bus. Bracher sees the idea

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 185.
of "group" man as stemming from conversations with the late Edward Ricketts, a marine biologist and Steinbeck's closest friend.

As far as it goes, Bracher's essay is admirable scholarship, far more objective in its evaluations than Wilson's pioneering effort. About the only criticism that can be leveled at the essay is that its conclusions are not carried far enough. Bracher seems to be content largely to point out the major implications of Steinbeck's biological naturalism by showing the close relationship that evidently exists between the biological speculations found in Sea of Cortez and the biological phenomena of Steinbeck's art.

Lisca's contention that Ross's article "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest" (1949) is a continuation of Bracher's is partially correct--the essay also seems a continuation of the one seen earlier. Where Bracher had only indicated the mystical component in Steinbeck's naturalism without probing its deeper meanings, Ross examines Steinbeck's biological mysticism in detail and comes to the conclusion that Steinbeck has
managed to overcome most of the ethical limitations of literary naturalism by his virtual reduction of man to animism:

...unlike Wordsworth, Steinbeck does not see through nature to a God beyond; he hears no intimations of immortality; for him there is no spirit which rolls through all things. There is only nature, ultimately mysterious, to which all things belong, bound together in a unity concerning whose stupendous grandeur he can barely hint.16

Ross isolates two main non-naturalistic elements in Steinbeck's naturalism. Up to a point Steinbeck is the "complete" naturalist, Ross maintains, since Steinbeck "accepts the scientist's representation of life"17 and "emphasizes...the value of human acts and attitudes which he considers in harmony with natural law."18 However, even for Ross, Steinbeck is not a thoroughgoing naturalist, because of certain non-naturalistic tendencies he finds amalgamated with Steinbeck's naturalism. "Altruism" is the chief


17Ibid., p. 208.

18Ibid., p. 208.
non-naturalistic element in the Steinbeck's ethical system. Altruism is the feeling for brotherly love and compassion that permeates Steinbeck's fiction. The other chief non-naturalistic element in Steinbeck's ethical system is his sense of the unity of all things. Steinbeck, as Ross contends, "cannot rest content with the naturalistic world of sense experience." He continually seeks for a deeper and mystical explanation of the oneness of the cosmos, the oneness that scientific investigation is only the first and faltering step toward.

Ross's two essays are thus seen respectively as an attempt to isolate Steinbeck's basic ideas and as an investigation of the ethical implications of his naturalism. Consequently, because of their concern with specific problems, they are quite limited in scope. Nevertheless, as limited as they are, the essays are quite valuable for Steinbeck scholarship for their attempts to evaluate Steinbeck's biological naturalism from the inside; that is to say, Ross has looked at

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19Ibid., p. 211. This essay will be examined in more detail in Chapter VI.
Steinbeck's ideas and basis of value judgment in their own terms rather than trying to make them conform to standards outside of them.

The latest of the critics who have examined Steinbeck's biological naturalism is Peter Lisca, a comparative newcomer to Steinbeck criticism but for all that the most important. Lisca's importance to Steinbeck criticism lies primarily in the fact that he has made the first book-length study\textsuperscript{20} of Steinbeck's art in \textit{The Wide World of John Steinbeck}, a re-working of his 1955 University of Wisconsin doctoral dissertation. Because of the length of Lisca's criticism--it includes several important critical articles as well--it will be impossible to examine Lisca's criticism in the same detail as the previous works of criticism have been examined. Nevertheless, several important insights of Lisca's criticism must be noted since they have an important bearing on the investigation of Steinbeck's biological naturalism.

\textsuperscript{20}Harry T. Moore's monograph \textit{The Novels of John Steinbeck} (1939) can scarcely be compared to Lisca's book.
The first important feature of Lisca's criticism is that he fully recognizes the significance of biology in Steinbeck's art. In his survey of Steinbeck criticism in *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, Lisca traces the development of interest in Steinbeck's use of biology in his works, as we have seen, from Wilson's pioneering essay to those of Bracher and Ross, coming to much the same conclusions concerning their significance as has this writer.

While agreeing with Bracher and Ross that the biological speculations of *Sea of Cortez* explain Steinbeck's fiction to a great extent, Lisca goes a step further: he speculates as to the source of these ideas. Lisca sees them as stemming from the influence of Edward F. Ricketts; Ricketts's influence on Steinbeck, Lisca finds, is strongly evident in several ways. For one thing, Steinbeck's biological ideas owe much to Ricketts as to their explicit formulation.21 Steinbeck might have had them germinally in mind before meeting Ricketts, but it took the close camaraderie with

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Ricketts to formulate them, Lisca contends. An even more subtle influence of Ricketts on Steinbeck, Lisca points out, is the use of Ricketts as a character and a "persona" or a mask in Steinbeck's fiction. Ricketts in a thinly disguised form is found in a number of Steinbeck's works, beginning with the early short story, "The Snake." Through the persona of "Doc," Ricketts' fictional image, Steinbeck is able to make value judgments on his subject matter without breaking the narrative of his fiction. A raissoneur in In Dubious Battle, Ricketts' role loomed larger in Steinbeck's fiction until he achieved protagonist status in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Finally, Ricketts' influence can be seen in the disintegrations of Steinbeck's work since the death of Ricketts. Without the steady influence of Ricketts, Lisca argues, Steinbeck's biological naturalism has run amok and consequently his work has suffered.

All of these writers, as we have seen, recognize, isolate, and to some extent, evaluate the implications of Steinbeck's biological naturalism. Wilson is the first to confront it and he does so after a general
fashion. However, there are several weaknesses to be seen in Wilson's interpretation. In particular, his dismissal of Steinbeck's naturalism for limiting the scope of his work -- a charge frequently to be met with in Steinbeck criticism since Wilson's time-- shows an insufficient appraisal of the complexity of Steinbeck's ideology as the essays of Bracher and Ross have demonstrated.

On the other hand, one would find it difficult to entertain serious objections concerning Bracher's interpretation of Steinbeck. He is nowhere as assertive as Wilson, and generally confines himself to a patient sifting of the biological point of view in Steinbeck's work. Perhaps the only way that Bracher's essay is found wanting is that its conclusions are not pressed far enough. Ross' essays, partly a continuation of Bracher's, have all the virtues and faults of the typical scholarly article's restricted approach. In the later article by limiting his attention to the ethical implications of Steinbeck's naturalism, Ross is able to probe more deeply into one aspect of Steinbeck's ideology than did Wilson or Bracher, but
is unable to say much about the more general implications of biological naturalism. Finally, Lisca's criticism, while more penetrating in particular than that of his predecessors, is usually too scattered in nature to do more than form a penetrating introduction to the study of Steinbeck's biological naturalism.

Consequently, to determine the extent and specific nature of Steinbeck's biological naturalism, a more embracing and systematic study must be effected by an analysis of his art. The literary essentials of Steinbeck's fiction--ideology, structure, characterization, and language will be the subjects of succeeding chapters in the dissertation, concluded by a summary of the findings. The purpose of the dissertation will be to demonstrate that there is a basic ideology of biological naturalism in Steinbeck's fiction by utilizing the insights of criticism, The Log from the Sea of Cortez, and Steinbeck's fiction itself as evidence. The present chapter will continue with an evaluation of the ideology of biological naturalism.

II

Biological naturalism is the key to Steinbeck's thought. For Steinbeck it is the indication of man's
nature, function, and purpose, the source of Steinbeck's value judgments and the explanation of man's history.

The idea of "group" man, examined by Wilson, Ross, and Bracher, contains in germinal form two more advanced ideas, differentiated in The Log, which give Steinbeck's biological naturalism its character. These ideas are "non-teleological thinking," Steinbeck's attempt to create a world view out of biology, and "racial memory," Steinbeck's clearest explanation of the irrational compulsive forces that motivate the Steinbeck man.

Steinbeck's most significant and yet his most bewildering idea is his concept of non-teleological thinking into which he brings the most diverse and often discordant elements. Non-teleological thinking reduced to its essentials is actually not a way of thinking at all, but is a revolt against thought--at least systematic thought. It places a premium on intuition and a debit against reason. This intuition

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22 For a discussion of some of the logical incongruities in non-teleological thinking see Woodburn Ross' essay "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars."
is not so much a thought process as it is a biological awareness.

Non-teleological thinking takes as given sensory impressions of reality. Incongruities pointed out by reason are dismissed as evidences of reason's limitations:

Everything is everywhere; and we, seeing the desert country, the hot waterless expanse, and knowing how far away the nearest water must be, say with a kind of disbelief, "How did they get clear here, these little animals?" And until we can attack with our poor blunt weapon of reason that causal process and reduce it, we do not quite believe in the horse-hair worms and the treefrogs. The great fact is that they are there. Seeing a school of fish lying quietly in still water, all the heads pointing in one direction, one says, "It is unusual that this is so"—but it isn't unusual at all. We begin at the wrong end. They simply lie that way and it is remarkable only because with our blunt tool we cannot carve out a human reason. 23

Non-teleological thinking is also man's sensed awareness of himself and his relationship with the universe. It encompasses all that he has experienced. In particular, non-teleological thinking is the "shaping" force of his mind—literally the particular orientation

23 The Log, p. 164.
of his consciousness on any given problem—all the factors
that undergird and help produce his conscious thought.

Evidences of non-teleological thinking may be seen
frequently in Steinbeck's fiction. This evidence
usually consists of a general implicit point of view,
relating the activities of man with the natural pro-
cesses of the universe. This technique is well seen
in The Grapes of Wrath where successive chapters oscil-
late in perspective between man and the natural world.

Occasionally, however, evidences of non-teleological
thinking may be seen in a more specific form, as the
following excerpts from Cannery Row will show. The
first quotation is a humorous application of non-
teleological thinking by "Doc" to a teleological
question raised by Hazel as they return from collecting
marine biological specimens:

Hazel turned one of the stink bugs over
with the toe of his wet tennis shoe and the
shining black beetle strove madly with floun-
dering legs to get upright again. "Well,
why do you think they do it?" "I think they're
praying," said Doc. "What!" Hazel was
shocked. "The remarkable thing," said Doc,
"isn't that they put their tails up in the
air—the really incredibly remarkable thing
is that we find it remarkable. We can only
use ourselves as yardsticks. If we did
something as inexplicable and strange we'd probably be praying--so maybe they're praying."24

The second quotation, also taken from Cannery Row, expresses the sense of cosmic flux in non-teleological thinking:

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 the thing, 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. Lee Chong is more than a Chinese grocer. He must be. Perhaps he is evil balanced and held suspended by good--an Asiatic planet held to its orbit by the pull of Lao Tze and held away from Lao Tze by the centrifugality of abacus and cash register--Lee Chong suspended, spinning, whirling, among groceries and ghosts.25

Bracher and Ross are in substantial agreement over what non-teleological thinking is, both seeing it primarily as a form of mysticism. Ross, who has examined the idea closely in "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," sees it largely as Steinbeck's attempt to


express unity in variety. But, more importantly, Ross notes that Steinbeck's explanations of non-teleological thinking are always limited because the basis of thought rests on feeling rather than on reason:

Steinbeck never explains the nature of the unity of the cosmos when he perceives.... Manifestly, he lacks data with which to answer; indeed, he is never able rationally to prove that the unity about which he speaks exists at all. But the fact that his notions about the unity of things are very incomplete and rest upon feeling, insight, intuition, rather than upon reason is neither here nor there. The fact is that as an artist he believes in these things.

Only slightly less important as a determinant in Steinbeck's thought than non-teleology is racial memory. It is the unconscious psychological residue remaining in all men that links them with the biological past of their species. All things that men have come into contact with in the past are buried deep in the memory of the living individual. To be sure, the individual cannot conceptualize the experience, but he can, nonetheless, sense

26 Ross, op. cit., p. 211.
27 Ibid., pp. 211-212.
its presence in the form of strong, peculiar--compulsive emotional identifications--more often than not with the inanimate world.

Many of man's hallucinations, such as sea monsters and ghosts, are products of this racial or sea memory. These are but visual symbolizations of a deeper psychological reality. Steinbeck attributes such reactions to the terrific tides endured by man's marine ancestors in the distant past. The sea monster, according to Steinbeck, is perhaps man's feeble recall of the enormous tidal forces of the moon, when it was probably the largest single environmental factor in the existence of the life forms of the time.  

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28The Log, Ibid., pp. 33-34. It is quite obvious that this notion of racial or sea memory bears close affinities to Jung's idea of the Collective Unconscious. Jung's concept of the archetypes, the unconscious primordial images inherited by man in his brain structure from his ancestors, bears the closest resemblances of Jung's ideas to racial memory. However, while both see man inheriting considerable unconscious psychic material, it is apparent that there are differences in their interpretations. For one thing, Steinbeck sees this memory as corpuscular in nature; that is to say it is carried in the genes rather than in the mind proper. Furthermore, Steinbeck sees racial memory as stemming from the time of marine evolutionary forms, while Jung sees the archetypes imprinted during man's human existence. The resemblances will be discussed at greater length later in the dissertation.
In the novel, *The Pearl*, this factor of racial memory is most clearly seen. Racial memory here is depicted in the "songs" of Kino and his people. These songs are in part the instinctive sensing of the biological drive of preservation in various forms. For example, the song of the Family\(^{29}\) represents the instinct of gregarious protection; the song of Evil,\(^{30}\) a generalized sensing of latent evil which has not yet been particularized; the song of the enemy,\(^ {31}\) the particular form of evil, etc. However, it is clear that the idea of the song encompasses much more than these gross approximations; it suggests also in its individual contexts a dimly sensed connection with the past as though the present dangers of Kino and his people were only the present manifestations of the same evils that beset their ancestors. Thus when Kino feels the song of Evil, he experiences both his own present danger together with all the past dangers faced by his race: "The songs were all in Kino and in his

\(^{29}\) *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck*, p. 365.


people—every song that had ever been made, even the ones forgotten."32 Because of this quality of universality, the songs might be considered archetypes of sorts.

In conclusion—non-teleological thinking is not a way of thinking so much as it is a biological intuition of man's self and his relation to the universe. Racial memory is man's cellular recall of the biological past of his race. As has been said, for Steinbeck biological naturalism is the indication of man's nature, function, and purpose. In other words, man is to be defined in biological terms.

In general, Steinbeck is well content to indicate man's nature as animal nature. To uphold this thesis, Steinbeck has either to ignore differences between man and animal or else to explain them away. The former course is usually the one taken. He establishes his artistic focus in such a way that only the animal inheritance of man can clearly be seen. It was shown earlier in the discussion of non-teleological thinking

32Ibid., p. 373.
that Steinbeck severely curtailed the scope of reason--the greatest single difference between man and animal. Even admitting the limited efficacy of the intellect, Steinbeck still holds it to be inferior in importance to man's biological drives. The few favorable comments Steinbeck writes about human intelligence--and they are few indeed--make a dubious and quickly forgotten impression against the almost overwhelming mass of anti-rational sentiments that flow almost continuously from his pen.  

Steinbeck's overwhelming emphasis on man's animality is shown in two ways: (1) in his use of language and (2) in the role that biological drives play in the lives of his characters. With the possible single

33However, it must be admitted that in recent years there has been some amelioration of Steinbeck's anti-rational bias to be observed in his fiction. Probably the best single example of a more favorable attitude toward the intellect than that usually found in Steinbeck's work is this taken from East of Eden, page 132: "Our species is the only creative species, and it has only one creative instrument, the individual mind and spirit of a man...And this I believe: that the free exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. And this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected..."

Curiously this passage is a very close paraphrase of essentially the same idea found in The Log p. xivi.
exception of Steinbeck's first novel, *Cup of Gold* (1929), every book of Steinbeck's up to *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* has exhibited a marked biological cast resulting from the exclusive use of biological frames of reference. The immense panorama of biology in all its varied forms is clearly something that Steinbeck knows at first hand. No one who has read *Cannery Row*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Pearl*, or *Of Mice and Men* can deny the abundance of purely naturalistic description that fills them. In *The Grapes of Wrath* there are frequent nature vignettes, some of which have been published separately, relating the trip of the Joads to their physical environment. Indeed, as Bracher has acutely observed, the Joad family "group themselves like the parts of a living cell around the trunk, the nucleus..."\(^\text{34}\) Similarly, in *Cannery Row* there is a superfluity of biological data, some of which is almost extraneous to the plot. The purpose of all this biology is obvious: Steinbeck wants to show that man is clearly related, as are all other animals, to a physical environment.

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\(^{34}\) Bracher, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
Man's animal nature is also indicated by the overwhelming role that his biological drives play in his existence as presented in Steinbeck's works. The great extent of these influences can easily be seen in Steinbeck's consistent emphasis on the irrational forces that motivate the Steinbeck man, and in the almost corresponding lack of purely rational and spiritual motivations to the observed in him. These irrational forces are not designated as irrational simply because Steinbeck only dimly recognizes the importance of the irrational element in man. On the contrary, Steinbeck has a very clear idea of the nature of the irrational: man's irrational drives are clearly to be understood as his biological inheritance from his animal ancestors. Man cannot, and indeed must not, outgrow his inherited animal nature Steinbeck seems to say; he can only modify or direct it in a very insignificant way.

With his picture of the biologist, Steinbeck has given his ideal portrait of man. To Steinbeck the biologist leads an idyllic existence (or did so until

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35The Log, p. 29. Bracher also sees the role of the biologist in a similar light.
Sweet Thursday), freed from the shackles of repressive customs and mores because he understands their biological origins in man's group instincts. Even more than the bum or the beggar, the biologist is Steinbeck's true philosopher in that he not only lives the good life, but also knows why he lives it. This beachcomber existence of the biologist and the social outcast that Steinbeck champions so strongly in The Log is particularly well seen in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. This uninhibited animality is an important element in Tortilla Flat, Of Mice and Men, In Dubious Battle, and The Grapes of Wrath.

The Wayward Bus contains what is perhaps the clearest exposition of the superiority of animality over rationality. The contrast, however loaded, between the fresh, unrestrained animality of Juan Chicoy and the inhibitions of Mr. Pritchard is especially significant. No one can deny that Steinbeck is extremely partial to Juan Chicoy and extremely antagonistic to Mr. Pritchard. The reason is obvious: Steinbeck places a greater value on the animality of Chicoy than he does on the restraint of Pritchard. Bracher's
observations on the same issue are worth noting:

The ability to adapt to new conditions is one of man's most valuable biological attributes, and the loss of it might well lead to man's extinction. Steinbeck's bourgeois characters are in a dangerous rut. Mr. Pritchard...is dependent on his level of society, not merely for the means of existence, but for self-assurance and self-respect. 36

Steinbeck himself has something significant to say on the matter in The Log:

When...man thinks of Jesus or St. Augustine or Socrates he regards them with love because they are the symbols of the good he admires, and he hates the symbols of the bad. But actually he would rather be successful than good. In an animal other than man we would use the term "good" with "weak survival quotient." Thus, man in his thinking or reverie status admires the progression toward extinction, but in the unthinking stimulus which really activates him he tends toward survival. Perhaps no other animal is so torn between alternatives. Man might be described fairly adequately, simply as a two-legged paradox. He has never become accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness. Perhaps, as has been suggested, his species is not set, has not jelled, but is still in a state of becoming, bound by his physical memories to a past of struggle and survival, limited in his future by the uneasiness of thought and consciousness. 37

36 Bracher, op. cit., p. 192.

37 The Log, op. cit., p. 96.
The frequency with which Steinbeck uses such biological terms as "species," "strong survival quotient," etc., to depict man biologically, and his frequent description of man as an animal provide convincing arguments that biological naturalism is the indication of man's nature for Steinbeck.

The function of man in Steinbeck's biological naturalism is to carry out the dictates of his animal nature. Examination of Steinbeck's works reveal these: the biological drives of survival and reproduction. Consequently, man's function can be stated simply as his attempt to perpetuate his species.

The purpose of man in Steinbeck's ideology is more difficult to ascertain. The usual sense of a teleological purpose manifested in human existence, Steinbeck refuses to recognize. As will be seen, Steinbeck admits only a limited validity to teleology:

What we personally conceive by the term "teleological thinking,"...is most frequently associated with evaluating causes and facts, the purposiveness of events. This kind of thinking considers changes and cures--what "should be" in the terms of an end pattern (which is often a substitute or an anthropomorphic projection); it presumes the bettering of conditions, often, unfortunately,
without achieving more than a most superficial understanding of those conditions. In their sometimes intolerant refusal to face facts as they are, teleological notions may substitute a fierce but ineffectual attempt to change which are assumed to be undesirable, in place of the understanding-acceptance which would pave the way for a more sensible attempt at any change which might still be indicated.38

Human existence in any imaginative and rational sense is an illusion, fostered by the merciful anodyne of hope. But, there is still a purpose of sorts to human existence recognized by Steinbeck. This purpose is not peculiar to humans, because it is shared by all life forms. Man's shared purpose is to survive. This is the categorical imperative imposed on all life:

There would seem to be only one commandment for living things: Survive! And all the forms and species and units and groups are armed for survival, fanged for survival, timid for it, fierce for it, clever for it, poisonous for it, intelligent for it. This commandment decrees the death and destruction of myriads of individuals for the survival of the whole. Life has one final end, to be alive; and all the tricks and mechanisms, all the successes and all the failures are aimed at that end.39

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38Ibid., pp. 134-135.

39Ibid., p. 241.
Steinbeck's basis of value is to be found in biology largely because biology is his point of reference--his vantage point from which he estimates and indicates his values. This basis of value may be demonstrated in two ways. Biological orientation of values undergirds Steinbeck's consistently one-sided portrayal of social conflict, the most prominent thematic material in his novels. Biological orientation of value is also demonstrated in the extreme stress which Steinbeck places on man's relation to a physical environment.

Social conflict is an ever-recurring theme in Steinbeck's novels, being found in one form or another in almost all of his works. In some novels it is clearly of secondary importance: To a God Unknown, Cup of Gold, The Pastures of Heaven, Cannery Row, Of Mice and Men, and Tortilla Flat. In other novels such as In Dubious Battle, The Grapes of Wrath, The Pearl, and The Wayward Bus, social conflict is clearly the most important theme.

On the surface it would appear that with Steinbeck as with some other social novelists the social struggle is motivated by and is an expression of economic struggle.
But such is not the case. In his two greatest novels of social conflict, *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck uses the theme of social conflict to say something interesting, and, to some extent, unique things about the dispossessed of society. However, Steinbeck does not make this theme of social conflict the purpose of these novels as some have thought. Instead the social conflict is the means by which Steinbeck demonstrates his biological values. For Steinbeck sees the social struggle not through the eyes of a propagandist, but through the eyes of a biologist as Wilson has observed.\(^{40}\)

However, to say that Steinbeck sees the social struggle as the means of demonstrating his biological values is not to say that he sees it with objectivity. On the contrary Steinbeck is vitally concerned with the outcome of the conflict. While accepting the necessity of this human natural selection, he sees its outcome in a novel way. Though believing that natural selection demonstrates the idea of "survival of the

\(^{40}\)Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
fittest," Steinbeck does not consider the "fittest" to be those who rule society because of their economic, political, and social supremacy. Steinbeck, clearly, does not interpret the phrase "survival of the fittest" as did many late nineteenth century thinkers to justify the rapacious excesses of the great financial figures of the time. Such men are, rather, the victims of natural selection--the ones unfit to survive in Steinbeck's eyes. Through their attempts to crush all opposition in the economic struggle, they have only succeeded in destroying themselves by becoming too specialized. There is something of the fury of an Amos in the following biological paraphrase of the Bible as Steinbeck draws the point in strong metaphorical language:

...In the world ruled by tigers with ulcers, rutted by strictured bulls, scavenged by blind jackals, Mack and the boys dine delicately with the tigers, fondle the frantic heifers, and wrap up the crumbs to feed the sea gulls of Cannery Row. What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? Mack and the boys avoid the trap, walk around the
poison, step over the noose while a generation of trapped, poisoned, and trussed-up men scream at them and call them no-goods, come-to-bad-ends, blots-on-the-town, thieves, rascals, bums...\textsuperscript{41}

Perhaps some explanation of the passage is necessary. Mack and the boys are bums on Cannery Row, the waterfront of Monterey. They are without visible means of support, existing largely by handouts, occasional theft, and, when all else fails, brief odd jobs on the Row. Yet they appear to thrive on their meager existence despite its lack of material advantages. They arouse in Steinbeck and "Doc" at times an almost idolatrous admiration because of their success at living:

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...\textsuperscript{42}

In this passage Steinbeck has indicated some of the results of bad selection, but he has not given the

\textsuperscript{41}\textit{Cannery Row}, p. 15.
\textsuperscript{42}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 149.
specific principle motivating such judgments. Here it is. Ed Ricketts, "Doc," is speaking to Steinbeck:

"Consider now," he would say, if you look superficially, "you would say that the local banker or the owner of a Cannery or even the Mayor of Monterey is the successful and surviving individual. But consider their ulcers, consider the heart trouble, the blood pressure in that group. And then consider the bums over there--Cirrhosis of the Liver I will grant will have its toll, but not the other things." "It is a rule of paleontology," he would say, "that over-armor, and over-ornamentation are symptoms of extinction in a species... Now those bums have no armor and practically no ornament, except here and there a pair of red and yellow sleeve garters. In our whole time pattern those men may be the ones who will deliver our species from the enemies within and without which attack it." 43

However, it must not be thought that Steinbeck is a complete Darwinian however much he uses Darwinian terminology. It is apparent from his interest in biological groups that he is acquainted with the biological theories of W. C. Allee, 44 who in strong opposition to Darwin advocates the idea of cooperation rather than

43 The Log, xxxiii.

44 Bracher has also noticed Steinbeck's debt to Allee. An assessment of influence of Allee's ideas upon Steinbeck will be dealt with in the next chapter.
struggle among the members of a species for survival. In fact, Steinbeck's ideas of "group or "Phalanx" man may well have had their origin in Allee's ideas of biological cooperation since much of Allee's research was devoted to the pelagic tunicates from which Steinbeck and Ricketts appear to have derived the idea of "group" organisms. Then, too, the fact that Ricketts was once a student of Allee's would suggest further evidence of familiarity on Steinbeck's part with Allee's ideas.45

Then there must be added to Steinbeck's biological relation of values, challenge, the catalyst of the biological struggle. This factor is an additional reason why Steinbeck interprets "survival of the fittest" as he does. The successful in Steinbeck's eyes grow entrenched in their achievements and cease to dominate actively. They become soft with success and have to rely upon hirelings to protect their holdings. On the other hand, the challenge of bare survival keeps the have-nots from becoming soft and

45Edward F. Ricketts and Jack Calvin, Between Pacific Tides (Stanford, 1952), viii.
weak and hence losing their ability to adapt to new conditions:

Where there is little danger, there seems to be little stimulation. 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 a survival drive...46

Thus it becomes apparent that all of Steinbeck's values can be summed up in one word—survival.

There remains one more aspect of Steinbeck's value orientation to be discussed: the relation of man to a physical environment. There seems to be an implied judgment, pervading Steinbeck's works that those closest to the earth are also those best adapted biologically. The phrase "children of the earth" has often been applied to Steinbeck's people, though perhaps more often in ridicule than in praise, but whatever its motivation, the expression is peculiarly apt.

Invariably, the man who derives his sustenance from physical nature or has a close contact with it or with the outdoors in general is "good" in Steinbeck's eyes. On the other hand, the man who derives his livelihood

46The Log., p. 227.
from control in some manner, usually economic, of the output of "the children of the earth" is evil, to a greater or lesser degree, in Steinbeck's sight. The relationship between the landowners of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In Dubious Battle* and their workers, the pearl merchants of *The Pearl* and Kino, and Mr. Pritchard and Juan Chicoy of *The Wayward Bus* gives ample proof of the contention.

The reason is obvious: the man who has withdrawn completely from his original animal habitat has forfeited his animal heritage and has upset the ecology of his environment. All animal life withers when separated from its native environment; man, bearing an animal nature, must also wither when separated from his.

This belief forms the basis of what has been termed Steinbeck's "primitivism." But Steinbeck's preoccupation with primitives, the derelicts of society, if they can be called that, is clearly not motivated by either of the two most common reasons for dealing with primitives in literature. Steinbeck is not motivated by altruism: he does not believe that these people are
modern counterparts of the "noble savage." Nor, is Steinbeck motivated by a pure preoccupation with a particular stratum of society, as are some socially conscious novelists: he is interested in these people not so much as ends in themselves as he is in demonstrating that they are confirmations of his biological ideas--at least that appears to be Steinbeck's purpose. These people, the paisanos of Tortilla Flat, the "Okies" of The Grapes of Wrath, Mack and the boys of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday—all live close to the soil, and all derive some of their sustenance from contact with it. The connection with biological theory is this: Steinbeck evidently believes that a close relation with the soil is necessary for man's ecological well-being. Steinbeck here is operating on the assumption that human and animal ecology parallel each other.

To summarize--the social conflict is Steinbeck's picture of the biological struggle on the human level. In this struggle all men are engaged; some are destroyed; others are successful, but none achieves permanent security. For the price of success too often means biological destruction to the dominant human in
the form of various diseases, or, to his offspring in the inheritance of weak survival potential. On the other hand, the defeat suffered by the apparent losers in the social conflict often insures their eventual victory. They are hardened and tempered by adversity, while success renders the victors soft and flabby.

Then, too, there is this further qualification of success: it must be achieved by natural means because the price of success gained through artificial means, the means of civilization, is often high—biological suicide.

Biological naturalism is also the most adequate explanation of man's history to Steinbeck. The motivating force in man's historical existence has not been economics, philosophy, or even religion, but his own biological drives. Steinbeck sees all human activity largely as the social outgrowths of basic biological impulses in man. Human beings, like animals, have to survive and to perpetuate themselves. Steinbeck finds all life to be predicated on the successful solution of these two problems.

Seeing all history as the attempted satisfaction of these two basic drives, Steinbeck first studies the
animal world because the life struggle appears more simplified in the lower life forms. This Steinbeckian study of the life struggle on the animal level may frequently be seen in his works, especially in his descriptions of the tide pools and marine fauna, as in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Though he describes these scenes well in sharp, graphic details, it is clear that the point of such nature vignettes lies not in their pictorial beauty, but in Steinbeck's desire to render the struggle for existence in all its elemental fury.

When Steinbeck observes this life struggle on the human plane, he sees it in the same simple terms, for the human life struggle is in its essentials the same struggle that goes on among the lower life forms. Only in outward appearance has it become more complex. The added complexity still in no way changes the essential nature of the struggle to Steinbeck. That the struggle is markedly similar is demonstrated by the fact that in describing human history, Steinbeck always uses animal analogies. The Log reveals the close inter-relation between human history and animal existence:
...In many cases the arrival and success of a species seems to be by chance entirely.... With marine fauna, as with humans, priority and possession appear to be vastly important to survival and dominance. But sometimes it is found that the very success of an animal is its downfall...47

Now Steinbeck extends the scope of his speculation to the human level. In drawing his parallels from the animal to the human state, Steinbeck reverses the normal perspective: instead of seeing animals in human terms, he tends to see humans in terms of animal drives.48 That Steinbeck regards class struggle as a biological and not an economic struggle may be seen in the following passage:

The dominant human in his security grows soft and fearful. He spends a great part of his time in protecting himself. Far from reproducing rapidly, he has fewer children, and the ones he does have are all ill protected from without. The lean and hungry grow strong, and the strongest of them are selected out. Having nothing to lose and all to gain, these selected hungry and rapacious ones develop attack rather than defense techniques, and become strong in them, so that one day the

47Ibid., p. 94.
48Ibid., p. 94.
dominant man is eliminated and the strong and hungry wanderer takes his place.49

This process is cyclic in nature to Steinbeck. However hackneyed the sentiments, however Whitmanesque the debts, the basic motivation is still biology and not a naive faith in the doctrine of progress:

"We take a beatin' all the time." Tom
"I know," Ma chuckled. "Maybe that makes us tough. Rich fellas come up an' die, an' their kids ain't no good, an' they die out. But, Tom, we keep a-comin'. Don' you fret none, Tom. A different time's coming."50

Steinbeck's depiction of history is most clearly seen in The Grapes of Wrath. For example, phrases in the preceding quotations are given specific and lengthy illustrations in the book. Chapter nineteen affords an excellent example:

Three hundred thousand in California and more coming. And in California the roads full of frantic people running like ants to pull, to push, to lift, to work. For every man load to lift, five pairs of arms extended to lift it, for every stomachful of food available, five mouths open.

49 Ibid., p. 95.

And the great owners who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history, with eyes to read history and know the great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands, it is taken away. And that companion fact: when a majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the oppressed...

In addition, Steinbeck's idea of history contains another biological tenet: his concept of "group" man. Historical movements are also "group" man movements. No individual directs or initiates historical processes, at least in the usual sense of these terms; men can be said to lead movements in the restricted sense that they perceive and act on the dictates of the group mind more quickly than their apparent followers. These leaders might be said to direct their fellow men to a better understanding of the group mind imperatives. But as to the possibility of any man's initiating and leading any mass movement through his own free volition and choice, Steinbeck would give an emphatic "No." For example:

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51Ibid., p. 314.

52Ibid., p. 315. Steinbeck's idea of "group" man in its historical contexts bears certain resemblances to Tolstoy's idea of history and will be examined later in the dissertation.
The teleological notion would be that those in the forefront are leaders in a given movement and actually direct and consciously lead the masses in the sense that an army corporal orders "Forward march" and the squad marches ahead. One speaks in such a way of church leaders, of political leaders, and of leaders in scientific thought and of course there is some limited justification for such a notion.

Nonteleological notion: that the leaders are simply those who, at the given moment are moving in the direction behind which will be found the greatest weight, and which represents a future mass movement.53

It is especially significant to note that Steinbeck concludes this explanation with a biological analogy:

For a more vivid picture of this state of affairs, consider the movements of an Ameba under the microscope. Finger-like processes, the pseudopodia, extend at various places beyond the confines of the central mass. Locomotion takes place by means of the animal's flowing into one or into several adjacent pseudopodia. Suppose that the molecules which "happened" to be situated in the forefront of the pseudopodium through which the animal is progressing, or into which it will have flowed subsequently, should be endowed with consciousness and should say to themselves and to their fellows: "We are directly leading this great procession, our leadership 'causes" all the rest of the population to move this way, the mass follows the path we blaze." This would be equivalent to the attitude with which we commonly regard leadership.54

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54Ibid.
In summary man's history is a biological process growing out of the animal necessities of survival and reproduction. It is in Steinbeck's eyes an irrational and almost purposeless process because of its non-teleological nature. History has meaning for Steinbeck only in so far as it records a cycle of transient domination by groups. Steinbeck's biological basis of history cannot be overstressed. The analogy of the amoeba presents tremendous implications perhaps scarcely realized by Steinbeck. By using in the form of an analogy an animal whose life processes are of the utmost simplicity, equating this creature with man, Steinbeck virtually annihilates man as a creature of significance. Caprice and the irrational forces of brute survival are the twin motivators of man's history. This idea of chance, it can be seen, contradicts his love of people. It is becoming increasingly apparent that Steinbeck's mind and emotions are in conflict.

III

Steinbeck's ideology of biological naturalism is significant in that it explains and motivates his art. However, while providing a basic world view to shape
his artistic experience, it places grave limitations upon Steinbeck's fiction and contains some striking inconsistencies.

The greatest limitation that biological naturalism imposes on Steinbeck is that it sharply curtails his definition of man, virtually limiting it to equating man with animal. Such a definition prevents Steinbeck from seeing human life as a drama, since he, in effect, takes man's freedom of choice from him. Man thus when faced with obstacles cannot exercise choice: he can only follow the most pressing dictate of his biological nature. Mind in the rationalistic and idealistic conceptions is an illusion; man deludes himself by believing that he has intrinsic merit. These limitations would be the consequences of Steinbeck's biological naturalism, if he followed only its logical dictates.

But it is clearly to be noted that Steinbeck's biological naturalism is rent with the gravest logical inconsistencies, weakening his thought, but perhaps saving and invigorating his art. One such inconsistency is Steinbeck's idea of non-teleological thinking which attempts to combine two irreconcilable mental attitudes: the scientific and the mystical. Another duality in his thought is his vacillation between the species and the individual. At least, these dualities in Steinbeck's thought give strong indications that Steinbeck is not satisfied with a simple objective depiction of man as an animal. Steinbeck's emotional sympathies with his people are too strong to allow him to weigh his material coolly. While perceiving man to be an animal, Steinbeck, nevertheless, supercharges his definition to include characteristics which are found in no animal. Steinbeck ridicules the rational, yet has to include it in man. Steinbeck denies man any spirituality, yet asserts it passionately in The Grapes of Wrath and The Moon is Down. Steinbeck rejects faith in his arguments against teleology, but accepts it unquestioningly in his great love for St. Francis and the Virgin Mary. Steinbeck detachedly sees human existence in mechanistic terms of biological struggle, yet violently assails social injustice. Thus, Steinbeck's animal man is a most unusual creature— an animal, like the unicorn, never found anywhere except in the mind of its creator.
If Steinbeck would confine his definition of man to the animal plane as he thinks he does, noting only the close corollaries between man and animal, then critics could only accept or reject his view in so far as they believed it to be a valid theory of man. But Steinbeck is not content to work within the confines he has set for himself. His strong emotional ties with his creations blur his conceptions. The disinterested detachment of the scientist that Wilson found in Steinbeck's work simply is not there. Biology, to be sure, is the conditioning through which Steinbeck sees his material, as Wilson was the first to point out, but Steinbeck's emotions make this biology a personal thing, totally unlike the clinical biology of science, which perhaps after all is only a fiction.

55Wilson, op. cit., p. 36.
CHAPTER III

SOURCES OF STEINBECK'S BIOLOGICAL NATURALISM

As was seen in the previous chapter, biological naturalism occupies a central position in Steinbeck's literary philosophy by providing him with a view of history, and a definition of man's nature, function, and purpose. Obviously this literary philosophy did not spring fully developed out of nowhere, but, as was seen to some extent in chapter one, it developed gradually over a period of years. It will be the purpose of this chapter to determine in so far as the writer is able, the sources of Steinbeck's biological naturalism.

I

Only two critics, Ross and Lisca, appear to have concerned themselves at any length over this problem of the origin of Steinbeck's biological ideas. Ross offers some passing speculations over the sources of
Steinbeck's ideas in the process of showing the similarity of Steinbeck's notion of non-teleological thinking with certain of Comte's ideas in his essay "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars." While examining the similarities existing between Steinbeck and Comte, Ross notes that Steinbeck has been influenced by the ideas of Hume, Rousseau, and Emerson, but he does not specify what their influences on Steinbeck are. In regard to Comte he is much more explicit. While he freely admits that resemblances of ideas is no proof that Steinbeck ever read Comte, Ross contends, nonetheless, that the marked similarity of certain of their ideas probably indicates that Steinbeck read Comte. Steinbeck and Comte, Ross finds, 'are similar in that both insist upon the necessity of thought based solely upon observation, both deny the power of reason to control man, both believe that the proletariat as a class is the principal repository of the social virtues, both are in some fashion inclined toward fetishism, and
both believe in the real existence of entities which transcend and include the individual."^1

However, in spite of the resemblances that Ross has shown between Steinbeck and Comte, this writer feels that the relationship of their ideas is not direct, but second hand. With such an influential thinker as Comte, it is really not necessary to read him to be acquainted with his ideas, or those of any other important thinker, provided those ideas are pervasive enough to have an impact upon intellectual history as Comte's did. Moreover, the more quickly and more extensively the ideas of any thinker are diffused into the intellectual climate of an age, the more symptomatic they are of that age. They are "in the air," so to speak. Such germinal ideas, while they may first or best be formulated by one thinker are, nonetheless, open to all to a degree. Thus, while Comte undoubtedly influenced the course of positivism to a profound extent even to its first explicit formulation, positivism was in the air and a number of

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other thinkers of the time, the most notable being Spencer, arrived at similar views independently. What Comte and Spencer, to a lesser extent, actually did was this: they were the first explicitly to formulate a philosophy based on the scientific method.

Lisca, on the other hand, looks at the sources of Steinbeck's biological naturalism from an entirely different standpoint from that of Ross. He sees it as stemming primarily from Steinbeck's close association with the late West coast marine biologist Edward F. Ricketts. That Ricketts exercised a tremendous influence on Steinbeck was noted in Chapter One, but now it will be examined in detail.

Lisca sees Ricketts's influence operating on Steinbeck chiefly as a symbol, "a mask, a persona through whom Steinbeck expressed his own attitudes and beliefs."² The chief use of such a mask was as a character through which Steinbeck could make strong value judgments without lapsing into propaganda or sentimentality. However, as Lisca is quick to point out, Rickett's influence on Steinbeck is much more

than that of a mere symbol. As a character he has occupied a notable place in Steinbeck's fiction. First seen as a character in the short story "The Snake," Ricketts in the form of "Doc" Burton played a considerable role in the novel In Dubious Battle, where he is structurally necessary to explain the significance of "group" man. Rickett's next literary appearance is in Cannery Row, where he becomes a fully developed character taking part in the action in addition to continue serving as a persona. In fact, Doc is the pivotal figure in the novel, the plot, such as it is, being built largely around the attempt of Mack and the boys to prepare a surprise party for him. Doc's final appearance as a character in Steinbeck's fiction is in Sweet Thursday. In Sweet Thursday the lonely but sympathetic observer role that Doc played in the earlier works is repudiated as he becomes one with the suffering humanity he has so long studied. This final capitulation to the world by Doc, in Lisca's eyes, is "Steinbeck's own capitulation to
his materials,"³ Steinbeck's attempt to exorcise Ricketts and biology from his works.

In short, Lisca has provided an admirable introduction to the problems of the sources of Steinbeck's biological ideas in his examination of the influence of Ricketts upon Steinbeck. As penetrating as it is, Lisca's examination does not go far enough for our purposes, since Lisca is primarily concerned with evaluating Steinbeck's works as literature. Thus his interest in Ricketts and in biological naturalism, though intense, is only incidental. Consequently, a closer and more detailed look must be taken of the influence of Ricketts upon Steinbeck's work to ascertain its significance.

II

The prospective critic would hardly need to look further than the commemorative tribute to Ricketts in The Log from the Sea of Cortez, "About Ed Ricketts," to realize that the impact Ricketts had on Steinbeck was enormous. Far better literary tributes have

³Ibid., p. 281.
certainly been written, but few of greater sincerity, and certainly few, if any, which reveal as much biographical information. In fact, this plethora of biographical information rather than clarifying the problem obscures it to some extent, for here is found a situation which vaguely resembles that of Plato and Socrates. As Socrates, Ricketts is primarily known through what someone else has to say about him. Similarly as with the case of Socrates, Ricketts in his fictional guise of "Doc" is used not only as a mask through which Steinbeck can pass value judgments on the content of his fiction, as Lisca has shown, but also he takes part in Steinbeck's fiction as a major character. In Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday Ricketts in the transparent guise of "Doc" not only is characterized in considerable detail but more importantly, he is the protagonist in them as well—a status which few if any literary masks have ever achieved previously.

That "Doc" of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday is closely modelled upon Ed Ricketts can be demonstrated in a number of ways, but perhaps most easily by comparing the portrait of "Doc" in Cannery Row with that
of Ed Ricketts in The Log. Here is the portrait of "Doc" in Cannery Row:

Doc is the owner and operator of the Western Biological Laboratory. Doc is rather small, deceptively small, for he is wiry and very strong and when passionate anger comes on him he can be very fierce. He wears a beard and his face is half Christ and half satyr and his face tells the truth. It is said that he has helped many a girl out of one trouble and into another. Doc has the hands of a brain surgeon, and a cool warm mind. Doc tips his hat to dogs as he drives and the dogs look up and smile at him. He can kill anything for need but he could not even hurt a feeling for pleasure. He has one great fear—that of getting his head wet, so summer or winter he ordinarily wears a rain hat. He will wade in a tide pool up to the chest without feeling damp, but a drop of rain water on his head makes him panicky.4

Now compare the above with this description of Ed Ricketts from The Log:

Although slight in build, when he was angry Ed had no fear and could be really dangerous...This hatred was only for reasonless cruelty. When the infliction of pain was necessary, he had little feeling about it.

For many years he wore a beard, not large, and slightly pointed which accentuated his half-goat, half-Christ appearance.

4Cannery Row, p. 28.
Ed had a strange and courteous relationship with dogs, although he never owned one or wanted to. Passing a dog on the street, he greeted it with a dignity and, when driving, often tipped his hat and smiled and waved at dogs on the sidewalk. And damned if they didn't smile back at him.  

As is almost immediately noted, the passages are substantially the same even to the point of paraphrase. The significant details and phraseology are quite close. The first is the more tightly written, but lacks the human interest of the second.

Rickett's own reaction to his portrayal in Cannery Row is significant:

I used the laboratory and Ed himself in a book called Cannery Row. I took it to him in typescript to see whether he would resent it and to offer to make any changes he would suggest. He read it through carefully, smiling, and when he had finished he said, "Let it go that way. It is written in kindness. Such a thing can't be bad."

But perhaps even more significant is the reaction of Jack Calvin and Joel W. Hedgepeth to this problem of how much of Ed Ricketts was embodied in the character of "Doc" in Cannery Row. Since these men knew Ricketts

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5The Log, xviii-xxi.

6Ibid., lviii.
almost as well as Steinbeck did, their comments are
worth quoting in full and afford a fitting summary to
the problem:

How much of John Steinbeck's Cannery
Row is true? Was Ed really like Doc? To
avoid an irritating yes and no answer as
far as possible, we might say, Yes, Cannery
Row is a true story, but it is not the whole
truth. The laboratory, the phonograph records,
the beer milk shake, and the establishment
across the street--these details are true.
And Ed was really like Doc, but Doc is only a
one-dimensional portrait of Ed. Who would
know from Cannery Row that Ed was the devoted
father of three children, and that he was a
hard-working biologist who managed to get a
great deal done between his records and that
solemn process--Ed would have called it a
lovely procession--of wine jugs? We mean
no criticism of John in suggesting that the
Doc of Cannery Row is half Ricketts the man
and half Steinbeck the author.7

However, a deep and abiding friendship such as that
which existed for nearly twenty years between Edward
Ricketts and John Steinbeck by itself is not conclusive
proof of intellectual influence. Literary history is
doubtless filled with numerous instances of writers
having strong friendships with men who nevertheless
exercized little or no intellectual influence over

7Edward F. Ricketts and Jack Calvin, Between
Pacific Tides (Stanford, 1952), ix-x.
their writing. That such is not the case with Steinbeck and Ricketts can be seen in several ways. One evidence of intellectual influence lies in the fact that Steinbeck once wrote an introduction to Ricketts' book on marine biology, *Between Pacific Tides*. Further evidence of intellectual influence can be seen in the fact that *Sea of Cortez* is a product of collaboration. Steinbeck wrote the "log" or narrative portion and Ricketts the scientific. A final and conclusive bit of evidence of intellectual influence can be seen in this autobiographical reminiscence taken from *The Log*. It concerns the stimulating profitable discussions that took place on many occasions between Steinbeck and Ricketts and the intellectual game they developed as a pastime for these occasions, "speculative metaphysics":

Very many conclusions Ed and I worked out together through endless discussion and reading and observation and experiment. We worked together, and so closely that I do not now know in some cases who started which line of speculation since the end thought was the product of both minds. I do not know whose thought it was.
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. It was an enjoyable exercise on the instruments of our minds, improvisations and variations on a theme, and it gave the same delight and interest that discovered music does...  

"About Ed Ricketts" is filled with similar examples of Rickett's influence on Steinbeck and their converse, for it goes without saying that Steinbeck had a profound influence on Ricketts as well.

Now that the strong effect of Ricketts upon Steinbeck has been demonstrated, it is necessary to determine its extent and nature. The extent of Rickett's intellectual influence upon Steinbeck can be pinpointed chronologically with fair accuracy, at least at its beginning. The circumstances of their meeting has been recorded in detail in "About Ed Ricketts." According to Steinbeck, their friendship was instant  

8Ibid., xlv-dvi.
and lasting from that first meeting in a dentist's office in 1930. 9 Mutuality of interests played a large part in their initial liking since Ricketts "had a library of good music and interests wider than invertebratology." 10 But it was Rickett's magnetic if eccentric personality that drew Steinbeck to him the most, that and his tremendous empathy for people: "He was different from anyone and yet so like that everyone found himself in Ed, and that might be one of the reasons his death had such an impact. It wasn't Ed who had died but a large and important part of oneself." 11

Evidently the influence of Ricketts upon Steinbeck's thought made itself felt almost immediately since the biological substratum that was seen in all of Steinbeck's works with the exceptions of Cup of Gold and The Short Reign of Pippin IV begins suddenly with The Pastures

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9 In "About Ed Ricketts" Steinbeck mentions having known Ricketts for eighteen years. Since Ricketts died in 1948, this would place their meeting sometime in 1930.

10 Ibid., xii.

11 Ibid., xiii.
of Heaven and To A God Unknown, works that Steinbeck was in the process of writing when he first met Ricketts. Now this initial appearance of biology in Steinbeck's fiction as a basis of value judgement is neither tenuous nor uncertain; it is handled even this early with a sureness and a directness that speaks well of Steinbeck's powers of quickly assimilating new ideas. Moreover, it is to be noted that Steinbeck's handling of this biological basis of value may be questioned from the standpoint of its philosophical and artistic shortcomings; it can scarcely be attacked from the standpoint of its truth to Steinbeck. Here was a man enthusiastically in the possession of an idea of sufficient complexity to allow him to evaluate his artistic experience by its dictates.

This sureness of handling, it is to be seen, begins to fall off with the death of Ricketts as all works written after 1948 show not only artistic but ideological difficulties as well. Steinbeck may still be capable of independent artistic creation, but it is certain that this ideology began to crumble with the
death of Ricketts. The simplest explanation of Steinbeck's increasing inadequacy in the handling of his ideology after Ricketts' death would seem to be this: that he was incapable of sustained independent thought, missing the necessary stimulus of Rickett's powerful mind and his collaboration in "speculative metaphysics."

The nature of Ricketts' influence on Steinbeck is more difficult to ascertain. However it can be indicated in broad outline. Since the kind of man Ricketts was plays an important part in determining the nature of his influence upon Steinbeck, it perhaps will be best to begin with an examination of the salient features in Ricketts' personality, in so far as they can be determined.

The most immediately seen characteristic of Ricketts was his tremendous personal magnetism that drew all kinds of people to him. As Steinbeck points out in "About Ed Ricketts," "no one who knew him will deny the force and influence of Ed Ricketts. Everyone near him was influenced by him, deeply and permanently.
Some he taught how to think, others how to see or hear."\textsuperscript{12}

Yet as pervading as this personal magnetism was, still, as Steinbeck readily admits, no two people who knew Ricketts could agree on the nature of his strong personal impact. Steinbeck, perhaps Ricketts' closest friend, readily confesses his own inability to fathom Ricketts' manysided personality. Some idea of Ricketts' highly complex, contradictory nature can be seen in this admittedly groping attempt to characterize him:

Nearly everyone who knew him has tried to define him. Such things were said of him as, "He was half-Christ and half-goat." He was a great teacher and a great lecher—an immortal who loved women. Surely he was an original and his character was unique, but in such a way that everyone was related to him, one in this way and another in some different way. He was gentle but capable of ferocity, small and slight but gave little and received much. His thinking was as paradoxical as his life. He thought in mystical terms and hated and distrusted mysticism. He was an individualist who studied colonial animals with satisfaction.\textsuperscript{13}

Yet as strong as Ricketts' magnetism was, it quickly becomes apparent when one examines his personality traits that he was essentially a lonely man despite

\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, x.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, xi.
his many friends. Ricketts' essential loneliness, his
detachment from the humanity that constantly engulfed
him, is well seen in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday.
Living in the world and observing it with avid interest,
Ricketts was not of it, keeping his essential self in-
violate from it. This essential detachment from the
world perhaps was paid for by Ricketts with his habitual
melancholy. According to Steinbeck, Ricketts' life was
a continuous search for something that he never quite
found. Not finding it in debauchery—Ricketts, if
"About Ed Ricketts" is to be taken at face value, was
incredibly promiscuous—he sought for it as well in
the arts and came nearer to finding it there, especially
in music.

This search was the source of Ricketts' philosophy
of "breaking through," which Steinbeck defines as
follows: "of coming out through the back of the mirror
into some kind of reality which would make the day
world dreamlike." This Apollonian idea of "breaking
through" was an obsession of Ricketts and he found

14 Ibid., xlviii-xl ix.
15 Ibid., liii.
elusive evidences of it in the art that he valued the most highly: Faust, Gregorian music, and the poetry of Li Po.  

As could be expected of such a complex and many-sided personality, Ricketts' mind was far-ranging and subtle. A freethinker, he strongly distrusted all organized religions, "suspecting them of having been fouled with economics and power and politics." Nor did he believe in an "after-life," other than chemical, concluding that promises of an after-life were based on fear or false hopes. An omnivorous reader, Ricketts read deeply not only in his own field of marine invertebratology but also widely in literature. His greatest reading enthusiasm was Faust; the seeker after knowledge he perhaps found it easy to identify with since in many respects Ricketts himself was a Faustian figure.

16Ibid., liii.
17Ibid., xliv.
18Ibid., xliv.
19Ibid., xlv.
But for all his magnetic personality and wide range of interests, it was likely Ricketts' scientific discipline that affected Steinbeck the most. The more one studies the sciences of ecology and invertebratology, the more apparent the tremendous intellectual impact of Ricketts upon Steinbeck becomes. What is non-teleology ultimately but an ecological attempt to relate man to the forces that make up his environment? Again, the central image in Steinbeck's fiction, the tide pool with its furiously struggling and reproducing organisms, was most probably obtained from Steinbeck's knowledge of Ricketts' vocation, which was largely the study and collection of the intertidal marine invertebrates.

The science of ecology is of comparatively recent origin; the word ecology itself was first coined by the German biologist Haeckel in 1869.20 As a clearly defined field of biology, ecology is even more recent,

dating from about 1900. Ecology is normally defined as "the study of the relation of organisms to their environment," or, "the science of the interrelations between living organisms and their environment." Normally ecology is concerned with groups of organisms, and how environment affects their functional processes. Thus as Odum says, ecology can best be understood as "environmental biology." 

Since it is quite apparent that the science of ecology has a tremendous scope and numerous contacts with other sciences, for the convenience of its practitioners it is broken down into general subdivisions, one of the most important being marine ecology. Within the field of marine ecology, as in the other subdivisions of ecology, the researcher normally confines himself to the study of one particular species for concentration and precision of results.

Enough has been said of the science of ecology to show that Ricketts though classified as a marine

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21 Ibid., p. 3.
22 Ibid., p. 4.
23 Ibid., p. 4.
invertebratologist was primarily a marine ecologist--there actually being no hard and fast reason to separate them--whose special application was the environmental study of marine intertidal invertebrates. *Between Pacific Tides* quite obviously is an ecological study of the habitats of the marine invertebrates of the Pacific coast between Alaska and northern Mexico. Again, the scientific portion of *Sea of Cortez* may be considered ecological in its point of view as well as being a sequel of sorts to *Between Pacific Tides*. But perhaps the most explicit evidence of Rickett's ecological bent of mind and Steinbeck's extensive practical knowledge of the science is seen in *Sweet Thursday* in "Doc's" laboratory experiments with octopii.

The scientific and literary articulateness of Ricketts goes far to explain the intellectual magnetism of Ricketts for a writer like Steinbeck. An omnivorous reader himself from childhood, Steinbeck would probably be impressed by a friend who could not only give him the knowledge of a particular scientific discipline, marine invertebratology, but also could converse with him intelligently in his own medium and
who was a magnetic personality as well. And it would be fatally easy for such an impressionable man as Steinbeck to become intellectually dependent upon such a man as Ricketts for literary advice and ideas without really suspecting his dependency. There is more than a hint of such dependency in "About Ed Ricketts." In view of Steinbeck's very evident literary decline after the death of Ricketts can one seriously doubt that such a dependence existed? Furthermore, Steinbeck's assertion of equal contribution in the discussion of ideas in the game of "speculative metaphysics" can be doubted in part. Even granting that Steinbeck's contribution was more or less equal to that of Ricketts once any discussion with Ricketts was joined, it still can be suspected that Steinbeck in the realm of abstract ideas needed the keen stimulus which Ricketts undoubtedly offered him to awaken his mind. No one can doubt Steinbeck's very evident powers of literary inventiveness, but one can well suspect his independence from others for ideas.
Now that the influence of Ricketts upon Steinbeck has been examined, the investigation into the origins of Steinbeck's biological naturalism can be continued. Although Ricketts, as has been seen, exercised a profound influence on the shaping of Steinbeck's biological ideas, the fact remains that they did not originate with him, for in a literal sense, no man ever originates ideas. Perhaps the most that he can do, as Ricketts probably did, is to focus ideas in particular ways and give them special applications. Even if it can be assumed, as indeed it must from the available evidence, that Steinbeck obtained his biological ideas from Ed Ricketts, their origin must still be accounted for. Though realizing that such an investigation must be conjectural, it is by no means a nebulous pursuit.

Investigation shows that each of Steinbeck's significant biological ideas is a composite of several other ideas. For example, "group" man appears to be derived not only from biological analogy with the pelagic tunicates as was seen in Chapter II, but also
appears to embody W. C. Allee's idea of cooperation as a force in evolution. Moreover, "group" man in its historical applications suggests a parallel with Tolstoy's idea of history that apparently is too close to be one of mere chance.

That much of the significance of "group" man is due to Allee's ideas of biological cooperation can be seen in an examination of these ideas. Allee in his book, *The Social Life of Animals* with characteristic modesty sees the idea of group cooperation in nature as ultimately stemming from the Greek philosopher Empedocles, who also seems to have arrived at its converse, the struggle for existence, as well.\textsuperscript{24} The next thinker who appears to have dealt with the idea of cooperation significantly was the third Earl of Shaftsbury. Allee considers him to be "the first intellectual in the modern period to recognize fairly clearly that nature represents a social impulse that has regard for others,

as well as a drive for individual self-preservation; that, in fact, there are racial drives, that go beyond personal advantage and can only be explained by their advantage to the group."  

Although, as Allee points out, a number of eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers continued to recognize the importance of the idea of cooperation, it quickly was ignored as an consequence of the dazzling implications of Darwin's theory of natural selection. In the intellectual ferment of the evolutionary controversy following the publication of The Origin of the Species (1859), the idea of cooperation was almost lost sight of in view of the tremendous experimental evidence of the struggle for existence among life forms. However, there was one pioneering effort in the late nineteenth century, which Allee admits owing strong debts to, Des Societes Animales, of the French scientist Espinas. Espinas' thesis, according to Allee, contended that "no living being is solitary, but that from the lowest to the highest each

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25Ibid., p. 8.
is normally immersed in some sort of social life..."26

Building by experimental result from Espinas' largely suggestive conclusions, Allee over a number of years amassed a tremendous amount of evidence confirming the existence of the idea of cooperation. Working through laboratory experiment and natural observation, Allee showed that animals solved many of their environmental hazards by group cooperation. In a telling experiment with goldfish—to cite one of many—Allee demonstrated that a group of goldfish could resist the effects of a toxic much more effectively than could the same number singly given proportional amounts of toxic. Analogous experiments were performed with other animals with broadly similar results. Everywhere Allee found copious evidence to support the principle of biological cooperation in nature which he sums up as follows:

...the growing weight of evidence indicates that animals are rarely solitary; that they are almost necessarily members of loosely integrated racial and inter-racial communities, in part woven together by environmental

26Ibid., p. 10.
factors and in part by mutual attraction between the individual members of the different communities, no one of which can be affected without changing some or even all the rest.27

Steinbeck's idea of "group" man now can easily be seen as a partial extension of Allee's thesis. Whereas Allee confined himself to explanations demonstrable from observable evidence, Steinbeck perhaps following the lead of "speculative metaphysics" carries Allee's idea of biological cooperation to its ultimate conclusion. If the individual organisms of a species seem to be bound to each other in such observable fashions as Allee has demonstrated, it is not reasonable to assume that they are bound together in ways immeasurable and undetectable as well? Thus Steinbeck's "group" man can be construed as a metaphysical speculation on the implications of the idea of biological cooperation.

However, this metaphysical component in "group" man, it must be admitted, could equally well have been gained from an altogether different source, Tolstoy's

27Ibid., p. 21.
War and Peace. In War and Peace Tolstoy suggests a theory of history strikingly similar to Steinbeck's handling of "group" man in "The Leader of the People" and in The Grapes of Wrath. In an attempt to explain the causes of Napoleon's campaign of 1812 against Russia Tolstoy comes to the following conclusion:

History—that is the unconscious life of humanity in the swarm, in the community—makes every minute of the life of kings its own, as an instrument for attaining its ends...

The people of the west moved to the east for men to kill one another, and by the law of the coincidence of causes, thousands of petty causes backed one another up and coincided with that event to bring about that movement and that war: resentment at the non-observance of the continental system, and the Duke of Oldenburg, and the massing of troops in Prussia—a measure undertaken, as Napoleon supposed, with the object of securing armed peace—and the French Emperor's love of war, to which he had grown accustomed, in conjunction with the inclinations of his people...

Not one of those is the cause. All that simply makes up the conjunction of conditions under which every living, organic, elemental event takes place. And the botanist who says that the apple has fallen because the cells

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28Moore has noted that "Steinbeck has been deeply moved by Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy." The Novels of John Steinbeck, p. 94.
are decomposing, and so on, will be just as right as the boy standing under the tree who says the apple has fallen because he wanted to eat it...In historical events great men--so called--are but the labels that serve to give a name to an event, and like labels, they have the least possible connection with the event itself. 29

Although Steinbeck's historical theory is personified more than is Tolstoy's abstraction of history, it is apparent that there are more than superficial resemblances between the two ideas. The first and most obvious resemblance is that both men see history as a predetermined causal process, not subject to the will of any individual. Though Steinbeck's "group" man does make use of an apparent leader in a historical movement as a kind of "eye" 30 or sense cell for the otherwise blind irrational group man, this usage apparently does not reveal any marked divergence from Tolstoy to the view of leaders as labels, since in both instances the apparent leaders are used as a means to an end by the historical force.


30 Wilson, op. cit., as quoted from In Dubious Battle.
Secondly, both see history essentially as an irrational process, predetermined perhaps, but unpredictable—at least by humans. Tolstoy who ironically sees all explanations of historical movements as being equally valid, hence equally absurd, would probably concur with Steinbeck's analogy of the amoeba as an example of the working of the historical process:

...consider the movements of an Amoeba under the microscope. Finger-like processes, the pseudopodia, extend at various places beyond the confines of the central mass.... Suppose that the molecules which "happened" to be situated in the forefront of the pseudopodium through which the animal is progressing, or into which it will have flowed subsequently, should be endowed with consciousness and should say to themselves and to their fellows: "We are directly leading this great procession, our leadership 'causes' all the rest of the population to move this way, the mass follows the path we blaze." This would be equivalent to the attitude with which we commonly regard leadership.31

Thirdly, Tolstoy in his conception of history suggests something akin to Steinbeck's idea of non-teleology, which earlier in the dissertation, was shown to undergird the idea of "group" man. What Tolstoy has in

31Steinbeck, *Sea of Cortez*, pp. 138-139.
common with nonteleology is an attitude toward the world which is strikingly similar to Steinbeck's nonteleological notions in several respects. First, as Isaiah Berlin has shown, Tolstoy is a pluralist; that is to say he sees the phenomenal world in all its graphic multiplicity:

Tolstoy perceived reality in its multiplicity as a collection of separate entities round and into which he saw with a clarity and a penetration scarcely ever equalled... No author who has ever lived has shown such powers of insight into the variety of life... 32

Second, Tolstoy has "an incurable love of the concrete, the empirical, the verifiable, and an instinctive distrust of the abstract, the impalpable, the supernatural—in short an early tendency to a scientific and positivist approach."33 Thus Tolstoy like Steinbeck is firmly grounded in the world of common sense which both take as a given in their historical theorizing. Yet for all his emphasis on the sensory world, Tolstoy is not a materialist; he had, as Berlin shows, too great a


33 Ibid., p. 10.
belief in a unitary system of thought that would explain all the diversity he saw so unforgettable to ever be content with explanations that satisfied him only on the level of material phenomena. And here is the third nonteleological resemblance between Tolstoy and Steinbeck: neither man is content with a material explanation of the universe that he senses so vividly. Both begin by taking as given sensory aspects of reality and end up with a near-mystical, all-embracing monad unity.

But in this unity lies an important difference between the two men. Tolstoy's unity is moral; it stems from his conviction that there is a moral order operating in the universe even though the sensory world shows little or no evidence of such an order. Steinbeck's unity, on the other hand, is non-moral or rather un-moral, for Steinbeck, for the most part, seems oblivious if not actively hostile to most conventional ethical systems. This is not to say that Steinbeck is not concerned with moral problems, but rather to say that his primary moral concern lies in experimental rather than abstract moral problems. Thus the order
that Steinbeck sees operating in the universe is essentially the mystical belief that all things are one thing, and that one thing is all things.34

Steinbeck's third major biological idea, racial memory, has numerous analogues to ideas past and present. Since to indicate its relationship to more than a few of these analogues would take the discussion too far afield, it will be necessary to limit the discussion of racial memory only to those ideas to which it bears explicit resemblances.

Fundamentally, racial memory is not a new idea. In one form or another, it goes back to the classical world, perhaps even father, for racial memory ultimately is seemingly a derivation of the idea of immortality. In the conception in which we are most familiar with it, the idea of immortality is found in the Christian doctrine of life after death. However, it is clear that the concept of immortality even in its Christian context did not originate with Christianity. A close approximation is to be found in the motivation

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34The Log, p. 150.
of the Greek mystery religions. A probable source of the idea might lie in a need to believe that life has transcendent value because of its observed shortness under the generally harsh conditions of the stone age and ancient world.

Thus in some form the idea of immortality has remained in the intellectual main stream of Western civilization. It has so thoroughly penetrated the fabric of Western culture that it has become liberated in large measure from its chief proponent for centuries, Christianity, and has manifested itself in guises so utterly different from its Christian contexts that resemblances between them are almost non-existent. Hence, because its ready availability and protean application, the idea of immortality is almost an intellectual assumption of the Western climate of opinion, so much so that it has managed to thwart almost all attempts to keep it out of scientific theory. Science, which purports to be an orderly body of facts and deductions from experimental results, turns out upon examination to embody many ideas which, objectively speaking, it would be expected to disavow. Such an
idea, of course, is immortality. That the idea of immortality permeates modern scientific theory in large measure can best be seen in the vitalistic controversy in biology, which has successfully resisted all attempts to purge it from science.

Vitalism might almost be said to be the bar sinister twin of biology since the first vitalist of note turns out also to be the first significant biologist as well, Aristotle. Indeed, Aristotle's vitalistic theory with few emendations has managed to survive until the present. Vitalism, the doctrine that life has its origin in some vital rather than chemical or physical principle, seems to have received its first serious attacks in the nineteenth century. Until then, with few exceptions, it seems to have been taken more or less for granted as an explanation of the origin of life. Perhaps the most serious objection that nineteenth century and later biologists have held against vitalism was that it is a metaphysical explanation of a scientific problem. In effect, it is a deus ex machina solution.
Nonetheless, for all its metaphysical implications, vitalism even in the nineteenth century had numerous reputable adherents, the most notable being Dreisch and Alfred Russel Wallace, the co-discoverer of the Darwinian theory of natural selection. Wallace, in particular, believed that no completely mechanistic system, such as that in vogue in the late nineteenth century, could satisfactorily explain the evolutionary process. That Wallace believed evolution was purposeful can be seen in his postulate of a Creative Mind as its first cause. \(^{35}\) Wheeler's history of vitalism, to which most of the present discussion is indebted, convincingly shows the tremendous interpenetration of biology by vitalism despite considerable efforts made by biologists to purge it, an effort which even at present shows little sign of succeeding.

It almost goes without saying that Steinbeck's idea of racial memory is strongly vitalistic in its major implications. Any theory that implies direction

in evolution, as racial memory appears to do, in its idea of the inheritance of acquired psychic material (see Chapter II) is vitalistic and not mechanistic in implication, for mechanism demands that evolution be considered a product of chance. Moreover, racial memory is vitalistic in another way as well. In its assertion that psychic material can be inherited by being buried in the germ plasm, racial memory can be considered an argument for the continuity of life and that life is "not chopped up into the fragments we call individuals."\textsuperscript{36}

This idea that life is continuous and not broken up into discrete units is particularly well seen in two vitalistic theories that racial memory bears close resemblance to, Butler's idea of unconscious memory and Jung's idea of the Collective Unconscious. Butler for a long time was regarded as a scientific crank, a dilettante meddling in areas that he had no right to. Rather than attempting to crush him in counter argument, the Darwinians did him the greater injury by

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid., p. 115.
simply ignoring him (Butler first was a zealous adherent of Darwin, then as zealously an opponent). Butler's first rehabilitation came in 1909, when the eminent biologist Bateson rediscovered him and recognized his importance:

Samuel Butler, the most brilliant and by far the most interesting of Darwin's opponents...whose works are at length emerging from oblivion. 37

Butler's major objection to Darwin, as Barzun has aptly put it, was that "Darwin banished mind from the universe."38 Butler himself saw the battle as one "between teleology and non-teleology."39 The crux of the argument was whether evolution was purposeful or not. Butler in contradistinction to Darwinians believed that it was and wrote a number of books demonstrating that it was, the most notable being Life and Habit, Unconscious Memory, Luck or Cunning, and Evolution Old and New.


38Ibid., p. 122.

In all of these works Butler freely acknowledges debts to predecessors and contemporaries in coming to the following conclusions: (1) that the older evolutionists, particularly Darwin's own grandfather Erasmus Darwin had acceptable evolutionary hypotheses, (2) that memory, not natural selection is the chief moving force in evolution. The latter, of course, is Butler's theory of unconscious memory.

Butler's argument for unconscious memory is extremely ingenious. Beginning with the premise that the organism is a living creature and not a machine, Butler argues that it is characterized by an "interest": The organism seeks to do certain things and not others. Barzun's summary of Butler's arguments which has been followed continues:

The physical action of living things is, ...
...the expression of a mental action--meaning by mind not Intellect, but consciousness, however low and limited... It followed that for Butler, effort, endeavor, purpose, have something to do with biological evolution, and... that living forms evolve because they want to: desires lead to efforts; successful efforts result in new powers; and new powers create new desires. As Butler saw it, the process was of course limited by the environment and the narrow powers of the creature, but it
corresponded to what could readily be observed in the phenomena of growth, habit, and learning. Above all it got rid of the inexplicable mechanism by which the evolution and the life of living things was made to result from chance...\textsuperscript{40}

Butler in his application of the theory partially anticipates Jung's Collective Unconscious in his insistence on the unbroken continuity of man's psychic experience:

\begin{quote}
It is one against legion when a man tries to differ from his own past selves. He must yield or die if he wants to differ widely, so as to lack natural instincts, such as hunger or thirst, and not to gratify them...His past selves are living in him at this moment with the accumulated life of centuries. 'Do this, this, which we too have done, and found our profit in it,' cry the souls of his forefathers within him...\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

That the above strongly resembles Jung's idea of the Collective Unconscious can easily be seen in a comparison. In the following passage, taken from \textit{The Integration of the Personality}, Jung describes the Collective Unconscious:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{40}Barzun, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{41}Samuel Butler, \textit{Unconscious Memory}, p. 20. Butler is quoting from \textit{Life and Habit}.\end{quote}
This localization explains a good deal of their archetypes' strangeness: they bring into our ephemeral consciousness an unknown psychic life belonging to a remote past. This psychic life is the mind of our ancient ancestors, the way in which they thought and felt...As the body is a sort of mind...the unconscious psyche is not only immensely old, it is also able to grow increasingly into an equally remote future. It forms, and is part of, the human species just as much as the body, which is also individually ephemeral, yet collectively of immeasurable duration.42

Both Butler and Jung see man as inheriting psychic material from his ancestors, and further, that this psychic material is continuous. That is to say man has an unbroken psychological continuity with his predecessors. Again, each sees man as being unable to modify this psychic inheritance significantly or rebel too actively against its promptings. From these and other resemblances it can be argued that Butler and Jung have arrived at fundamentally the same idea.

The question thus naturally comes to mind as to whether Jung derived the Collective Unconscious from

42 C. G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality, (New York, 1939), pp. 24-25.
Butler, since Butler was his predecessor. Here a tentative no must be given in answer, for there is no evidence that Jung had read Butler before arriving at his theory. Jung, a scrupulous scholar, certainly makes no mention of Butler in *The Integration of the Personality*, in which he gives a brief historical account of the ideas that influenced his thinking on the subject.

Nonetheless, an influence of sorts can be established between the two in that both appear to have been virtually influenced in their ideas by those of Schopenhauer, and more particularly, Von Hartmann. It is readily apparent that the idea of unconscious memory as well as the Collective Unconscious rests in part upon the notion of a "blind" will that operates beneath and independent of conscious considerations, but which, nevertheless, has a profound effect upon the conscious mind. Moreover, this blind or unconscious will seems to exert a teleological force that drives all life forms toward its own unconscious ends. Von Hartmann's *Philosophy of the Unconscious* saw this Schopenhauerian will as a cosmic principle operative in the universe, a speculation
that both Butler and Jung were strongly influenced by, but ultimately reacted against, each coming to the conclusion independently that this teleology or blind purposiveness in life is inherited in the form of an unconscious memory.

However this problem of influence is made much more difficult when Steinbeck's racial memory is examined. Despite all the uncanny resemblances between it, the Collective Unconscious, and unconscious memory, such as the inheritance of psychic material, the archetypical nature of this psychic material, and its being carried in the germ plasm, the fact remains that there is no evidence of Steinbeck having read either Butler or Jung. To be sure, there is no proof that he has not read them, and there is the strong possibility that he might be familiar with Jung in view of his and Ricketts' penchant for omnivorous reading.

Notwithstanding the possibility that Steinbeck might be familiar with Jung, there is also the possibility that he could have arrived at the idea of racial memory without having read Jung. As was seen
earlier, the idea of racial memory in one form or another has been endemic in western culture. Moreover, to anyone of such a speculative cast of mind as Steinbeck and, more particularly, Ricketts, fired by the imaginative implications of biology, the idea of life's continuity, an inheritance not only of physical material but also of psychic, would seem to be a speculation too certain to be overlooked for long. Given the game of "speculative metaphysics," outlined earlier in the chapter, it is difficult to see how Steinbeck and Ricketts could really avoid arriving at the idea of a racial memory in which man inherited the collective experience of his ancestors.

To see how Steinbeck and Ricketts could have arrived at the notion of racial memory through the game of "speculative metaphysics," it will be necessary to review the essentials of the game as listed by Steinbeck in The Log. Speculative metaphysics began with observations based upon and verified by empirical reality. This, in short, was always its given—its
only objective check. From there the speculation could go the gamut of fancy as Steinbeck freely admits:

In our game there was no stricture of rightness. It was an enjoyable exercise on the instruments of our minds, improvisations and variations on a theme...\footnote{The Log, xlv.}

Given such an undertaking and the vigorous, well read if not philosophically disciplined minds of Steinbeck and Ricketts, it is possible to see how Steinbeck's major biological ideas could have been evolved. For example, the idea of "group" man seen in this light becomes a fanciful extrapolation of Allee's thesis of cooperation among animals. If, as Allee's thesis seems to suggest: that if group behavior among animals can be considered a factor in their evolution, then why not carry the idea a step further--a step beyond the empirical verification prerequisite for science--and say that all life forms inherit a tendency toward group behavior that makes them upon occasion collect in large group organisms? A similar process can be outlined for racial memory. Racial
memory in the light of speculative metaphysics might be considered a cellular awareness of evolution. That is to say if man's body reflects some of the evolutionary changes that he has passed through in the past, then perhaps his mind reflects them also.

Then, too, such a speculative origin of Steinbeck's fundamental ideas might well account for many of their logical contradictions. Such contradictions as that existing between non-teleological thinking and racial memory, which implies a purposive force in evolution, can be explained on this basis. For Steinbeck like most artists is not a rigorous logician and tends to handle ideas more from their imaginative implications than he does from their logical, a tendency well crystalized by the game of speculative metaphysics.
Steinbeck's biological naturalism can clearly be seen in his handling of people. His preference for exhibiting the animal side of man to the exclusion of man's spirit and reason is readily seen in his characters, many of whom are scarcely removed from the animals with which Steinbeck so frequently associates them. Edmund Wilson has noted this tendency acutely in his essay on Steinbeck.\(^1\)

Wilson's list of Steinbeck's animal men ends in 1940, nearly twenty years ago and covers less than half of Steinbeck's published novels. Steinbeck could conceivably have abandoned his biological naturalism in the meanwhile, but he has not. If anything, his attachment for it has increased. A brief survey of

\(^1\)Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 36.
the major characters of most of these later novels will
give strong evidence of the continuance of Steinbeck's
biological naturalism.

Admittedly the characters of The Moon Is Down
(1942), show little obvious evidence of Steinbeck's
biological naturalism; but, as Lisca has shown, they
bear subtle evidences of biological thought. First of
all, the invaded people reveal "that softness of moral
fiber which makes them fall easy prey to the invaders."²
Secondly, the invaders inevitably fail in their con­quest because of the very efficiency of their organiza­tion, which destroys their ability to adapt to new
environmental challenges.³

However, little argument is needed for the
denizens of Cannery Row (1945): Mack and the boys, as
well as Doc, are too intimately connected with animal
activities to be overlooked as evidence. Their living
in pipes, which seems a curious analogue to the burrows

²Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 188.
³Ibid., p. 189.
of certain animals; the frog hunt in which Mack and
the boys overcome the wiles of the prey by proving to
be superior if more irrational animals; and Doc's
curious biology in which he "animalizes" himself to
understand his specimens the better are excellent
proofs of Steinbeck's biological cast of mind. While
the characters of The Wayward Bus (1947) are apparently
taken from all walks of society, this technique of
selection is merely a convenient way for Steinbeck to
demonstrate the biological superiority of the animal-
man hero, Juan Chicoy, and his kind, over the business-
man scapegoat, Mr. Pritchard and his kind. For all its
abstraction and artful concealment, Burning Bright (1950)
has a clearly biological theme: the human desire to
procreate is a much more important consideration than
the social mores which would restrict its observance
to certain defined paths. East of Eden (1952), which
purports to be something of a parable on the problem
of good and evil, is more probably, if unwittingly, a
study in biological determinism since Steinbeck in
effect tries to explain the motivation of his char-
acters in the book from the standpoint of their
biological heredity. Finally, *Sweet Thursday* (1954) is but a nostalgic return to the cheerful animal world of *Cannery Row*.

Still a specific analysis of the Steinbeck character will demonstrate his biological naturalism even more clearly. First, a discussion of his characters from the standpoint of construction will illustrate how Steinbeck creates character and how biology plays an important role in his construction of character. Second, the Steinbeck character will be examined as a biological symbol to show how Steinbeck effects a pervading criticism of society through the use of character as symbol.

I

The simpleness of Steinbeck's character construction is notable. Steinbeck relies heavily on an initial description of the character to prepare the reader for the character's subsequent actions. What the character thinks and how the other characters regard him are techniques only fleetingly used by Steinbeck. Normally the Steinbeck character's actions are important only
in so far as they provide additional confirmation of what was known about him in the beginning of the story.

Technically speaking, it is evident that Steinbeck is a conventional novelist as far as the creation of character is concerned, somewhat reminiscent of Trollope. The following comments by David Daiches on the techniques of characterization followed by Trollope could be applied with some minor reservations to that of Steinbeck:

...The other, and perhaps the commoner, way is illustrated as well as anywhere in the third chapter of Trollope's Barchester Towers. The chapter is entitled "Dr. and Mrs. Proudie" and is a complete formal account of the characters of Dr. Proudie and his wife. First a general sketch of Dr. Proudie's personality and habits of mind, then an account of his career, the further expansion of his present nature and attitude. Then Mrs. Proudie is taken out and similarly treated. By the end of the chapter we know exactly who and what these two characters are: we know no more about their characters at the end of the book—we have only seen the applications to particular events of the general principles already enunciated. The interest in the book lies in these events and in our noting and approving how the characters run true to form throughout.  

Though Steinbeck's handling of the technique is much more simplified than Trollope's, he does follow the same general pattern. He first describes the character's appearance and dominant characteristics, which, since his people operate on a more elemental level than those of Trollope, lack the variety of Trollope's. Steinbeck then demonstrates the validity of this introductory material to his character by having him confirm what has already been said about him. Certainly, there is a significant reason why Steinbeck employs this technique. Because of Steinbeck's biological cast of mind, it would not be feasible for his characters to develop as they would in the hands of a more psychologically oriented novelist such as Henry James. It is more pertinent for Steinbeck's purpose to regard his people, whatever his emotional attitudes toward them may be, as guinea pigs in a controlled environment. One often has the feeling when reading Steinbeck that his characters often move little more than vehicles for biological ideas.

Among the more representative Steinbeck characters have been Ma Joad of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Juan Chicoy
and Mr. Pritchard of *The Wayward Bus*, and "Doc" of *Cannery Row*. These characters have been chosen deliberately to reveal several different ways in which Steinbeck approaches the technique of Trollope. With Ma Joad, Juan Chicoy, and "Doc," Steinbeck follows a method of concretion: he individualizes the character by giving the reader a mass of details about him and his activities. On the other hand, with Mr. Pritchard, Steinbeck keeps his character abstract, tending to portray a type rather than an individual.

A detailed observation of these four characters, beginning with Juan Chicoy is revealing:

...Juan was clean-shaven, but not since yesterday, and along the corners of his chin, and on his neck, the coming whiskers were grizzled and white like those of an old Airedale. This was the more apparent because the rest of his beard was so intensely black. His black eyes were squinting and humorous, the way a man's eyes squint when he is smoking and cannot take the cigarette from his mouth. And Juan's mouth was full and good, a relaxed mouth, the underlip slightly protruding—not in petulance but in humor and self-confidence—the upper lip well formed except left of center where a deep scar was almost white against the pink tissue. The lip must have been cut clear through at one time, and now this thin taut band of white was a strain on the fullness
of the lip and made it bunch in tiny tucks on each side. His ears were not very large, but they stood out sharply from his head like seashells, or in the position a man would hold them with his hands if he wanted to hear more clearly...\(^5\)

By accumulation of detail Steinbeck has created an individual. No single detail can be said to characterize Juan Chicoy, but the correlation of all suggest a person who is unique, and to a degree unlike all other Steinbeckian characterizations. Of particular significance in the description of Chicoy is Steinbeck's penchant for giving a detail and "philosophizing" over it. This speculation gives depth to the individual being drawn; suggesting, among other things, that he exists over and above the physical framework that molds him.

But Steinbeck's handling of Juan Chicoy, though illustrating the point in question adequately, still does not express the full brilliance of the individual technique as shown in his most famous characterization, Ma Joad. Ma Joad is depicted more incisively. The creative details of this character lack the rambling

quality as those revealing Juan. Steinbeck establishes a hierarchy of details in his picture of Ma Joad implying that some are far more significant than others:

...Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with child bearing and work. She wore a loose Mother Hubbard of gray cloth in which there had once been colored flowers, but the color was washed out now, so that the small flowered pattern was only a little lighter gray than the background. The dress came down to her ankles, and her strong, broad, bare feet moved quickly and deftly over the floor. Her thin, still-gray hair was gathered in a sparse wispy knot at the back of her head. Strong, freckled arms were bare to the elbow, and her hands were chubby and delicate, like those of a plump little girl. She looked out into the sunshine. Her full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. 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. She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken...6

Thus Steinbeck has achieved the universal through depicting the particular. Ma Joad is an individual, but she is a woman, possessing the universal attributes of womankind.

6The Grapes of Wrath, pp. 99-100.
Steinbeck's humorous individualizing of characters is another significant technique. Probably the best example of this approach is "Doc," the eccentric biologist of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday:

Doc is the owner and operator of the Western Biological Laboratory. Doc is rather small, deceptively small, for he is wiry and very strong and when passionate anger comes on him he can be very fierce. He wears a beard and his face is half Christ and half satyr and his face tells the truth. It is said that he has helped many a girl out of one trouble and into another. Doc tips his hat to dogs as he drives by and the dogs look up and smile at him. He can kill anything for need but he could not hurt a feeling for pleasure. He has one great fear—that of getting his head wet, so that summer or winter he ordinarily wears a rain hat. He will wade in a tide pool up to the chest without feeling damp, but a drop of rain water on his head makes him panicky.7

Here Steinbeck has achieved a creation by carefully exaggerating a few selected details.

Thus, Steinbeck appears to create unique characters by two distinct methods of experimental distilling. The first method, illustrated by Juan Chicoy and Ma Joad, respectively, points out a series of strongly individualized characteristics comparatively

7Cannery Row, p. 28.
unselective, and an attempt to achieve the universal through the careful choice of significant particulars. The second method, exemplified by "Doc," was to emphasize incongruous elements to achieve the individual by caricature.

The reverse process, that of working from the abstract to the particular, though not as frequently seen in Steinbeck's major characterizations, is still to be noted by fairly numerous examples. Mr. Pritchard, the businessman of The Wayward Bus, is the best example of the technique. Here Steinbeck is clothing an abstract principle in human garb.

Mr. Pritchard is drawn in large general strokes; there is little done to particularize him. Every detail used in forming Pritchard is generic. Steinbeck points out his "business manners" rather than his uniqueness as an individual member of the human species. Steinbeck also uses this general technique of characterization, as in Pritchard's case, to portray characters whom he dislikes. Steinbeck, in effect, uses the method to create "straw men" to personify his dislikes. Mr. Pritchard is a businessman; ergo, he is
a bad man, having no individuality, for it is a point
to be noted in Steinbeck's people that the antagonistic
characterizations are almost never individualized;
they exist as (or they are) specific expressions of a
general force as this portrait of Pritchard reveals:

...A medium sized man came out. He looked
like Truman and like the vice presidents of
companies and like certified public account­
tants. His glasses were squared off at the
corners. His suit was gray and correct,
and there was a little gray in his face too.
He was a businessman, dressed like one,
looked like one... He was never alone. His
business was conducted by groups of men who
worked alike, thought alike, and even looked
alike. His lunches were with men like him­
self who joined together in clubs so that
no foreign element or idea could enter...
Wherever he went he was not one man but a
unit in a corporation, a unit in a club,
in a lodge, in a church, in a political
party. His thoughts and ideas were never
subjected to criticism since he willingly
associated only with people like himself.8

Mr. Pritchard is thus a prime example of the human ten­
dency to collectivize.

Consequently it appears that Steinbeck's usage of
the general method of characterization springs from two
different sources, which on close examination are found

8The Wayward Bus, p. 37.
to be one, his attempt to personify an abstract principle. The only significant difference between these two commonly motivated techniques is the added factor of dislike.

Although the specific and abstract techniques of characterization differ in their portrayal of people, the general drawing the type, and the specific, the individual, it can be seen that neither departs from the Trollope tradition of character. Both utilize an introductory description as their basic building block in developing the character being drawn.9

9 However, Steinbeck apparently does make a radical departure from the Trollope tradition in one of his characterizations, that of "group" man. In this idea of man as a group organism Steinbeck appears to fuse the concepts of the group and the individual by seeing a mob of men as a single organism. This idea seen explicitly in In Dubious Battle, and "The Leader of the People," is used symbolically in a number of novels to question the concept of the individual man. Indeed, as Dr. Burton implies in this analysis of "group" man In Dubious Battle, the most individualistic men are those who perceive and act upon "group" man's dictates the quickest.

Yet, as will be seen in Chapter V, Steinbeck is by no means consistent in his handling of "group" man. Later, by the time of East of Eden, Steinbeck has come full circle in his approach to man's group instincts. By this time he has come to distrust them chiefly because they appear to confine the individual and circumscribe his creative impulses. Indeed, it is man's mind and his creativeness that individualizes him—an apparent repudiation of much of the irrationality of Steinbeck's early biological naturalism.
Because of this reliance on a fixed method of characterization, there is little apparent change in the Steinbeck character as he progresses through the action of his book. Indeed, it would be injurious to Steinbeck's purpose for his people to change much from his initial portrayal of them.

The evidence for such an assertion is considerable. First of all, the Steinbeck character is generally a severely limited creature. He exists largely in a realm of sensation; most of his time and activities are spent in satisfying physical needs and desires such as those for food, clothing, shelter, and procreation. There is normally little cultural refinement to be found in him; outside of apparent exceptions as Doc, who loves all the arts, especially music. As a rule, he regards such consideration as frivolous, if not hateful. Frequently, only the most elementary ethical and moral considerations intrude upon his physical preoccupations. The factors of need and desire for any sought-for entity are sufficient reasons for its gain either by persuasion or by theft, as can readily be seen in the hand-to-mouth existence led by Mack and the boys.
of Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday and the paisanos of Tortilla Flat.

When seen against a conventional standard of morality, the Steinbeck character must be considered an extremely amoral creature. However, it must be remembered that he does possess a rudimentary ethic of his own making: he is generally loyal and trustworthy toward his friends, outside of sexual considerations; most Steinbeck characters are almost completely without scruples in that respect.

Such a being can scarcely be said to change much. His plane of character motivation is too limited. Most character changes in literature are of a psychological nature, but Steinbeck has effectively reduced the psychological nature of his people by confining them largely to a plane of basic life processes. In effect, Steinbeck's character focus is physiological in nature rather than psychological.

Conclusively, the Steinbeck character is almost an animal, and if not, the differences between him and the animal kingdom are frequently so slight as to pass by
the reader's scrutiny virtually unnoticed. Edmund Wilson has discussed this pointedly: "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 plane."\[^{10}\] Furthermore, as was noted in Chapter II, Steinbeck is frequently to be seen making slighting references to those qualities which would seem to separate man from the animal world, particularly the intellect of man.\[^{11}\] Moreover, in his post-war fiction, Steinbeck attacks the animal-man dichotomy in a more subtle fashion. He singles out those acquisitive characteristics of man that he associates with the guiding principles of modern society--particularly those dealing with financial success--and bitterly assails them, more often than not in the oblique fashion of combining them in unsympathetic characterizations such as Mr. Pritchard. And, as vindictively as Pritchard is drawn, the character Chicoy, his antithesis, is portrayed as favorably.

\[^{10}\]Edmund Wilson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 36.

\[^{11}\]Steinbeck appears to modify his anti-rationality in \textit{East of Eden} as was noted earlier.
The motivating principle behind these attacks, first on man's separation from the animal world, and then on the economic bases of society, forming the basis for his characterization as a whole is Steinbeck's ideology of biological naturalism. People, to Steinbeck, before they are anything else in his fiction, are biological symbols. They are prime examples of the working of natural selection on the human level. Thus, when Steinbeck dislikes the Mr. Pritchards and their kind intensely, more than a personal reason must be sought. Steinbeck dislikes the Mr. Pritchards because they have willfully, with malice aforethought, betrayed what he conceives to be the course of human evolution. As these businessman succeed financially, Steinbeck argues implicitly, they destroy themselves physically with ulcers and impotence. Indeed, Steinbeck seems to regard these particular physical disabilities almost as proofs of bad natural selection. On the other hand, the great

\[12\] A study of the symbolism of the Steinbeck character will be made in part II of this chapter.
majority of Steinbeck's characterizations, subsisting on the lowest of economic levels, are therefore much closer to the basic processes of life. Simple, vulgar, amoral and animal-like for Steinbeck, they are hope of mankind because of their greater biological potential.

II

All of Steinbeck's animate symbols to be discussed here could be likened to avatars of man, for through his recurrent character types Steinbeck is effecting a symbolic study of man. In order of handling these avatars of man are "group" man, the bum, the seer, the biologist, the prostitute, the madam, the mechanic, the policeman, and the businessman.

Since "group" man was examined earlier in this dissertation, the discussion of "group" man will be limited to the pointing out of its symbolic significance. This would seem to be the denial of human individuality--that man ultimately is as much a part of a group organism as such lower life forms as fish and sponges.

The bum, on the other hand, will have to be examined in detail, for he is one of the prime symbols
in Steinbeck's fiction. The bum and those living on the lowest level of sustenance are the best examples of natural selection operating on the human level. For all his lack of worldly goods the bum leads the good biological life because he has not disturbed his ecological relation with his environment by the obsessive pursuit of things called business. As a consequence of his lack of worldly goods and, more importantly, his desisting from the struggle to secure them, he keeps his biological self healthy and well in tune with his environment. To indulge in the economic struggle would result not only in the destruction of man's ecological relation with his environment, but would inevitably destroy him through ulcers or a blown prostate.\(^{13}\) In short, the economic struggle that the bum avoids is made at the cost of the instinctual life.

In his championing of the instinctual life Steinbeck shows a close resemblance to D. H. Lawrence. Although Steinbeck is not as philosophical or as articulate in his handling of the argument for the instinctual life

\(^{13}\)Cannery Row, p. 15.
as D. H. Lawrence, he perhaps goes deeper in his argument than Lawrence did in one respect in his vision of the instinctual life as a reflection of the basic life processes.

The seer might well be considered an offshoot of the bum. Like the bum he has freed himself in large measure from the economic struggle, but more importantly, the seer does not accept his emancipation as unquestionedly as the bum does; he broods over it and seeks to understand it as the biologist does. Here, however, the seer parts company with the biologist, who in keeping with his scientific discipline, seeks a rational answer to his questions. The seer, instead, reaches for the intuitive answer. He is perhaps the nearest of all Steinbeck characters to the basic life processes since he makes only token attempts to compromise with the civilization that he tries to ignore. The bum, on the other hand, does not actively object to civilization so long as it does not interfere with his pursuit of idleness; in fact, he is often as acquisitive as a pack rat, as Mack and the boys are in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday and Danny and his friends in
Tortilla Flat. But his principle of collection, is utterly different from that of the businessman who collects for prestige. The bum collects goods through theft and discovery purely for enjoyment and need. The seer, however, collects as few of the artifacts of civilization as possible and tries to satisfy his wants as much as possible from nature herself.

Notwithstanding the seer's attempt to be emancipated from the shackles of civilization, he is usually bound to it in some curious fashion, which seems to be Steinbeck's way of saying that no man can really escape the conditioning of his society. A case in point is the seer in Sweet Thursday who, for all his concerted attempts to rid himself of civilization's ills, has a compulsion to steal candy bars—a compulsion which eventually leads to his arrest.14

The biologist is Steinbeck's ideal man. Emancipated in large measure from civilization by his understanding of the biological bases of culture, the biologist, nonetheless, can partake of the world's

14Sweet Thursday, p. 70.
goods and make something of an acceptable living in its eyes. He comes the closest of all Steinbeck's characters to living the life of instinct in civilization. Yet he does pay the price for his freedom in loneliness that neither sex nor friendship can allay. Through the character of the biologist Steinbeck seems to be saying that although one can perhaps understand his conditioning there is comparatively little he can do about it—that knowledge does not make one free. It is thus that Steinbeck shows the essential inadequacy of the Faustian image of the biologist. Knowledge alone is not enough to satisfy the demands of life as Doc's capitulation in Sweet Thursday reveals. Doc finds there that one cannot be an observer and a participant simultaneously or to have emotional relationships without personal involvement is an impossibility. Thus through the medium of Doc, his ideal man and his own persona, Steinbeck comes to grips with the dichotomy of thought and action that has perturbed man since the Renaissance.

The prostitute Steinbeck views as an necessary concomitant of civilization. His implicit argument for the prostitute is as follows: if man's instinctual
life were fully realized in society, then the prostitute would not be a necessary adjunct of civilizational life, for it is clearly seen that those living the freest instinctual lives such as Doc and Mack and the boys have no need of the prostitute's services as their calls upon the Bear Flag brothel are social rather than sexual. Only those whose instinctive lives are blighted such as the Mr. Pritchards need the prostitutes for even their caricature of the instinctive life. Apparently the prostitute attracts Steinbeck's deepest sympathy, for in his eyes she is more sinned against than sinning. He has a decidedly romantic if not sentimental view of the prostitute even though he sees through the melodramatic idea that most prostitutes are coerced into prostitution. Fauna's interview with a prospective prostitute, Suzy, in Sweet Thursday is an excellent example of Steinbeck's considered view of the prostitute's raison d'etre:

There's some dames born for this business. Some are too lazy to work and some hate men. Don't hardly none of them enjoy what they're doing. That would be like a bartender that loves to drink.15

15Sweet Thursday, p. 39.
Then, too, Steinbeck sees the prostitute as a physical type. First of all, she is usually flat chested and heavy hipped. Her face may be vaguely pretty, but is not the sort to be remembered; however, and more importantly, it is masklike, not revealing any strong emotions, this masklike exterior of the prostitute perhaps indicating her remoteness from her profession. In addition, the prostitutes in any house reflect the madam to an appreciable extent since the madam generally keeps those prostitutes like her or else "imprints her personality" on them.

The madam is the intelligent prostitute who rises to the top of her profession. With the exception of the monster Kate, all of Steinbeck's madams are near saints. The madam must be regarded by him as a practical saint because of all the difficulties she must labor under and manages to surmount with good temper. Dora the madam in Cannery Row is a case in point:

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16Ibid., p. 50.
17Ibid., pp. 194-195.
Dora--keeps an honest, one price house, sells no hard liquor, and permits no loud or vulgar talk in her house. Some of her girls are fairly inactive due to age and infirmities, but Dora never puts them aside.

As for Dora--she leads a ticklish existence. Being against the law, at least against its letter, she must be twice as law abiding as anyone else. There must be no drunks, no fighting, no vulgarity, or they close Dora up. Also being illegal Dora must be especially philanthropic. Everyone puts the bite on her. If the police give a dance for their pension fund--Dora has to give fifty dollars. With everything else it is the same..., Dora's unsung, unpublicized, shameless dirty wages of sin lead the list of donations. But during the depression she was hardest hit. In addition to the usual charities, Dora saw the hungry children of Cannery Row and the jobless fathers and worried women and Dora paid grocery bills right and left for two years and very nearly went broke.18

The madam is representative of a prime symbol of society's hypocrisy. Attacked by society, she nonetheless must pretend not to exist while paying blackmail to it to exist. Yet despite all society's hypocrisy and rapacity toward her, the madam performs a necessary function for society: through her ministrations, and largely through them Steinbeck would seem to say, the

18Cannery Row, pp. 10-11
demands of the instinctual life are partially satisfied.

Symbolically the madam would appear to perform the function of a high priestess of sex. She is the necessary intercessor to whom sex-starved middle-class males must pay homage for sexual relief. She knows the rites and how the votary must approach them. The madam in the light of Steinbeck's implicit argument for the full expression of instinct would appear to be the last surviving exemplum of the worship of the earth mother, an anachronism in an age of increasing emotional debility.

The mechanic is clearly one of Steinbeck's best loved symbolic characters as can be seen in the attention Steinbeck lavishes upon him in such works as *The Grapes of Wrath, Sea of Cortez, Cannery Row, and The Wayward Bus*. He affords perhaps the strongest evidence that it is not the technology of civilization that Steinbeck objects to, but its frustration of the instinctive life. The mechanic, as the study of the car will show, is a "good" mechanic not so much because of his rational knowledge of his craft, but rather because his rich instinctive life awakens him to the power of
empathetic suggestion since, as will be seen, Steinbeck looks upon the car or any mechanical device primarily from the standpoint of a fetish. The mechanic often must either "outwit" the malevolent machine by a ritual of sympathetic magic (i.e. bloodletting) or else be so identified with its workings that their failure provokes empathetic hurts in him:

He Tex, the engineer in Sea of Cortez, is a sure man with an engine. When he goes below he is identified with his engine. He moves about, not seeing, not looking, but knowing. No matter how tired or how deeply asleep he may be, one miss of the engine jerks him to his feet and into the engine room before he is awake, and we truly believe that a burned bearing or a cracked shaft gives him sharp pains in the stomach.  

Thus the good mechanic owes his mechanical insight largely to his instinctual flexibility, which strongly emphasizes that he is a good mechanic because he has remained biologically adaptable.

This biological adaptability of the mechanic is well seen in Juan Chicoy of The Wayward Bus who lives the freest instinctual life of any of its characters.

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19 Sea of Cortez, p. 18.
This free instinctual life is not only an expression of his biological adaptability but also of his non-teleological or relational approach to people and things, as Sexias and Lisca have noted.

The only recurrent character who appears to have changed radically in the course of Steinbeck's fiction is the policeman. In the social consciousness novels of the thirties, he is seen as an unsavory creature, a sadistic, cowardly minion of the haves of society. This image of the policeman is perhaps best illustrated in the numerous vituperative sketches of the deputies of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Here the deputy, the usual guise of the policeman in the thirties for Steinbeck, is drawn with the loving hand of hatred. He has no individuality—he is a type. Mean, cowardly, swaggering like a storm trooper, the deputy is fat—"fat assed" as Steinbeck viciously puts it—with a heavy pistol holstered on a Sam Browne belt. The deputy is thus seen in terms of his symbols of office.

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20 Moore in *The Novels of John Steinbeck* on pp. 56-57 gives an interesting discussion of this relationship of the deputy to the California landowners.
and actions; Steinbeck does not condescend to characterize him for he is an underling of the great landowners who pay him to intimidate the Okies.

This unsympathetic character who has sold his biological birthright is a far cry from Sheriff Quinn of *East of Eden* and Constable Joe Blaikey of *Sweet Thursday*. Officers Quinn and Blaikey are no one's tools; they run their towns with firm but generally benevolent hands. Little escapes their vigilance as they know more about their towns than anyone else living in them. Above all, their law enforcement is tempered with mercy as neither man insists on a rigid adherence to the letter of the law. As the good mechanic is sensitive to every nuance of his engine, so are these men sensitive to "every ripple on the town's surface."

The question that naturally comes to mind is this: Why did Steinbeck change his impression of this character when his impression of the others has remained

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21 *Sweet Thursday*, p. 34.
remarkably consistent? A reasonable answer is that given by Lisca in answer to the evident decline in Steinbeck's work following The Wayward Bus: "capitulation to his materials." By this phrase Lisca means that Steinbeck has lost the ability to handle his materials critically. To be sure, this argument does seem valid when Steinbeck's works are considered in relation to each other, since Burning Bright and its successors do seem to reflect a falling off of Steinbeck's powers. Notwithstanding this, the contention leaves something to be desired upon this particular level of application, for sherriff Quinn and constable Blaikey are more sharply drawn characters than the strongly felt but flat deputies of The Grapes of Wrath. Now something of the truth of the change in characterization can be fathomed.

The deputy in a time of local crisis, such as that seen in The Grapes of Wrath can be a vicious creature, since his tenure of office is but short as a rule, existing only for the emergency for which he is hired. Naturally those who hire or appoint him would
choose a man reliable from their point of view. On the other hand, the constable and the sheriff are semi-permanent officials by virtue of their election. Thus they are accountable for their actions to the people in general and not only to a special interest. Even more, because of this accountability and the need for practical diplomacy it demands, the constable and the sheriff must make it their business to know the whys and wherefores of their towns to a greater degree than anyone else. In this roundabout way, as his social vision has expanded, Steinbeck has belatedly come to the conclusion that the police officer can be considered a good environmental adaptation because of the flexibility of judgment his office entails. In the late Steinbeck novel he more than the biologist is the master of the good life because in his case there can be no dichotomy between thought and action as existed with the biologist, for he is fully committed to his environment and its challenges. (This change of viewpoint on the policeman reflects a widening of Steinbeck's social interests that shows his views concerning people are in flux.)
The final recurrent character to be considered is the businessman, the only consistently unsympathetically drawn character among Steinbeck's people. In almost every appearance throughout Steinbeck's fiction he is seen through hostile eyes if Lee Chong of Cannery Row and Ernest Horton of The Wayward Bus are excepted (and they should be since neither has a consuming interest in business). In his early appearances, the businessman is not even characterized; he is merely referred to as a landowner or a banker. In these works he is a faceless, disembodied abstraction, a dehumanized product of a system gone wild. Enslaved by the economic struggle to which he gives his utmost and only loyalty, the businessman has forfeited his humanity and relationship with the instinctual world and lives in the cold world of economic ciphers as Steinbeck's constant references to the bank and bankers of The Grapes of Wrath implies.

Although the businessmen of The Pearl are more individualized than the abstractions of The Grapes of Wrath, they still remain slaves to the great god Economics. They, the pearl dealers and the doctor, are
seen as corrupt and venial creatures, completely lacking in humanity. Steinbeck here is arguing that to deal in abstractions is to be dehumanized.

Steinbeck's most considered portrait of the businessman is found in Mr. Pritchard of The Wayward Bus. While Pritchard is neither as venial nor as vicious as the businessmen seen in earlier works, he is as unsympathetic a characterization. His generic description, his inhibitions, his herbivore-like congregation among like-appearing and like-minded cohorts all add up to a man who has sacrificed his manhood for economic pottage. On the symbolic level he is an example of a creature that has become over specialized and hence has lost its adaptability. Then, too, as a grisly episode in The Wayward Bus demonstrates, human instincts when continuously repressed are apt to erupt catastrophically as Mr. Pritchard's rape of his wife reveals. Thus through the example of the businessman a corollary can be added to the instinctual argument that civilization corrupts man. Steinbeck appears to say we should be stronger, that man can establish some workable compromise with civilization and retain his instinctual
humanity if he does not allow himself to be absorbed up in the economic struggle as the Mr. Pritchards do.
CHAPTER V

BIOLOGICAL EVIDENCE IN THE LANGUAGE AND STRUCTURE OF
STEINBECK'S NOVELS

A study of the language and structure of the Steinbeck novel provides considerable evidence of his biological naturalism.

I

Though owing apparent debts to Hemingway, Steinbeck's language owes perhaps even more to science. Its avoidance of analogy whenever possible is probably its most obvious scientific debt, for, Steinbeck shares the scientist's fear of analogy because of its inherent ambiguity. Again, Steinbeck's vocabulary largely made up of single-syllable words owes more to science (and the oral language of the working man) than to Hemingway, for on occasion it runs to biological jargon. Outside

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1Lisca, The Wide World of John Steinbeck, p. 110.
of this leaning toward biological jargon, Steinbeck's diction is simple and unpretentious for the most part and his ear for simple earthly dialogue perhaps makes him Hemingway's closest rival in this respect among American writers.

Steinbeck's prose rhythms are normally of the utmost simplicity, perhaps even more than Hemingway's, since they also run to the simple sentence. As is the case with Hemingway, Steinbeck's staple sentence is the declarative, but here again science, the collector and assessor of facts, is the more likely influence. Normally, there is comparatively little subordination of idea in the Steinbeck sentence because there is usually very little need for it, since Steinbeck, like Hemingway, keeps his prose focus substantially on the plane of sensation, and this focus is best captured in the terse discrete chunks of the declarative sentence. About as near as Steinbeck customarily ventures toward subordination of idea is on those few occasions when he uses a subordinate conjunction. He rarely uses the semicolon; his
most frequently used connective, as to be expected in language of this simplicity, is the coordinate conjunction, and it is normally and.

That science and not Hemingway is the chief molder of the Steinbeck style can be seen in the marked change in language and syntax that occurs from Steinbeck's first novel *Cup of Gold* (1929) with its highly ornate literary style and that distillation of oral prose and scientific exposition that makes up the bulk of all succeeding Steinbeck novels. The style of *Cup of Gold* is obviously that of a self-conscious writer new at his craft. Lisca, who has done perhaps the only close study of the structure of Steinbeck's novels, sees a strong influence of "Elizabethan drama and particularly of Shakespeare."\(^2\) In addition, a metaphysical influence may also be noted. Certainly this contention is borne out by an examination of any of the more descriptive passages of the work. The following may be taken as a typical example:

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 34.
And Chagres twisted on ahead in loops and tremendous horseshoe turns. The yellow water, like a frightened, leprous woman, timidly caressed the hulls. In this Chagres you might pole your boat all day, and at night make your camp not half a mile by straight line from the starting place. It was a sluggish, apathetic river of many shallows where the bright sand glittered in the sun. Chagres was a dilettante in the eternal and understood business—of getting to the ocean with as little bother and effort as possible. Chagres dreamed about over the country, seemingly reluctant to lose its lazy individuality in the worried sea. ³

This is the writing of one enthralled with the possibility of language. Each image, each idea must be newly minted to make even the commonplace exotic. This end of novel expression is carried so far as to interrupt communication. The images arrest the reader to the extent of startling him, and thus break the normal thought flow. This breaking of the thought flow by the novelty of the image is well seen in the simile of the "frightened, leprous woman," which is so startling in context that rather than giving a clear impression of the river—which would seem to be the purpose of such expository description—it only blurs the impression and confuses

³Cup of Gold, p. 169.
the reader. Such striking images are thus parenthetical
asides, which reflect an inability to assimilate a
style derived from reading. There is more than a little
touch of the metaphysical in this prose, but the meta­
physical style with its context-breaking, thought­
provoking images does seem out of place in twentieth
century expository whose ostensible purpose is to clarify.
The emphasis here is upon impression rather than the
sensory actuality that constitutes the focus of
Steinbeck's later novels. The frequent use of drama­
tic images with their imaginative extensions—the
tremendous emphasis upon mood will either disappear or
else be severely circumscribed in Steinbeck's later
work. Although this early style will largely disappear
with Cup of Gold, faint echoes of it will be found in
later works, notably in Tortilla Flat. Here the em­
phasis upon mood and the conscious use of the mock
heroic technique would seem to owe something to
Steinbeck's early handling of language.

Steinbeck's mature prose is perhaps first seen in
In Dubious Battle. The terse sensory objectivity of
his later prose is already evident. The pastoral or idyllic quality of *Tortilla Flat* is no longer evident, nor its sentimentality, for Steinbeck is almost clinically cool in his writing in *In Dubious Battle*. The style is "harsh, factual, catalogue-like in its complete objectivity." It is almost completely non-committal in its survey of the action. The remoteness of the dissecting biology laboratory permeates this prose as any sample will indicate:

Jim sat under the hard white light typewriting letters. Occasionally he stopped and listened, his ears turned toward the door. Except for a kettle simmering huskily in the kitchen, the house was still. The soft roar of streetcars on distant streets, the slap of feet on the pavement in front only made the inside seem more quiet. He looked up at the alarm clock hanging to a nail on the wall. He got up and went into the kitchen and stirred the stew and turned down the gas until each jet held a tiny blue globe.

The above is a far cry from the first example given of Steinbeck's prose. It has none of the vague

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5 *Loc. Cit.*

6 *In Dubious Battle*, p. 34.
impressionism that characterized the former. Outside of a single elemental image in the last line Steinbeck limits himself to the giving of a catalogue of sense impressions and actions almost Hemingwayesque in their telegraphic simplicity. However, this is not the artistic catalogue of a Hemingway, but the dispassionate scrutiny of the biologist as he calmly describes the habitat and habits of a laboratory specimen. In *In Dubious Battle* Steinbeck catches and records the sense impressions on the level of perception before they are given notation by the rational mind. In this way he can approach the ideal of objectivity, the extreme psychological distance toward his material, in order to avoid emotional involvement with his subject matter and hence intrude ideological bias upon it. As Lisca has noted, "the characters are perceived only as they speak or execute physical movements," an approach certainly used by the biologist. It is this thorough-going concentration upon the physical plane of life that as much as any other single quality that characterizes Steinbeck's mature prose.

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7Lisca, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
Although the telegraphic concision of the sense impression is frequently maintained in the prose of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the cool objectivity intone is not. The reader only has to glance a few pages into the book to realize that the author is intimately involved in the outcome of the action. There is a burning strident sincerity about the prose of *The Grapes of Wrath* that gives it a stark immediacy even now years after its *raison d'être* is gone. Yet for all its occasional lapses into sentimentality, its muddled philosophizing, the prose is elemental and direct in its communication. Here Steinbeck's ear for oral effect, first seen in *In Dubious Battle*, is used to produce some of the best colloquial prose of the twentieth century. The syntax generally is even more simple than that of *In Dubious Battle* in addition to being generally more concrete and pithy.

Lisca sees several styles operative in *The Grapes of Wrath*. One style, he maintains, owes much to the Old Testament in its "parallel grammatical structure of parallel meanings, simplicity of diction...balance,...
concrete details,...summary sentences,...reiterations."\(^8\)

An example of this style, given by Lisca is the following:

The tractors had lights shining
For there is no day and night for a tractor
And the disks turn the earth in the darkness
And they glitter in the daylight.\(^9\)

In addition to that of the Old Testament Lisca sees these influences operative in *The Grapes of Wrath*:

Dos Passos' "newsreel technique," folk idiom, Walt Whitman, Hemingway, Sandburg, and Pare Lorentz.\(^10\)

Then there appears to be another type of writing not explicitly noted by Lisca, the nature vignette. This writing, which will be seen more frequently in the future--the most notable examples being found in *Cannery Row*--chiefly serves the function of what Lisca terms the "intercalary" chapter.\(^11\) That is to say the chapter "amplifies the pattern of action of

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 160.
\(^9\)Ibid., p. 161.
\(^10\)Ibid., p. 164.
\(^11\)Ibid., pp. 155-156.
the Joad family*' and makes it "part of the social climate," or provide historical information. The best example of the nature vignette to be found in The Grapes of Wrath is chapter three, which relates the attempts of a landturtle to cross Highway 66.

The kind of minute naturalistic observation that seems more germane to Steinbeck than to any other modern novelist perhaps no other novelist. Even Hemingway has developed the power of observation to the extent that Steinbeck has. Steinbeck perhaps even as much as C. P. Snow bridges the gulf between science and art. Snow bridges it ideologically; Steinbeck stylistically. And why is Steinbeck so interested in the natural world? He is interested in it because the natural world is his fundamental assumption, the basis of all his speculations. Steinbeck, as the game of "speculative metaphysics" indicates, always begins his thinking about the world with the sense impression and

13Loc. cit.
14Loc. cit.
goes speculatively from there often to some form of nature mysticism, but it is always important to see that he carefully begins with the sense impression. Thus because the sense impression is his building block, a point of view he possibly obtained from the discipline of biology, he observes it with the greatest possible accuracy. The following passage taken from chapter three of *The Grapes of Wrath* will give an idea of the nature vignette:

The concrete highway was edged with a mat of tangled, broken, dry grass, and the grass heads were heavy with oat beards to catch on a dog's coat, and foxtails to tangle in a horse's fetlocks, and clover burrs to fasten in sheep's wool; sleeping life waiting to be spread and dispersed, every seed armed with an appliance of dispersal, twisting darts and parachutes for the wind; little spears and balls of tiny thorns, and all waiting for animals and for the wind, for a man's trouser cuff or the hem of a woman's skirt, all passive but armed with appliances of activity, still, but each possessed of the anlage of movement.  

Immediately the passage brings to mind Fabre, Beebe, Culross Peattie, and other scientific naturalists.

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15 *The Grapes of Wrath*, p. 20.
For whatever its stylistic purpose, as Lisca has pointed out, the nature vignette is also a naturalistic essay fully in the tradition of scientific nature description and compares favorably with any work of that stamp. The details are keenly observed, and carefully chosen to reenforce the topic idea of the living organisms' diversity of forms to spread themselves the more efficiently.

The technique of the nature vignette is again seen in Cannery Row and here with even more zest and keenness, for by now Steinbeck is the master of a supple pithy prose that easily satisfies the sensory focus he chiefly places upon it. There is a tremendous gusto as well as tremendous observational accuracy in the following depiction of a tide pool with the frenzied struggle for existence by all its multitudinous life forms:

Doc was collecting marine animals in the Great Tide Pool on the tip of the Peninsula. It is a fabulous place: when the tide is in, a wavechurned basin, creamy with foam, whipped by the combers that roll in from the whistling buoy on the reef. But when the tide goes out the little water world becomes quiet and lovely. The sea is very clear and the bottom becomes fantastic with hurrying,
fighting, feeding, breeding animals. Crabs
rush from frond to frond of the waving algae.
Starfish squat over mussels and limpets,
attack their million little suckers and then
slowly lift with incredible power until the
prey is broken from the rock. And then the
starfish stomach comes out and envelopes
its food. Orange and speckled and fluted
nudibranchs slide gracefully over the rocks,
their skirts waving like the dresses of
Spanish dancers...

Enough has been given of the passage to give its specific
flavor. First of all, it is quickly seen that for all
its mantle of observational objectivity, this is an
intensely personal prose. A strong zest pervades the
writing. Steinbeck consciously or unconsciously is
applying a principle first worked out in Sea of Cortez,
that of combining the felt vision with statistical
measurement. He explains the point of view in Sea of
Cortez in describing the reasons for the expedition:

We wanted to see everything our eyes
would accommodate, to think what we could,
and, out of our seeing and thinking, to
build some kind of structure in modeled
imitation of the observed reality. We
knew that what we would see and record
and construct would be warped, as all

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16Cannery Row, p. 17.
knowledge patterns are warped, first, by the collective pressure and stream of our time and race, second by the thrust of our individual personalities. But knowing this... we might maintain some balance between our warp and the separate thing, the external reality. The oneness of these two might take its contribution from both.17

In short, Steinbeck has sought to bridge the gap that exists between the personal and subjective and the scientific and objective.

This stylistic application of non-teleology (for what else is it?) will be operative in all succeeding novels up through **Sweet Thursday**. Largely it will remain a prose ideal, an unconscious resolve carried out whenever Steinbeck creates his best writing.

The style, however, is little seen in **The Pearl** (1945) largely because of the parable nature of that work. The style is as objective as that of **In Dubious Battle** but far more suggestive in its symbolism and details, for Steinbeck here is not so much interested in the plane of sensation--his usual focus--as he is in the mystical reality undergirding it which it fronts.

17 **Sea of Cortez**, p. 3.
As Lisca has shown, the style of *The Wayward Bus* (1947) represents a return to the scientific objective prose of *In Dubious Battle*. Here the specimen being considered is a bus with deliberately chosen heterogenous inhabitants, there the group animal of the strike. In this contemporary morality play Steinbeck presents his specimens with a near passionless objectivity, yet with a slight but perceptible sympathy lacking in *In Dubious Battle*. (That Steinbeck is sympathetic toward certain characters in the book and unsympathetic toward others can be seen in his individualizing the sympathetic characters and abstracting the unsympathetic.) For the most part, however, the style is similar to the "camera-eye" technique of *The Grapes of Wrath*, the clinical look that "is almost Swiftian in its attempts to expose man in all his meanness."  

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18 *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 246.

19 See Chapter IV.

Steinbeck's grip upon his language begins to weaken in *Burning Bright* (1950). Lisca argues the merits of its language convincingly:

The real difficulty is not that the characters speak "a kind of universal language," as Steinbeck puts it (and whatever that may mean), but that this language is a kind of incredible hash of realism, coined archaisms, and poetic rhetoric. The closest thing to it in Steinbeck's works is found in the language of his first book, *Cup of Gold*, and indeed some of the images are taken right out of that early book...21

Steinbeck's inability to handle his language in *Burning Bright* is probably a reflection of his increasing loss of a stable literary philosophy. The biological naturalism that had sustained him from *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) through *The Wayward Bus* now seems unclear and muddled. A likely explanation for his increasing failure in structure and idea is that advanced in Chapter III, the death of Ricketts. With the death of Ricketts in the summer of 1948 Steinbeck lost the reassuring advice and criticism of the man who was probably the great single influence on the development

of Steinbeck's art. Naturally such a blow would make itself felt in Steinbeck's art.

The increasing loss of Steinbeck's grip of his language continues in *East of Eden* (1952). The heightening abstraction of his language noticeable in *Burning Bright* also is evident here and proves as in the earlier novel a fault. As *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Cannery Row*, and *The Wayward Bus* have shown, Steinbeck handles language best when he is dealing with the concrete and the particular. The style of *East of Eden* is almost an object commentary as that of *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* to Mark Twain of a man trying to exceed the limitations of a prose that he has made uniquely his own. The affected prose of *East of Eden* (as Lisca puts it) is far removed from the elementally honest prose of the late thirties and early forties. Now language is used to explore instead of to present as this passage reveals:

"There's a blackness on this valley. I don't know what it is, but I can feel it. Sometimes on a white blinding day I can feel

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22See Chapter III for an estimation of Ricketts' influence on Steinbeck.
it cutting off the sun and squeezing the light out of it like a sponge."..."There's a black violence on this valley. I don't know--I don't know. It's as though some old ghost haunted it out of the dead ocean below and troubled the air with unhappiness. It's as secret as hidden sorrow. I don't know what it is, but I see it and feel it in the people here."23

This is the groping abstract language of a man seeking certainty, as can be seen in the vague generality of the passage. The feeling for the concrete that characterized Steinbeck's best prose is now gone and in its wake there is found but the pedestrian grip of the journalist, who is satisfied with the smooth commonplace. In short, this language lacks force and direction.

In Sweet Thursday (1954) Steinbeck appears to recover something of his former power of language until his prose is examined carefully. To be sure, the prose of Sweet Thursday is superior to that of its immediate predecessors, East of Eden and Burning Bright, but still it is not up to the standards of Steinbeck's best prose. For one thing, it is the prose of a technician, who is relying upon his competence rather than upon observation and inspiration. In Sweet Thursday

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23East of Eden, p. 127.
there is none of the heart-felt sincerity that made the prose of *The Grapes of Wrath* memorable even at its worst, nor any of the crisp economy of *In Dubious Battle*, nor any of the observational gusto of *Cannery Row*. No, this prose has the flexible utility of the clever journalist now, slick and flavorless:

> It's a funny thing, but you never like to trade at your own place. The store across the street has always got fresher cigarettes than you have. 24

In the place of close observation Steinbeck has now substituted a folksy cracker-barrelism that provides a moment's diverting.

The marked journalistic style noted in *Sweet Thursday* is continued in *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*, Steinbeck's latest novel. The novel, as Lisca points out, seems but a melange of many of Steinbeck's previous ideas thrown together without much rhyme or reason and only given the semblance of a unity by the slick style that covers them. The writing seems adequate enough to portray whatever limited humorous and farcical demands Steinbeck places upon it, but is hardly distinguished.

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24 *Sweet Thursday*, p. 49.
Certainly little remains of the distinctive Steinbeck prose of the late thirties and forties.

In conclusion a number of pertinent remarks can be made concerning the development and the disintegration of Steinbeck's prose. Steinbeck's earliest style, that seen in *Cup of Gold*, is a self-conscious literary one, marked by impressionistic context-breaking analogies. With his next novel *The Pastures of Heaven* he begins to find his true metier, that curious mixture of the oral and the scientific that characterizes his best writing. The clinically objective aspect of this style is best seen in *In Dubious Battle*; it is best orchestrated in *The Grapes of Wrath*; and reaches its highest observational usage in *Cannery Row*. After *The Wayward Bus*, possibly because of the death of Ricketts, Steinbeck's grip upon language begins to weaken. With *Sweet Thursday*, however, he seems to make a partial recovery, but in actuality the recovery is but a degenerate journalistic vestige of his best style.

Steinbeck's biological naturalism, of course, is most clearly evident in his best style and influences it profoundly in at least three ways: (1) in his
occasional use of biological jargon, (2) in his naturalistic description, and (3) in his biological basis of analogy.

Although Steinbeck's vocabulary is normally extremely simple and direct--almost completely free from polysyllabic and recondite words, on occasions when technical words are used they are without exception biological jargon--revealing Steinbeck's considerable knowledge of the science of biology. The use of this jargon such as "low survival quotient," "ecological balance," is always precise and to the point. Moreover, the jargon is always that of key descriptive words, giving the final set or shape to the expression that Steinbeck is attempting to convey.

A perhaps more subtle example of Steinbeck's biological naturalism at work in his language is in his use of extended naturalistic description and exposition in his novels. Frequently these passages run to chapter length. In Cannery Row and The Grapes of Wrath--to cite the best examples of the technique--these passages are used either to provide background or to introduce the coming action. In either case this naturalistic
description and exposition is used primarily to relate human activities to those of nature at large. Because of the generally episodic nature of Steinbeck's plotting, these nature vignettes have the appearance of naturalistic essays, and several have been published independently.

But perhaps the best single example of Steinbeck's biological naturalism to be found in his use of language lies in his use of analogy. On the comparatively few occasions when Steinbeck finds it necessary to communicate by analogy—he prefers direct description almost exclusively—the analogy is almost without exception a simile or a metaphor of the simplest variety, revealing a single, direct animal characteristic of man. In Steinbeck's eyes, man in a specific situation always reacts to a stimulus "like" a particular animal, or some activity of man suggests to Steinbeck a powerful metaphoric parallel in a comparable animal activity. The comparison, simile or metaphor, is always drawn directly and non-abstractly from the animal to the man. Instead of "humanizing" animals, as most writers do, Steinbeck seeks
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.25

The value of this observation cannot be overstressed, because it more than any other single bit of evidence reveals Steinbeck's biological basis of language. First of all, it explains why he relies heavily upon expository prose, for direct description is a way of avoiding the pitfalls of anthropomorphic conditioning by which man tends to see the world in terms of self-projection. However, as Steinbeck implicitly admits in the passage, analogy cannot be avoided. Therefore, if the writer has to use it, and sometimes he has to, then he must realize its limitations and circumvent them. This Steinbeck proposes to accomplish by reversing man's customary anthropomorphic projections; that is, by looking at man from the world in order to see him more clearly. Thus it is

25The Log, p. 95.
that Steinbeck sees man in terms of animal drives and biological abstractions such as ecology and natural selection.

II

A study of the structure in Steinbeck's novels also provides important evidence of his biological naturalism. In three phases of structure, theme, plot, and recurrent imagery—especially in the last—there is vital confirmation of Steinbeck's biological naturalism.

Surprisingly enough, for all the importance of theme in literature there has been no book-length study of the relationship of theme to structure—at least the writer has not been able to unearth one. While there have been specific studies relating a specific theme to a specific composition, these studies have invariably been part of larger works dealing with the literary composition as a whole and have dealt with theme only in passing.26 What is even more strange: some of the more important handbooks of literature—that by Thrall and Hibbard is an excellent example—fail even to define

26 An example of such a study is Paul Goodman's The Structure of Literature.
theme—evidently the editors have taken it for granted that the idea of theme is so obvious that it needs no definition.

But it is this very taking for granted the meaning of theme that leads to difficulty, for the concept of theme is by no means as obvious and unanimous in its meaning as dictionaries and literary glossaries would have us believe. As best the writer can determine, theme can have three somewhat different meanings in contemporary literature. The first is the *leit motiv* conception, which appears to stem from nineteenth century music. In the *leit motiv* conception of theme there is no one central ruling theme in a literary work, but a synthesis resulting from the interplay of minor themes. The second interpretation of theme is perhaps the one most frequently met at present: the controlling idea of the literary work or its shaping force. Under this conception everything in the work must have an integral bearing on the theme. The author's interpretation of life, the third conception of theme, appears to have also stemmed from the nineteenth century. This idea has been favored by the New Critics,
especially Robert Penn Warren, who refers to it in his essay "Pure and Impure Poetry" as "earned vision."^27

Steinbeck's approach to theme would appear to involve all three conceptions of theme listed above, but primarily the second and third. The only example of the leit motif theme that may be found in Steinbeck's fiction—and this is closer to the musical usage of the term—is that to be found in The Pearl. Here the identification of the "songs" largely with particular people and situations might well be likened to the Wagnerian use of the leit motif. Although Steinbeck apparently never again uses the leit motif theme in his works, the usage cannot really be considered an unusual one for him to adopt, for Steinbeck has often composed to music^28 and The Log, Cannery Row, and Sweet Thursday reveal a great love for as well as a considerable knowledge of classical music.

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^28 Moore, op. cit., pp. 92-93.
Despite the dangers of having such an approach labelled "begging the question," it is readily seen that Steinbeck's biological naturalism comes close to being the controlling idea of his fiction. Both implicitly and explicitly most of the details of his work dovetail together to present a consistently biological view of man as will be seen. Certainly in view of the evidence of the preceding chapters it can scarcely be doubted that biological naturalism is the shaping force of Steinbeck's mind as well as being his interpretation of life.

That Steinbeck's biological naturalism is in general both the controlling idea of his fiction and his interpretation can be demonstrated from an examination of his themes. With few exceptions these are clearly biological in nature or else rest on biological assumptions. The latter is demonstrable in Steinbeck's major theme, social conflict. This theme which in the hands of most social novelists usually rests on economic assumptions, does not do so in Steinbeck's, as was seen in Chapter II. There the theme of social conflict was
shown to rest on biological premises and revealed his interpretation of Darwinian natural selection.29

Closely related to the theme of social conflict and undergirding it in large measure in Steinbeck's fiction is the theme of the group versus the individual. This theme is to be found in most of Steinbeck's work, especially that from the middle thirties on. In his handling of the theme Steinbeck's interests first turn to the group and then in the forties to the individual, though it must be admitted that Steinbeck by no means is consistent in his change of interest as will be seen.

The theme first appears in an explicit form in the novel In Dubious Battle (1936). Here although Steinbeck makes an attempt to be objective in his handling of the theme, his very preoccupation with the concept of "group" man is evidence to the contrary. By inference he argues that it is the mass or group man rather than the individual who is responsible for human activity as Dr. Burton, a mask of Steinbeck's, maintains in a discussion

29See Chapter II for the biological implications of this theme.
with Mac, a communist labor agitator:

"It might be like this Mac: When group man wants to move, he makes a standard. 'God wills that we recapture the Holy Land,' or he says 'We fight to make the world safe for democracy,' or he says 'We will wipe out social injustice with communism.' But the group doesn't care about the Holy Land, or Democracy or Communism. Maybe the group simply wants to move, to fight, and raises these words simply to reassure the brain of individual men..."30

This group man thesis is also seen explicitly in a short story of this period (1936-1938), "The Leader of the People," where it is argued that individual men lead pointless and almost useless lives once they have served their purpose for group man. In fact, the grandfather of the story, a mask of Steinbeck's, suggests that it is this use of an individual by group man as an apparent leader of a historical movement that gives the leader a purpose:

"It wasn't Indians that were important, nor adventures, nor even getting out here. It was a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast. And I was the head. It was westering and westering. Every man wanted something for himself, but the big beast that was all of them wanted only westering. I was the leader, but if I hadn't

30 In Dubious Battle, p. 151.
been there, someone else would have been the head. The thing had to have a head."

Although Steinbeck's next novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937) appears to lack the presence of group man in any explicit form, it is apparent that Steinbeck is still interested in the ramifications of group behavior since Lennie comes to grief at the group's hands largely because of his pathetic inability to sense and follow the dictates of the group. Lennie might be considered a Steinbeckian study of a lethal mutation.

Group man is present in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) by implication--it is certainly the basis of Steinbeck's theory of history seen there. Moreover, Casy's and Tom Joad's humanitarian impulses stem probably as much from their intuitions of group man's promptings as from any other cause. They might be considered the "eye" cells, envisaged by Doctor Burton in the passage from *In Dubious Battle* quoted earlier. Certainly Tom's and especially Casy's utterances on their mission would appear to offer some evidence for such a contention:

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Casy picked the backs of his long knotty fingers. "They's stuff goin' on and they's folks doin' things. Them people layin' one foot down in front of the other, like you (Tom Joad) says, they ain't thinkin' where they're goin', like you says--but they're all layin' em down the same direction, jus' the same. An' if ya listen, you'll hear a movin', an a sneakin', an' a rustlin', an'--an' a reslessness..."

In the *Sea of Cortez* (1941) Steinbeck's group speculations reach their most developed stage. In fact, the log or narrative portion of the work--that part written by Steinbeck--is a veritable storehouse of material on the group versus the individual theme. Here it is seen that Steinbeck's ideas on the group apparently stem from the cooperative functions performed by organisms, actions so coordinated that the organisms seem to make up a large super organism:

The school swam, marshalled 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 of 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

\[32\] *The Grapes of Wrath*, pp. 236-237.
of the school as an animal itself, reacting with all its cells to stimuli which perhaps might not influence one fish at all. And the 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.33

Now Steinbeck's group speculation takes on a decidedly metaphysical aspect:

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 places as placating food for predators for the sake of the security of the school as an animal. In the little Bay of San Carlos where there were many school of a number of species, there were 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 this

33Sea of Cortez, p. 240
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.34

In its ultimate extensions the idea of the group as an individual appears to merge into the idea of non-teleology. Steinbeck in the long Easter Sunday "sermon" on non-teleology35 (to use Lisca's phrase) appears to imply that the individual is related to the group in a non-teleological fashion. That is to say while the individual would seem to be free, to do largely what he will, this apparent freedom is substantially an illusion, a product of an overclose perspective. The true perspective of the individual, Steinbeck would seem to say, is seen in that of the group. With his analogy of the electron36 apparently free to go where it will and so inflexibly ordered when seen in the aggregate, Steinbeck appears to suggest not only that the concept of the individual is dubious but also that it has no real freedom to influence the group of which it forms a small and insignificant part.

34Ibid., p. 241.
35Sea of Cortez, pp. 131-151.
36Ibid., p. 135.
The swan song of Steinbeck's group speculations is seen in *The Moon is Down* (1942). Perhaps the explicit speculations on the implications of the group in *Sea of Cortez* largely quenched his interest in it, but not entirely since the fundamental struggle in the novel is that of the group. Here, however, the struggle is not between the group and the individual so much as it is between groups. The conquered, it is felt, will ultimately win out over their oppressors for their group existence is more genuine than that of the invaders. Curiously enough, it is Colonel Lanser, the leader of the invaders, who sees their ultimate defeat most clearly: "Defeat is a momentary thing. A defeat doesn't last."37

The seeds of Steinbeck's ultimate repudiation of the group are already present in *The Moon is Down*. Dr. Winter, the doctor and historian of the town, in effect, repudiates the group man historical thesis of *The Grapes of Wrath*:

37 *The Moon is Down*, p. 67.
"They think that just because they have only one leader and one head, we are all like that. They know that ten heads lopped off will destroy them, but we are a free people; we have as many heads as we have people...

Here Steinbeck is getting at an idea elaborated later in Cannery Row and The Log from the Sea of Cortez that overintegration is a symptom of decay. Lisca has also noted the presence of the idea in The Moon is Down.

By 1944 there is to be seen a radical shift in Steinbeck's point of view concerning the group. By this time, possibly because of the war and perhaps because of his distaste for the military mind in general, Steinbeck has apparently come to regard the phenomenon of mass man as a not unmixed blessing. Certainly the periodic insanity of war that he had diagnosed as such in Sea of Cortez and had demonstrated the fertility of in The Moon is Down had filled him with an overpowering desire to escape from it as a consequence of his experiences as a war correspondent.

38Ibid., p. 175.
40Lisca, "John Steinbeck: A Literary Biography," p. 16.
The result of his therapeutic vacation was Cannery Row, which reveals Steinbeck's newly found interest in the individual. Mack and the boys, and above all Doc, are biological individuals precisely because they resist the herd dictates of middle-class American society that Steinbeck will begin to satirize more pungently with each succeeding novel. That Steinbeck regards Mack and the boys as individuals and not 'eye' cells in group man can be seen in any number of places in Cannery Row, but perhaps the subtle evidence of their individuality is that in their reaction toward a parade in Cannery Row. While everyone else in the Row rushes frenziedly to see the parade, the boys do not even turn their heads toward it:

Mack and the boys sat dejectedly on their log and faced the laboratory. The sound of the band came from Lighthouse Avenue, the drums echoing back from the buildings...And not a head turned, not a neck straightened up. The parade filed past and they did not move.  

The Pearl (1945) would seem to be a reversion to Steinbeck's group speculations with its emphasis on

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\(^{41}\)Cannery Row, p. 151.
racial memory, but Steinbeck's increasing preoccupation with the individual is well seen in *The Wayward Bus* (1947). A more complete about face from his group speculations can scarcely be imagined than that to be found here. If Lisca's interpretation of the work is correct and it seems convincing—a morality play,42 the saved characters are those most individualized biologically such as Juan Chicoy. The damned are those such as Mr. and Mrs. Pritchard, who follow the herd instincts of the group. In fact, the novel read on one level appears to be a withering satire upon middle-class Americana, particularly its business ethics, from the standpoint of biology. This is Steinbeck's most continuous satire since *Tortilla Flat* as well as being his most serious. Normally Steinbeck's satire is sporadic, being best exemplified in the deft episodic jabbing of *Cannery Row*. In *The Wayward Bus*, however, Steinbeck's focus is changed considerably. He concentrates his attention upon a number of individuals, treating them much as specimens in a laboratory experiment. He simply throws a carefully selected handful of people representing

various aspects of America together, maroons them for a short time, and observes the consequences. The saved grow stronger by their temporary adversity whereas the damned are quickly found wanting. The thesis would appear to be that those who find and follow the dictates of their biological natures are best able to meet the unexpected challenges that life sooner or later confronts them with.

_Burning Bright_ (1950) continues Steinbeck's indictment of the American middle class begun in _Cannery Row_, but since its attack has only a tangential relationship to the group versus individual, discussion on it will be deferred until later. _East of Eden_ (1952) has some of Steinbeck's most explicit statements championing individualism. The following, apparently a very close paraphrase of the same idea in _The Log from the Sea of Cortez_, is perhaps the best of all:

> Our species is the only creative species, and it has only one creative instrument, the individual mind and spirit of a man. Nothing was ever created by two men. There are no good collaborations, whether in music, in art, in poetry, in mathematics, in philosophy. Once the miracle of creation has taken place, the group can build and extend it, but the
group never invents anything. The preciousness lies in the lonely mind of man.

And now the forces marshaled around the concept of the group have declared a war of extermination on that preciousness, the mind of man.\textsuperscript{43}

Compare the above with this passage from \textit{The Log}:

...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 [Steinbeck and Ricketts]\textsuperscript{44} could not think of any group that has ever created or invented anything. Indeed, the first impulse of the group seems to be to destroy the creation and the creator.

The fact that both books were published within a year of each other would normally account for the similarity of statement, for an author frequently repeats himself even to the point of paraphrase. But the problem is more complicated than this as the material preceding and following \textit{The Log} passage shows. These are very suggestive. First of all, the excerpt is given as an example of Steinbeck's and Ricketts' game of "speculative metaphysics." Secondly, according to Steinbeck, the game was "developed quite a long time ago." Now since


\textsuperscript{44}\textit{The Log}, xlvi.
Ricketts died in 1948, and the passage is cited as an example of mutual thought, then Steinbeck was familiar with the idea before the spring of 1948 since Ricketts died then. Then, too, the passage immediately following the above might be construed as evidence upon its dating with the mention of The Third Reich as though it were still politically active. In a similar way if all the elusive hints in "About Ed Ricketts" having any kind of bearing on the passage were considered, the passage might be thus considered to stem from the time of *Sea of Cortez* (1941). In any event, Steinbeck's championing of the individual over the group would appear to antedate any explicit literary mention of it by a number of years.

*East of Eden* reflects Steinbeck's emphasis upon the individual in another way, one noted earlier in Chapter I. The idea of "Timshel" or "thou mayest," implying that man can make a free choice between good and evil would certainly seem to reflect an emphasis upon the individuality of man. Yet, as was noted earlier, the constant lapsing into biological determinism appears to contradict Steinbeck's assertion of man's freedom of choice.
Sweet Thursday, while it may leave much to be desired as a novel, nonetheless contains some pertinent evidence of Steinbeck's championing of man's essential individuality. Sheriffs, constables, and other law enforcement officials who had been bitterly assailed in In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath as underlings of wealthy landowners are suddenly seen in an entirely new light if Sheriff Horace Quinn of East of Eden and Constable Joe Blaikey of Sweet Thursday are considered. Joe Blaikey appears to join the biologist and the bum as Steinbeck's true philosopher as this eulogistic portrayal shows:

It is popular to picture a small town constable as dumb and clumsy. In the book he plays the stock bumpkin part....

A constable, if he has served for a few years, knows more about his town than anyone else and on all levels. He is aware of the delicate political balance between mayor and councilmen, Fire Department and insurance companies...He is aware of every ripple on the town's surface. If there is a crime the constable usually knows who didn't do it and often who did. With a good constable on duty a hundred things don't happen that might....

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45 The Grapes of Wrath, p. 326.
Monterey's Joe Blaikey was a good constable...
Everybody in town liked Joe and trusted him....
Joe knew everyone in Monterey and he could size
up a stranger almost instantly.46

Whether this is part of "succumbing to his materials,"
as Lisca suggests, is one thing, but regardless of
Steinbeck's growing mellowness in which old enemies turn
out to be friends in disguise, the change reveals some­
thing else: a faith in the individual that transcends
occupations and social groups. On such a note Steinbeck's
group versus individual theme quest ends.

In addition to the general pervading themes already
discussed, there are a number of specifically bio­
logical themes to be discerned in individual works.
Perhaps the best example of an explicitly biological
theme to be found in any single work of Steinbeck's
is that of Burning Bright, sterility. The theme poses
very effectively the conflict between social mores and
biological fulfillment—a conflict frequently to be
met with in Steinbeck's fiction. In Steinbeck's eyes
it is more important to have Mordeen, the heroine,
commit adultery in order to give Joe Saul the child he

46Sweet Thursday, p. 35.
craves then to allow him to remain biologically unful-
filled. Fatherhood even by cuckoldry is a far more
important consideration to Steinbeck than are the
social mores which would restrict its possibility.
Even more, Steinbeck is ultimately saying that the
natural drive of procreation is more important to man
than the artificial dicta of society which would seek
to control it—a Romantic instinctual argument stemming
from Blake and Rousseau but one refurbished with
biological trappings.

Nor is this theme an isolated one, for it is
frequently to be met with Steinbeck's fiction in
either a generalized or specific form as may be seen
in his attitudes toward sex in general. Without ex-
ception Steinbeck champions the free, uninhibited
sexual expression of his characters throughout his
fiction. His attitude toward social conflict and the
group versus the individual might have changed consi-
derably over the twenty-five odd years of his novel
career, but his joyous upholding of free sexual ex-
pression appears to remain a constant in his work.
In its earliest form the sexual emphasis of the Steinbeck novel is tied up with fertility worship in *To A God Unknown*, perhaps Steinbeck's deepest venture into symbolism, folklore, and myth. Frequently, the imagery is strongly suggestive of the sex act, as Lisca and Moore have noted, the various physical configurations of the setting of the novel having obvious phallic and vaginal significance. However, the sexual force of the novel generally is much deeper than this. The irrational promptings of the characters, particularly those of Joseph Wayne, give a Jungian archetypal undercurrent to the plot.47

*The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) sets the stage for Steinbeck's normative handling of sex, the approach that will be seen in the great majority of his novels. Here sex is seen in the tolerant light with which Steinbeck always regards prostitution and fornication. The Lopez sisters, Steinbeck's initial study of the *paisanos*, sideline their restaurant business with rationalized prostitution, and everyone seems content. The same easy-going attitude toward sexual favors is

47*The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, p. 53.
even better seen in *Tortilla Flat*, a book-length study of the amours and adventures of the Monterey *paisanos*.

By the middle forties Steinbeck's sexual insight appears to have deepened from the humorous *laissez-faire* attitude that he approached it with in the middle and late thirties. Beginning with *Cannery Row* (1944) his attitudes toward sex appear to show sociological significance. The free and uninhibited sexual expression of Doc and Mack and the boys by inference is taken as evidence of their excellent adjustment to the biological realities of life, whereas "the blown prostates" of the town's more socially prominent males is proof of their biological maladjustment. In addition, Steinbeck uses sexual frustration as the basis of the topical satire of one of the episodes in *Cannery Row* as seen in the contretemps between the soldiers, their floozies, and the caretaker who tries to run them out of the private grounds presumably he is watching. Here also is found Steinbeck's first lengthy depiction of a house of prostitution and its inmates. Steinbeck's attitude is highly sympathetic if not sentimental as may be seen in this description of the house's madam:
But on the left-hand boundary of the lot is the stern and stately whore house of Dora Flood; a decent, clean, honest, old-fashioned sporting house... This is no fly-by-night cheap clip-joint but a sturdy, virtuous club, built, maintained, and disciplined by Dora who, madam and girl for fifty years, has through the exercise of special gifts of tact and honesty, charity and a certain realism, made herself respected by the intelligent, the learned, and the kind. And by the same token she is hated by the twisted and lascivious sisterhood of married spinsters whose husbands respect the home but don't like it very much.  

The central importance of the prostitutes and their madam to the novel can readily be seen by the frequency with which they take part in the action.

The sexual component of Steinbeck's most penetrating indictment of the American middle class, The Wayward Bus (1947) can scarcely be overestimated. Much of Steinbeck's attack upon the middle class is centered in its sexual taboos and prudery. Mr. Pritchard is obviously a sex-starved man without really being aware of it, so successfully has his frigid wife weened him of his conjugal rights. But frustration takes a grisly revenge when Mr. Pritchard avenges his

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48 Cannery Row, pp. 9-10.
sexual slight at the hands of Camille Oaks by raping his wife. Camille herself, a woman with normal sex drives, is blighted by her allure which keeps her from having the humdrum married life she craves. All in all, at one level The Wayward Bus can perhaps be considered a study of the debilitating effects of the great American preoccupation with sex, a thesis confirmed in part by the evidence of Juan Chicoy, the only character freed of the tyranny of sex because of his innate acceptance of it.

The sexual implications of the theme of Burning Bright (1950) have already been noted. East of Eden (1952) continues Steinbeck's study of the place of sex in the American life begun in Cannery Row. Again, as in Cannery Row the chief explicit use of sex as a thematic element occurs in relationship with prostitution. In fact, prostitution forms an important element in the rambling structure of East of Eden. Cathy, Steinbeck's first and only study of a psychopath, is the unifying element in the prostitutional material. A monster for all her fair appearance, Cathy enters the main plot of the novel by her near escape from murder
at the hands of a whoremaster whom she has driven to temporary insanity by her wiles. She ten marries one of her benefactors, commits adultery with his brother, and deserts him after bearing him twins to become a madam of a house of prostitution specializing in perversion. In addition, Steinbeck has perhaps his most considered expository comments on the institution of prostitution in the book as may be seen in this example:

The church and the whorehouse arrived in the Far West simultaneously. And each would have been horrified to think it was a different facet of the same thing. But surely they were both intended to accomplish the same thing: the singing, the devotion, the poetry of the churches took a man out of his bleakness for a time, and so did the brothels...

Every town has its celebrated madams, eternal women to be sentimentalized down the years. There is something very attractive to men about a madam. She combines the brains of a businessman, the toughness of a prize fighter, the warmth of a companion, the humor of a tragedian. Myths collect around her, and oddly enough, not voluptuous myths. The stories remembered and repeated about a madam cover every field but the bedroom.49

Prostitution and the brothel are even more integrally used in *Sweet Thursday*. Not only do the prostitutes play an important part in the action of the novel, but also a prostitute, Suzy, is its heroine. The book, a sequel to *Cannery Row*, has Doc, so free of emotional ties in *Cannery Row*, finally succumb to human need. In fact, the plot of the novel can be briefly summarized as the concerted attempts of the Row's inhabitants, chiefly Mack and Fauna, the new madam of the Bear Flag brothel, to marry Doc off to Suzy.

Even though Doc is married to Suzy in the end, making an "honest" woman of her, Steinbeck by no means regards marriage as a blessing in *Sweet Thursday*. While the comments on marriage in *Sweet Thursday* are not as caustic as those seen earlier in *East of Eden*, they generally present marriage in a critical light as Mack's remarks to Doc on the subject would indicate:

"You take a dame and she's married to a guy that's making twenty-five bucks a week. You can't kill her with a meat ax. She's got kids and does the washing—may get a little tired but that's the worse that can happen to her. But let the guy get raised to
seventy-five bucks a week and she begins to get colds and take vitamins." 50

The only complete advocate of marriage in Sweet Thursday is Fauna, oddly enough. Her reasons for supporting marriage are curious to say the least. She is a firm believer in marriage for two reasons: (1) she obtains some of her best customers through marriage, and (2) she tries to marry off her girls well. In short, Fauna is a confirmed believer in marriage of convenience, provided she is the match-maker. Believing that "most people, one, did not know what they wanted; two, did not know how to go about getting it; and three, didn't know when they had it," 51 Fauna thus had no scruples and a great deal of satisfaction over arranging marriages. She was the prime mover in Doc's.

III

Although symbol hunting seems to be the current rage among present day literary critics, it is, nonetheless, a dangerous undertaking, for there is much

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50 Sweet Thursday, pp. 100-101.

51 Ibid., p. 176.
confusion as to what constitutes the literary symbol and even more over its function. It is quite obvious even from the outset of a study of the symbolism of any author that a number of perplexing problems must be faced. The first and most elementary problem is that of definition and here each critic must essentially fend for himself. The definition of symbolism that will be used in this study is this: a symbol is a recurrent image with accretions of meaning. Thus a distinction will be effected between symbol, metaphor, and image. The function of the symbol, as this study will have it, is to organize the metaphorical level of the literary work; that is to say the symbol re-enforces, unifies, and expands the images of the work into a coherent pattern of significance.

In the case of Steinbeck the search for the symbol is paradoxically made more difficult yet simpler by his reliance upon direct description, avoidance of metaphor whenever possible, and limiting his language focus chiefly to the plane of sensation. Nevertheless, Steinbeck does make extensive use of symbols since he cannot accomplish even his limited stylistic ends
without them. Furthermore, since language, even that of direct description, substantially contains a substratum of buried metaphor, it is apparent that the simple prose of Steinbeck, if not richly metaphorical, does contain at least enough imagery for investigation.

This imagery, chiefly biological in reference as seen in the first section of the chapter, is yet too extensive to subject it to a comprehensive analysis. Thus the study will be limited to the recurrent symbols in Steinbeck novels--those occurring in more than one work--to give further evidence of the pervading force that biology exercises over Steinbeck's artistic sensibility. Upon examination of Steinbeck's works a number of recurrent symbols stand out: such inanimate objects as the tide pool, the biological laboratory, and the brothel; physical locales as Monterey and the Salinas Valley and such devices as the boat, and the car.

The recurrent image of the tide pool is found in two novels, Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. Its symbolic nature, however, is established some years before
Cannery Row in Sea of Cortez (1941). There the tide pool is seen to be a microcosm:

...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 non-conceptual time. Then ecology has a synonym which is all.52

This mystic approach to the tide pool, noted also by Bracher, 53 is perhaps even better seen in an extended passage toward the end of Sea of Cortez in which Steinbeck makes a speculation on the mystical oneness of everything in the universe with this observation: "It is advisable to look from the tide pool to the stars and then back to the tide pool again."54

This idea of the tide pool as a microcosm is carried over into Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday. In Cannery Row the tide pool is seen as a place of beauty and of frantic scrambling life. It is the place where Doc collects his marine specimens. The argument of the tide pool as a microcosm is implied in Cannery Row.

52Sea of Cortez, p. 85.
53Bracher, op. cit., p. 184.
54Sea of Cortez, p. 217.
Within its narrow confines the life forms struggle to survive and to procreate as they do in the world at large; the smaller confines of the tide pool in no essential way appears to change the analogy of the microcosm, the life struggle here only being more elemental and easier to see than that in the larger world of man.

Moreover, as Bracher has noted, the tide pool is Steinbeck's "central metaphor." It is his constant among recurrent symbols that he always refers back to in his ecological and non-teleological speculations. That the animals of the tide pool are meant to be related to man can be seen in this passage from *Sea of Cortez*:

We have looked into the tide pools and seen the little animals feeding and reproducing and killing for food. We name them, and describe them and, out of long watching, arrive at some conclusion about their habits so that we say, "This species typically does thus and so," but we do not objectively observe our own species as a species, although we know the individuals fairly well.

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56 *Sea of Cortez*, pp. 16-17. Bracher also gives this quote in an abridged form.
Closely related to the symbol of the tide pool and likewise given explicit treatment in *Sea of Cortez* is the recurrent image of the biological laboratory. Unlike that of the tide pool, the symbol of the biological laboratory first appears in a short story, "The Snake," before it is seen in *Sea of Cortez*. Again, however, as with the tide pool, the laboratory's most extended literary treatment is found in *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*, especially in the latter where a considerable portion of the action of the novel takes place.

The symbol of the biological laboratory like that of the biologist, which was dealt with earlier, is one of the prime symbols in Steinbeck's fiction, for it is the meeting place of two worlds that Steinbeck has managed to bridge in his unique way, the natural and the scientific. The uneasy tension of the yoking can be seen in the frequent descriptions that Steinbeck makes of the laboratory. There is often an undercurrent of humor in descriptions of the laboratory, marking a departure from the usual clinical descriptions of laboratories, for, as will be seen, this laboratory is an unusual one to say the least with its incongruous
mixture of the personal and the scientific since it serves as a home in addition to being a laboratory. Sweet Thursday gives Steinbeck's most extended treatment of the laboratory since, as noted above, much of the action takes place there. Cannery Row, however contains its most explicit description:

   It is a low building facing the street. The basement is the storeroom with shelves, shelves clear to the ceiling with jars of preserved animals. And in the basement is a sink and instruments for embalming and for injecting. Then you go through the backyard to a covered shed on piles over the ocean for the larger animals, the sharks and rays and octopi, each in their concrete tanks. There is a stairway up the front of the building and a door that opens into an office where there is a desk piled high with unopened mail. Behind the office is a room where in aquaria are many living animals; there are microscopes and the slides and the drug cabinets...57

Enough of the catalogue has been given to indicate the specific flavor of the laboratory. It can readily be seen from the familiar humorous tone of the writing that this laboratory is a far cry from the clinical spotless laboratories of universities and corporations. This laboratory obviously reflects Steinbeck's fusion

57Cannery Row, p. 15.
of the personal and the scientific which will be dealt with at more length when the symbol of the biologist is examined.

Another recurrent symbol found in *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday* is that of the brothel. It, however, is found in many more works of Steinbeck as well, for as noted in the preceding section on theme, the brothel formed an important factor in the formation of Steinbeck's views on sex. The brothel, like the laboratory, is also a meeting place between two worlds; only here the worlds are the instinctual and that of social restrictions. Perhaps one, if not the most important, reason why the brothel looms so large in the Steinbeck novel is that it is one of the few places left to urban man of satisfying the demands of instinct, kept so bottled up in him by the tensions and frustrations of the mores and economics of urban life--at least this would appear to be Steinbeck's primary view of the brothel.

The brothel is also seen as a place of initiation where the sexual novice is introduced into the sacred mysteries of sex. There is much fetishism implicit in
such a description of two madams and their brothels as this despite the undercurrent of humor:

She [the Nigger] conducted her house like a cathedral dedicated to a sad but erect priapus...if the sweet world-sadness close to tears crept out of your immutable loneliness, the Long Green was your place. When you came out of there you felt that something pretty stern and important had happened. It was no jump in the hay. The dark beautiful eyes of the Nigger stayed with you for days....

Faye was the motherly type, big-breasted, big-hipped, and warm. She was a bosom to cry on, a soother and a stroker...Her house became the refuge of young men puling in puberty, mourning over lost virtue, and aching to lose some more...58

The symbolic significance of the brothel would seem to be this: The instinctual life of urban man is stifled by the demands of the economic struggle and societal inhibitions. The brothel would appear to be the only way for the average middle-class man to satisfy the demands of the instinctual life.

There are at least two large inanimate recurrent symbols to be found in Steinbeck's fiction, the town of Monterey and the county of Salinas. Both, especially the latter, are to be found in most of Steinbeck's

58East of Eden, p. 194.
works, for only four of Steinbeck's sixteen novels have been localized outside of Salinas county, *Cup of Gold*, *The Moon is Down*, *The Pearl*, and *The Short Reign of Pippin IV*.

It is to be seen that Steinbeck's depiction of Monterey is non-urban. That is to say he does not concentrate his attention as much upon the town as he does upon its outskirts. Its waterfront forms the locale for two novels, *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*, and one of its landward slums the site for *Tortilla Flat*. By focusing his attention upon the outskirts of the town, Steinbeck would appear to be striving to present some kind of mean between the natural world and the urban. Here, as in the tide pool, Steinbeck has set up a kind of no-man's land. If the tide pool can be thought of as the point of contact between the sea and the land, *Tortilla Flat* and *Cannery Row* can be looked at in a similar light. They are the meeting grounds between the instinctive and the conventional drives of man.

Then, too, like the tide pool these outskirts are microcosms. Especially is this designation of microcosm true of *Cannery Row*, which Steinbeck describes in
the familiar terms of non-teleology to show its interrelatedness with all things:

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, honkytonks, 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 had said, "Saints and angels and martyrs and holy men," and he would have meant the same thing.59

Steinbeck's largest recurrent image, Salinas County, as was noted in Chapter I, exercises a similar hold over his creative imagination as did Wessex for Hardy and Yoknapatawpa for Faulkner. However, as was seen earlier, Steinbeck's imagination has not seen fit to transmuted Salinas County as Hardy and Faulkner did with their settings, the most convenient explanation being that Steinbeck is even more committed to the physical reality of his settings than they are. Thus

59Cannery Row, p. 1.
because of this tremendous emphasis upon the physical reality of his setting, Steinbeck's Salinas County as well as his other locales will have an almost photographic correspondence to their originals.60

Ordinarily this near-photographic quality of Steinbeck's settings would seem to lower their value as symbols by cutting down their metaphorical extensions: a closer look, however, would show that they have considerable symbolic value, if circumscribed toward the physical. Salinas County for all its literalness can be said to have several immediate symbolic extensions. The first is that of the microcosm seen already in Monterey and the tide pool. Salinas County is merely a slightly larger microcosm that the town and tide pool. In ratio they are to it as it is to the rest of the country. That it is habitual for Steinbeck to think in this fashion can be seen in an analogous speculation from *Sea of Cortez*:

60This use of literal settings has been noted by Moore and Lisca among others, but perhaps the best evidence is that given by Steinbeck himself in *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, especially in "About Ed Ricketts."
...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.61

Secondly, Salinas County is an ecological unit. That is to say it is a whole of related animate and inanimate units and all of these units are dependent upon each other in some subtle way. The third symbolic extension of Salinas County is implicit in the first two and is made clear by the passage cited above: the microcosm of Salinas County is related to the microcosms of the world, town, and tide pool in an non-teleological fashion. The reality of Salinas County as a symbol is due not only to its sensory impressions but also to all imaginable considerations that can be thought about it as may be seen in this analogue:

61Sea of Cortez, p. 216.
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... conscious and unconscious, subject and object. The whole picture is portrayed by *is*, the deepest world of deep ultimate reality, not shallow or partial as reasons are, but deeper and participating, possibly encompassing the Oriental concept of *being.*

Thus Salinas County stands as a symbol not for something else but for its microcosmic non-teleologically related self, an inextricable part of the whole. Now why Steinbeck depicts his settings in such physical detail can perhaps be seen. He presents his settings as they appear to him because the physical reality of the setting is the index of its ultimate reality, for to Steinbeck while things are more than what they seem, they are primarily what they seem. It is possible that Steinbeck conceives his settings normally in terms of their physical reality because of his interest in

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63 It is obvious from the above that Steinbeck uses the concept of microcosm in a somewhat different sense than it is usually understood. Microcosm, which would normally stand for something else, is not used in this sense by Steinbeck, who uses it primarily in terms of metaphorical extension.
biology, which would condition him to see settings in terms of their physical facts. However, because Steinbeck is also something of a nature mystic, he must also speculate on some kind of ultimate reality lurking behind the appearance he senses so vividly.  

There remain two more inanimate recurrent symbols in Steinbeck's fiction to be examined, the boat and the car. Both appear to have exercised a curious fascination over Steinbeck's mind amounting to fetishism. Although the car is the more frequently seen of the two, the boat is perhaps the more deeply felt as a symbol as this passage from *Sea of Cortez* will show:

> Out of some essential race soul the horns came...the deer antlers sometimes seen in fishing boat masts and not only the horns but the boats themselves, so that to a man, to nearly all men, a boat more than any other kind of tool he uses is a little representation of an archetype. There is an "idea" boat that is an emotion and because the emotion is so strong it is probable that no

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64 Steinbeck's symbolism here would seem to owe something to Emerson's doctrine of correspondences.

65 Ross notes Steinbeck's bent toward fetishism in his essay, "John Steinbeck: Earth and Stars."
other tool is made with so much honesty as a boat...A man builds the best of himself into a boat--builds many of the unconscious memories of his ancestors.66

The passage above, which is continued for more than a page in Sea of Cortez, goes far to explain the curious eccentricity of Henri, the painter, an avid boat builder in Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday, who, nonetheless, has a tremendous fear of the sea. Even more than his paintings, Henri's boats catch up the essential man in him. But Henri, it is to be seen, never finishes his boats; he is always building them, for to finish them as Doc acutely observes, would be tantamount to putting them into the water, a substance that Henri has a deep and unreasoning fear of. It is this same fear that causes him to leave Cannery Row unexpectedly in Sweet Thursday when Mack and the boys play a practical joke on him by gluing seaweed and barnacles on the bottom of his boat, giving him the delusion that the boat has been going out to sea while he has been sleeping in it.

The symbol of the boat is found in two more Steinbeck novels, Cup of Gold and The Pearl. Steinbeck's

symbolic interest in the boat seems not to have been aroused to any great extent in *Cup of Gold*, but the nature of Kino's boat in *The Pearl* quite obviously owes much to the symbolism already seen in *Sea of Cortez*:

The killing of a man was not so evil as the killing of a boat. For a boat does not have sons, and a boat cannot protect itself, and a wounded boat does not heal.67

The car, while perhaps not as deeply felt a symbol, is the more frequently seen in Steinbeck's fiction. Although seen in passing in earlier novels, the car possibly first appears as a symbolic entity in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Here the major symbolic outlines of Steinbeck's attitude toward the car are found. In Chapter VII the car is seen in terms of the used car lot. The Okies desperately seeking transportation for the journey to California are victimized by the rapacious dealers who take advantage of the Okies' needs to make tremendous profits out of worn-out used cars. Then on the journey west on Highway 66 the Joad truck is seen as a kind of nucleus as Bracher has noted.68

67 *The Pearl*, p. 80.

68 See Chapter II of the dissertation where Bracher's ideas are discussed in detail.
Farther on in the novel the car becomes a status symbol. In general, the normative impression of the car appears that of a fetish, for Steinbeck frequently describes the car not only here but also in later works as something sentient.

The Wayward Bus, which perhaps reveals Steinbeck's attitude toward the car more clearly than any other of his novels, shows this fetishism of the car. Juan Chicoy is speaking to Pimples as they work on Juan's bus:

"There's lots nobody knows about metal and engines too. Take Ford. He'll make a hundred cars and two or three of them will be no damn good. It's not just one thing that's bad, the whole car's bad.... It just breaks down little by little and there don't nobody know what makes them bad. And you'll take another car right off the line.... It's got something the others haven't got. It's got more power. It's almost like a guy with a lot of guts. It won't break down no matter what you do." 69

Steinbeck here would seem to be implying a theory of natural selection among inanimate objects. The full fetishistic importance of the passage is seen in that which directly follows it. Juan explains the fetishism of metal to Pimples:

69 The Wayward Bus, p. 22.
"Metal's funny stuff," he said. "Sometimes it seems to get tired. You known down in Mexico where I came from they used to have two or three butcher knives. They'd use one and stick the others in the ground. 'It rests the blade,' they said. I don't know if it's true, but I knew those knives would take a shaving edge."  

But perhaps the most subtle evidence of the fetishism of the car is revealed in the curious blood exorcism of Juan's skinned knuckle as he tightens a nut with a wrench. Juan's attitude toward injury is that of a priest toward a successful sacrifice: "No, it's good luck, I guess. You can't finish a job without blood. That's why my old man used to say."  

This same appeasing of the car spirit is found in The Grapes of Wrath as well.  

Although Walcutt's contention that there is no integral relation between the form and ideas of Steinbeck's fiction seems justified in the main, there is yet some evidence that Steinbeck's plots do more than merely illustrate (Walcutt's italics) his
biological ideas. The animal fables or nature vignettes of The Grapes of Wrath and Cannery Row are a case in point since Walcutt sees them as an apt confirmation of his contention. For him their purpose is clearly to set forth the theme of these works. However, while they seem to do this, they appear to do something more as well as do Steinbeck's plots in general.

The vignette of the turtle crossing Highway 66 in The Grapes of Wrath is too integrally connected with the action that follows to be regarded merely as a theme illustration. This assessment appears to ignore the tightly written naturalistic style of the vignette which would stamp it as a fine example of the scientific essay if it were taken out of context. Then, too, the assessment seems oblivious to the implicit ecology of this and other of Steinbeck's nature vignettes which not only relate man to his environment, but also seem to give Steinbeck's plots a curious organic quality as well, for these vignettes are placed too carefully in their works to be anything other than deliberate.
Then, too, on a larger scale Steinbeck's plots reflect his biological thinking closely. The conclusion to *The Grapes of Wrath* while it may leave much to be desired as denouement is well in keeping with Steinbeck's biological theorizing. The symbolism of Rose of Sharon offering her milk to the starving old man is but a way of saying that "life has one end... to survive." Again, what is the plot of *The Wayward Bus* but an oblique rendering of a laboratory experiment disguised as a modern morality play. The characters are too carefully chosen, their roles too carefully circumscribed, and the irritant that triggers the experiment too carefully administered for these parallels to be considered accidental.

Even the plot of one of Steinbeck's most loosely organized works, *Cannery Row*, would appear to be a series of specific satires on the American middle class from a biological standpoint. For example, the episodes of the frog hunt in which Mack and the boys triumph over the frogs by their superior irrationality and the burial of Josh Billings offer pungent satire of middle-class Americana. However, the plot of *Cannery Row*
reflects Steinbeck's biology in a much deeper way as well. The seeming random placement of the episodes which from any rational point of view would seem to be plotless is perhaps a subtle attempt at a non-teleological organizing of his materials. If non-teleology represents an attempt to see and accept life and the universe as one perceives it, that it becomes apparent then the seeming plotlessness of *Cannery Row* is in reality a non-teleological attempt to show that everything in *Cannery Row* is inextricably related to and has a bearing on everything else. Whether this application of non-teleology to structure was arrived at independently by Steinbeck or was derived from the qualitative progression of the stream of consciousness novels--Steinbeck has been noted to be influenced by literary techniques—cannot be determined here.

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73 See *The Wide World of John Steinbeck*, which examines the literary influences of Steinbeck's works.
CHAPTER VI

BIOLOGICAL NATURALISM AND THE NATURALISTIC TRADITION

Now that Steinbeck's biological naturalism has been examined in detail, it is necessary to summarize the findings and relate them to the naturalistic tradition.

I

The seeds of Steinbeck's biological naturalism were sown in his childhood in his romantic sense of wonder over the panorama of nature and germinated in his teens with his many-sided outdoors life and omnivorous reading. These seeds, however, remained dormant through his college fiction and in his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, although the latter has them close to the surface. They spring into tumultuous growth in Steinbeck's second and third novels, *To a God Unknown* and *The Pastures of Heaven*. While there is no evidence to the
contrary that Steinbeck could have arrived at this biological naturalism without the intermediary and continuing influence of the late Edward F. Ricketts, Steinbeck's closest friend, its strongest influence on his fiction curiously coincides with the period of Steinbeck's friendship with Ricketts, 1930-1948. All the novels written in this period and three of the four following it show a marked ideology of biological naturalism as the dissertation has shown.

In four distinct ways can this biological naturalism be shown to motivate Steinbeck's fiction: in ideology, characterization, structure, and language.

In ideology Steinbeck's biological naturalism manifested itself in three ways—in his explanation of man's history, in his explanation of man's nature, function, and purpose, and in his source of value judgments. Biological naturalism was seen to be Steinbeck's explanation of man's history because of his belief in the essential purposelessness of history. History, Steinbeck appeared to argue, had meaning only in so far as it represented a struggle for domination by transient groups. In addition, biological
naturalism effectively curtailed Steinbeck's explanation of man's nature, function, and purpose. Man's-nature was shown to be largely that of an animal by Steinbeck's strong emphasis on man's biological inheritance and his highly critical appraisal of man's intelligence—perhaps the single most important difference between man and animal. To be sure, in the novels of the fifties Steinbeck appeared to mitigate some of the severity of his anti-rational bias to the extent of praising the creative potential of man's mind, but it is also to be noted that he has not repudiated his anti-rational judgments outright. The function of man in Steinbeck's ideology was to carry out the dictates of his biological drives. The purpose of man was to further his species—literally to survive. Finally, by forming the source of his value judgments, Steinbeck's biological naturalism gave the best and clearest proof of its hold on his art. It was shown to be the motivator of the greatest single theme in his novels, social conflict. In the social conflict the apparent losers, the "have-nots" of society are in reality the
winners of the struggle because they fulfill their biological potential under the stress of adverse fate, while the apparent winners, the "haves," are normally weakened by their success.

In the third chapter of the dissertation an attempt was made to ascertain the origin of Steinbeck's most important biological ideas, "group" man, non-teleological thinking, and racial memory. In addition, some estimate was made of the chief influence upon Steinbeck's biological naturalism, Edward F. Ricketts. Ricketts appeared to exercise a strong influence over Steinbeck's thought in at least three ways: one, through his personality, which was used as a basis of a frequently seen character in Steinbeck's novels, Doc, the biologist; two, through the game of "speculative metaphysics," in which the two men analyzed ideas, usually from a biological standpoint; three, through his vocation, marine biology. The fact that Steinbeck was a partner in Ricketts' business and wrote about it with an easy familiarity would also show the tremendous hold that biology held over his outlook. "Group" man was traced to two possible sources; Allee's thesis of cooperation among animals as a factor in the
evolutionary process or Tolstoy's group movement theory of history. Non-teleological thinking was shown to be a curious mixture of mysticism, scientific observation, and even teleology. Finally racial memory was seen to be derived from the idea of immortality, persisting in biology as aspect of Vitalism, and having analogues to Jung's Collective Unconscious and Butler's unconscious memory.

Biological naturalism appeared to play a prominent role in Steinbeck's handling of character. First of all, it largely confined his people to a plane of sensation; psychological nuances, the normal character-developing tool of most novelists, seemed to be substantially absent in the determination of Steinbeck's characters. The realm most inhabited by his characters was found to be the physiological rather than the psychological. Moreover, biological naturalism was found to be an important if not the chief reason for Steinbeck's favoring of one type of character over another. For example, Juan Chicoy was looked upon with favor by Steinbeck because his frank animality expressed best Steinbeck's biological ideas of the good life of
Mr. Pritchard, on the other hand, was too completely hamstrung by the artificial mores and pressures of middle class society for Steinbeck to have anything more than an acute distaste for him.

The language and structure of the Steinbeck novel when examined revealed important evidence of biological naturalism. The simplicity of Steinbeck's language, his use of direct description and general avoidance of analogy, showed the influence of science upon his writing. However, it was Steinbeck's use of analogy that offered the greatest proof of his biological naturalism. However infrequently used, Steinbeck's analogies were almost always biological in reference, relating man to animal activities. The reference was always from the animal to the man because Steinbeck invariably saw man in animal terms.

Biological naturalism made considerable inroads in the structural relationships of the Steinbeck novel, theme, recurrent symbols, and plot. Besides furnishing the theme of one of his novels, *Burning Bright*, biological naturalism formed the basis of Steinbeck's
largest theme, social conflict, as well as motivating the themes of the group versus the individual, and the free instinctual life. Then, too, Steinbeck's major recurrent symbols, animate and inanimate alike, owed much to his biological naturalism. His inanimate recurrent symbols were microcosms having a non-teleological and ecological relationship to the universe at large. His animate symbols, largely human, showed evidence of biological naturalism chiefly in their relationship with the instinctive life. Those living the freest instinctive lives, Doc, the bums, the paisanos, were almost always those best adapted to meet the generally hostile challenge of their civilization. On the other hand, those who succumbed the most completely to the economic blandishments of civilization, the businessmen, were those with the poorest survival potential. Finally, biological naturalism was most evident in the plots of Steinbeck's novels in his nature vignettes or animal fables which implicitly related the activities of man to the natural processes of the universe in an ecological fashion.
The most important conclusion to be drawn from Steinbeck's biological naturalism is the limitation that it places upon his art. It limits his definition of man largely to a plane of sensation. Thus, most of man's higher faculties; if not taken from him or ignored, are at least placed in jeopardy. Furthermore, by confining man severely, Steinbeck effectively reduces the significance of man's achievements--his technology and civilization. Indeed, Steinbeck seems to regard civilization and most of its attendant values as more harmful than beneficial to man since, in his eyes, it harms man's natural biological fulfillment by limiting his adaptability. Finally, Steinbeck's biological naturalism largely rules out for man any effective code of ethics or morals that would restrict his instinctive life, for only desire and need are usually permitted in Steinbeck's naturalistic ethic. Thus, it can be seen that Steinbeck's biological naturalism is a severely confining ideology. However, it can also be seen that Steinbeck does not follow it blindly. His work, though motivated by a prevailing philosophy of biological naturalism, does contain some departures from it. These departures rather than being motivated by a conflict in thought between
his naturalism and something else appear to stem from a conflict between his head and heart. While Steinbeck in theory may regard man as an animal, any attempt to treat man as an animal brings forth his highly developed sense of social justice.

II

While Steinbeck's naturalism has been considered almost self-evident by critics, only two have appeared to concern themselves about it to the extent of relating it at any length to the naturalistic tradition, Woodburn Ross and Charles Child Walcutt.

Ross in his essay "John Steinbeck: Naturalism's Priest," examined earlier in the dissertation, sees Steinbeck's work as an attempt to create a mystical religion upon a naturalistic foundation. Up to a point Ross views Steinbeck as the complete naturalist in his "acceptance of the scientist's representations of life"¹ and "the value of human acts and attitudes which he considers in harmony with natural law."²

²Ibid., p. 208.
Steinbeck's ethical position, according to Ross, is this: "His position, in so far as he is a naturalist, appears to be the commonplace one that, since humanity is a product of natural forces and since the profoundest biological urge is the urge for life, for survival and reproduction, then virtue consists in whatever furthers these ends."³

Ross isolates three tenets in Steinbeck's naturalistic ethic. First, Steinbeck loves whatever he considers "natural and is keenly sensitive to its emotional values."⁴ Secondly, Steinbeck's next major virtue is that of altruism, which means that man must occasionally go against his natural drives in his love for his fellow man. (This virtue would seem to be based upon Allee's idea of cooperation among animals.) Thirdly, Steinbeck has developed mystical ideas about the oneness of the universe which, Ross believes, "go considerably beyond...his scientific naturalism...but which are...connected with his love of the natural."⁵

³Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 211.
⁵Ibid., p. 211.
Upon this naturalistic ethic Steinbeck builds a religion or rather creates a religious attitude. Ross observes: "He is religious in that he contemplates man's relation to the cosmos and attempts, although fumblingly, to understand it. He is religious in that...he explicitly attests the holiness of nature."6

Walcutt like Ross recognizes the duality in Steinbeck's naturalism that exists between his scientific thought and his mysticism, but where Ross simply regarded them as being two semi-contradictory aspects of a naturalistic ethic, Walcutt attempts to resolve the duality in a more comprehensive theory of naturalism. It is the thesis of Walcutt's book, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream, "that naturalism is the offspring of transcendentalism."7 Walcutt explains his thesis:

American transcendentalism asserts the unity of Spirit and Nature and affirms that intuition (by which the mind discovers its affiliation with Spirit) and scientific investigation (by which it masters Nature, the

6Ibid., p. 217.

7Charles David Walcutt, American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream, vii.
symbol of Spirit) are equally rewarding and valid approaches to reality. When this mainstream of transcendentalism divides, as it does toward the end of the nineteenth century, it produces two rivers of thought. One, the approach to Spirit through intuition, nourishes idealism, progressivism, and social radicalism. The other, the approach to Nature through science, plunges into the dark canyon of mechanistic determinism.

While Walcutt does not see Steinbeck as a major figure in American naturalism, he, nonetheless, devotes about twelve pages in his book to an analysis of Steinbeck's naturalism. First of all, he perceives that Steinbeck has not allowed his naturalism to triumph over his form as did Anderson and Farrell. More importantly, however, Walcutt sees Steinbeck's work as exhibiting both aspects of American naturalism which appear in Steinbeck's work in a state of tension:

The two great elements of American naturalism—spirit and fact, the demands of the heart and the demands of the mind—are Steinbeck's constant preoccupation; they form the poles of his thought in almost every one of his novels; but they are never united in an Emersonian

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8Ibid., p. vii-viii.

9Ibid., pp. 258-269.
pattern of oneness where fact is the symbol and expression of spirit and the union of science and mysticism is acknowledged as natural and inescapable.\textsuperscript{10}

This uneasy tension of spirit and fact Steinbeck deals with "as if he were confused and doubtful and somewhat surprised to see them emerging from a single phase of experience."\textsuperscript{11}

After ascertaining the core of Steinbeck's naturalism Walcutt proceeds to analyze its nature, which he sees as "dramatic and exploratory" and shows how it pulls Steinbeck in many ways:

Thus we see in novel after novel a belief in science, a firm belief in material causation, a belief in the spontaneous goodness of simple men, and a radical distrust of commerce, industry, the business outlook, and conventional piety and morality. The latter he finds either fraudulent or irrelevant to the fundamental problems of men...These ideas seem to pull Steinbeck in various directions: toward science, transcendentalism and revolution. His ideals draw him to naturalistic primitivism and toward the opposing extremes of retreat and revolution. His forms do not embody these forces;

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., p. 258.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 258.
definition of naturalism that he could offer would leave as much to be desired, but if his investigation will help relate Steinbeck's biological naturalism to that amorphous, often contradictory, always puzzling realm known as naturalism it will have served its purpose. Consequently, rather than offering any formal definition of naturalism, the writer will attempt to relate a number of intellectual complexes in Steinbeck's work to naturalism and show they are naturalistic in implication however much their real and seeming contractions since they originate in a vision of life that is essentially naturalistic.

Even on the most obvious level Steinbeck's fiction is thoroughly naturalistic in implication. His very preoccupation with the phenomenon of life and the organisms it so prodigally creates and destroys to perpetuate itself is probably Steinbeck's most immediately seen naturalistic tendency. For it is this catabolic vision of life, this insatiable and unending struggle for existence that Steinbeck has observed so intensely in the greater majority of his works that best characterizes the Steinbeck ethos. Before this all-consuming
struggle most ethical and rational considerations pale, for it is man the biological organism that Steinbeck is most interested in.

Yet for all his technical literary debts, Steinbeck has been singularly little influenced by literary naturalism. Most Steinbeck critics appear to have overlooked this when they have attempted to relate Steinbeck to literary naturalism, since there is little reason for Steinbeck to have derived his naturalistic ideas in this way and there is much evidence to the contrary. As chapter three demonstrated, it was not necessary for Steinbeck to have been familiar with literary analogues of his major naturalistic ideas to have come to similar conclusions, for such conclusions were implicit in the biological theorizing that Steinbeck indulged in by his own admission with Ed Ricketts. Moreover, and this is a tribute to the tremendous interpenetration of Steinbeck's fiction by biology, such a writer does not shape his world in a fashion that would suggest literary influence from the standpoint of ideas. Again, outside of the possible exception of In Dubious Battle, there is not that emotional distance toward
characterization found in Zolasque naturalism in Steinbeck's fiction. Here is a man who feels intensely and reacts sympathetically if not sentimentally toward the life struggle he observes so keenly--there are no puppets in Steinbeck's fiction. His heart--his passionate identification with the biological potential of his people--is a felt thing. And to come at this mystical oneness of all life as he does in Sea of Cortez Steinbeck need not have been stirred by any influences save those of his own sensibilities and the catalyst of Ed Ricketts.

While it is little more than a truism to say that all naturalism is implicitly biological in reference, Steinbeck's naturalism is explicitly biological as well. Few if any naturalistic writers appear to use biology in their work to the extent that Steinbeck does. Certainly no other naturalistic utilizes biology as the basis of his value judgments as much as Steinbeck, for no other naturalist has such an extensive knowledge of biology or uses it with Steinbeck's facility. While other naturalists have seen man in animal terms, only Steinbeck appears consistently to frame man in terms
of animal drives, which is perhaps the best perspective from which to see the continuity of life forms.

Finally, Steinbeck's naturalism appears to have been derived, inasmuch as it can be said to have been derived from any specific source, from evolutionary naturalism, the philosophical movement beginning shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century triggered by Darwin's *The Origin of the Species* that saw "the establishment of the theory of evolution as a law of nature." Steinbeck's major biological ideas, non-teleological thinking, group man, and racial memory, all appear to be derived in large measure from this tradition. Seen in this light non-teleological thinking would appear to have its origin in the Darwinian theory of natural selection and the laws of statistical probability that modern geneticists use to fathom the ramifications of natural selection. On the other hand, the idea of group man would seem to stem from a modern corrective to the theory of natural selection envisaged by Darwin,

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Warner C. Allee's theory of cooperation among life forms. Finally, racial memory would appear to be a vitalist offshoot of nineteenth century biological theory stemming from the Lamarckian assumption that man's mind offers a psychic counterpart to the physical evidence of the evolution of his body.

It is quite obvious that these ideas are contradictory in large measure. Certainly there is a sharp conflict between the evolutionary theory of struggle implicit in the Darwinian theory of natural selection and the idea of evolutionary theory of cooperation seen in Allee's theory, but Steinbeck does not seem to be interested particularly in resolving the dichotomy. While Steinbeck sees that the have-nots of society are biologically superior to its haves, he appears to vacillate somewhat on which method is the best demonstration of their superiority. The social consciousness novels of the thirties, In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath give a marked Darwinian cast to the class struggle whereas such later works as Cannery Row and Sweet Thursday shown an Alleean. Moreover, the idea of non-teleological thinking is a discordant mixture of
ideas as Ross has observed. In it Steinbeck yokes together mysticism, scientific observation, and even teleology. Finally the idea of racial memory is in conflict with orthodox biological theory which views any kind of vitalism with extreme suspicion, since the intrusion of vitalism is regarded as a deus ex machina answer to a particular scientific problem.

Thus Steinbeck's biological naturalism is rent with grave inconsistencies which nonetheless invigorate rather than vitiate the force of his fiction. All these biological influences exist in a state of tension in Steinbeck's work which, as Walcutt has seen, give it a dramatic and exploratory nature. It is the work of a man who has never lost the child's romantic sense of wonder and who sees the life struggle as a wonderful though enigmatic spectacle.
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