CHAPTER 4

THE THEORY OF GROUP-ORGANISM
Non-teleological thinking enabled Steinbeck to see life steadily and as a whole and the result is a unique understanding of social dynamism. As one interested in marine biology, he happened to observe instances of corporate and co-operate life presented by the tide pools. He observed schools of fish and their behaviors and came to the conclusion that there is a fallacy in a usual way of thinking about fish as individuals. The school itself is an animal. The parts serve the whole by the special function they perform. Inevitably Steinbeck gravitates towards the disturbing and thought-provoking concept of the group-animal, suggested first through *Doc Burton of In Dubious Battle*. This group-man concept informs most of Steinbeck’s books like *Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath* and *Cannery Row*. The passions, the migrant Okies, bums like Mack and the boys, do not merit serious consideration as individuals. They are significant because of their group existence. Such groups are integrated units which have separate identities distinct from those individuals composing them.

This idea is unknown to totalitarian set-ups where the individuals are in the name of nationalism or communism, atomized to form highly disciplined and subservient groups. But Steinbeck’s groupman-theory emphasises the element of voluntary union. Thus it is unique as one of Steinbeck’s basic postulates leading to his image of man. As Frederick Carpenter eulogizes,

> This group idea is American, not Russian, and stems from Walt Whitman, not Karl Marx. But it does include some elements that have usually seemed sinful to orthodox Anglo-Saxons.¹

But to the rigid, Caste-Oriented Indian Consciousness this concept does not seem to alien.
Study of biology also leads Steinbeck to a reverence for life and to apprehend its unity. Further, the tide pools make him aware of the dynamic energy and strength involved in all living organism. All living things, including men, he notes, are having the irresistible urge to evolve themselves into better forms. He visualises the life force at work. The inevitability of change and evolution makes the arena of life one of perpetual flux and struggle. By studying the evolutionary pattern, he arrives at strange conclusion. The survival quotient of animals and fish astonishes him. It is greater when the "fighting, crawling resisting qualities" are particularly determined and ferocious. With the help of such logical postulates, he projects the "ethical paradox" confronting man. The qualities of wisdom, tolerance, kindness, generosity and humanity are almost universally acknowledged as "good", but in human society, they "invariably" lead to failure. Social success attends those who have the bad qualities of cruelty, greed, selfishness and rapacity. In other words, it is an over-development of the "survival" qualities that guarantees success.

In an animal other than man we would replace the term 'good' with 'weak survival quotient' and the term 'bad' with strong survival quotient."^2

The above paradox, adduced by him as a result of his study of the tide pools, influences his vision of life and conditions his image of man.

Steinbeck's recognition of the 'ethical paradox' of man was born out of the biological analogy. His image of human life as 'group man' *In Dubious Battle* stemmed from such analogies. The analogy also appears in playful ways elsewhere. Watt points out,

As the novelist sees them, communities like Tortilla Flat and Cannery Row, in Monterey are not merely aggregates of individuals- they are corporate beings,
like schools of fish or like variegated, complex, interdependent colonies of marine creatures in a tide pool, through which messages, information, moods and awareness of needs travel by unknown means with inexplicable rapidity...

Even such a realistically and rather more somberly portrayed community as that of *The Pastures of Heaven* has characteristics of organic life suggestive of the marine analogy.³

The workers in *In Dubious Battle* take on a unity which changes them from individual units to a collective whole. Jim describes the mob in action: “It was like all of them disappeared, and it was just one big animal, going down the road. Just all one animal”.⁴ And Mack approves: “It is a big animal. It is different from the men in it”.⁵ *In The Grapes of Wrath* we see the groupman moving westwards neglecting the ruin of his individual ‘calls’, but unified in his basic compulsion.

The artistic stimulus that Steinbeck found in his biological studies is first articulated in a letter to his friend, Carlton Sheffield, dated June 21, 1933. Three years of random scientific observation had suddenly taken a clear philosophical direction so that he now felt the urge to seek what he called “the symbolism of fiction,”⁶ to act as a vehicle for them. These observations and experiments were derived largely from study of the coral insect, but in the context of the United States in the Depression, they all have obvious human and political dimensions. These are three main issues of importance, the first of which he called the group or phalanx idea. This concerns the properties of a group organism and their difference from the properties of the individual units that compose the group. The ideological extension of this interest in the society of the 1930 may be variously viewed as the clash of totalitarianism and individualism and of communal and selfish behaviour. The second concern is advantages and disadvantages of non-
teleological thinking. The third of Steinbeck's biological themes is a holistic sense of the unity and interdependency of all life forms and their environment. It appears early in Steinbeck's fiction as an instinctive veneration of the natural world by man; however, when this kind of pantheism is placed in the contemporary context of the decay of agrarian life, the mechanization, industrialization, and depoilage of land, it clearly may provoke political as well as religious responses. None of these biological concerns ever became systematized for Steinbeck into rigid theories; they are constantly re-examined in his fiction in changing circumstances. However, the fact that these circumstances include Communist efforts to organize a strike among fruit-pickers and the exploitation of migrants who are forced off their land lures the reader of Steinbeck to measure him against the orthodoxies of his time, even if his progress was oblique and unorthodox.

Steinbeck's interest in the phenomenon of groups' behaviour was certainly not new to American fiction, as Mark Twain's description of the mob in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* will testify: "The pitifulest thing out is a mob ... they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass". In the 1930s a more positive characterization of group behavior emerged in the many proletarian novels that dealt with the solidarity of the union, where workers could acquire dignity, strength and power, all inaccessible to the exploited and impotent individual. What distinguishes Steinbeck's interest is group man from either of these examples is his reluctance to attach any moral judgement to the group phenomenon.
"Man," wrote Steinbeck, "unlike any other thing organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerges ahead of his accomplishments." The Grapes of Wrath is Steinbeck's affirmation that man's life has meaning beyond material existence. And it is revealing of Steinbeck's development as an artist and as a thinker that these conclusions, implicit in The Grapes of Wrath, arise out of the same rational and scientific approach to life with which I have identified him all along. In The Grapes of Wrath he has illustrated how groups could effectively ensure their survival in predatory society only if they sustained a conscious will to survive and only if they followed leaders whose individuality provide them with a clear sight of the purpose of their struggle. These twin necessities satisfied, man could in fact inch forward in material and spiritual evolution. It is no wonder then that Steinbeck reacted bitterly to the war, a war "out of all control of intelligence". War for Steinbeck, was futile. He believed, as Doc Burton had expressed in In Dubious Battle, that "you can only build a violent thing with violence". Men in war are not groupman exercising their survival instinct, but are "herd men" fed on the illusion that killing will end the killing, all the while manifesting their drive towards self extinction. Steinbeck recognized "the sad trait of self destruction that is in our species," but he denounced it. In what appears now to have been an almost symbolic last act before the United States entered the war, Steinbeck returned to Mexico immediately after his marine expedition to work on the documentary, The Forgotten Village. The film was a poignant illustration of man's potential for helping his fellowman to wage a different kind of war—a war against ignorance, poverty, and disease.
In *In Dubious Battle*, Dr. Burton compares social injustices to the physiological injustice of syphilis or amoebic dysentery, and he insists that to cure either, one must first study and see. Nor is it enough to study the pathogenic organisms in the test tube; one must observe them in interaction with a body and grasp the whole pattern. Hence he goes to the seat of the wound, the strike, and he studies the vigilantes as enthusiastically as he does the strikers.

In explaining to Mac why he works for the strikers without really believing in their causes, Dr. Burton touches on one of the speculations elaborated in *Sea of Cortez*. This is the idea of group-man, and it is an idea which has deeply stirred Steinbeck's imagination. Apparently it developed out of conversations with Ricketts, and some of the biological data out of which the concept grew are recorded in between Pacific Tides, "an account of the habits and habitats of some five hundred of the common, conspicuous seashore invertebrates of the Pacific Coast." In a discussion of the aggregating, or intertwining, habits of brittle stars (Amphiodia Occidentalis) Ricketts refers to studies made by Dr. W.C. Allee which "lead us to the border line of the metaphysical." Groups of brittle stars bring about "a degree of resistance to untoward conditions that is not attainable by isolated individuals," by giving of a protective material which passes through ordinary filter paper and persists after the filtrate is boiled. It is apparently similar to antibodies, and it is capable of conferring protection from poisons to isolated animals which, by themselves can not produce the protective substance. Ricketts uses their discovery to explain his own observation that, while individual anemones can be readily anesthetized, a group shows great resistance and even ultimately renders the pans in which they are kept unfit for use in anesthetizing.
To summarize, there is evidence that a group of animals performs biological functions of which the individual animals are incapable.

Dr. Burton in *In Dubious Battle*, quite explicitly presents such an idea:

I want to watch these group-men [the strikers], for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn’t himself at all, he’s a cell in organism that isn’t like him any more than the cells in your body are like you.... It might be like this, Mac: When group-man wants to move, he makes a standard, ‘God wills that we re-capture 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. May be the group simply wants to move, to fight, and uses these words simply to reassure the brains of individual men, I say it might be like that Mac. 15

The nature and desires of group-man are not the same as those of the individuals.

“The pleasure we get in scratching an itch causes death to a great number of cells. May be group-man gets pleasure when individuals are wiped out in a war.” 16

Though the strikers constitute a group-animal, they may also be only one part of a still larger group-animal – the total society of which they are one force. Similarly, the school of fish, “an animal itself, reacting with all its cells to stimuli which perhaps might not influence one fish at all”, may be a part of a larger unit which is as, explained in *Sea of Cortez,* 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 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.” 17
To study group-man, a scientist must try his best to keep from being a mere cell in that organism. The tragedy is that an individual is not able to isolate himself completely from the larger organism, nor yet control it; and he is affected, often mortally in Steinbeck’s novels, by what group-man does. So, in *Of Mice and Men*, George does, knowingly, what group-man makes it necessary for him to do, even though it is bad in itself. So in *The Grapes of Wrath*, men do evil things driven by the demands of an organism which they compose, but which is larger than themselves.

The bank is something else than the men. It happens that every man in a bank hates what the bank does, and yet the bank does it. The bank is something more than men, I tell you. It’s the monster. Men made it, but they can’t control it. 18

The grandfather who was “The Leader of the People” (*The Long Valley*) is left an empty shell when the westering group-animal of which he was a part has spent its force. And the Nazis in *The Moon is Down* are not so much evil in themselves (to the great annoyance of many reviewers) as cell in a group-animal bent on evil of an immensity impossible to any single human being.

Though Steinbeck clearly hates capitalist exploitation and attacks bourgeois virtues, he is far from being an orthodox leftist. The inconclusive struggle between strikers and the town is truly a dubious battle; and while the reader’s sympathy is directed unmistakably toward the strikers, Dr. Burton is there to remind us to be shocked at all mechanized inhumanity of the Communist Organizers. The exploitation of the apple pickers is undoubtedly bad, but so are cancer and tetanus. The cruelty of the vigilantes is bad, but Steinbeck makes it clear that they are only tools of the owners; they are parts of an organism larger
than themselves, and they follow the drivers and direction of the larger organism. So with the owners and vigilantes of *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck hates the system of which they are natural manifestations, but his severest charge against them personally is that they have become de-humanized, have lost the vitality and initiative and adaptability of good biological specimens of the human species. This, it appears from the novels generally, is the true sin against the Holy Ghost-to become so sunk in the social organism as to loose one’s biological individuality.

Steinbeck’s attitude to communism was like the ancient Greek citizen’s attitude to politics. “In the winning of his livelihood he was essentially individualist: in the filling of his life he was essentially ‘communist’. “¹⁹ Steinbeck’s sources of inspiration were Marxist only in passing; the roots were in Emerson and Whitman. The novels of social protest, *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, had their roots in his own native ground. Through his intimacy with the poor and the outcasts, Steinbeck learned to like them, caught the trick of their speech and gestures, shared their joys, sorrows and their dreams. *The Grapes of Wrath* is a testament of love and sacrifice, and not of mere Wrath.

Steinbeck was deeply moved by the unhappy lot of the migrants. Even before *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, he wrote a number of articles on the migrant laborers for the San Francisco News.²⁰ No one was better suited for the job than Steinbeck:

He knew the work: he knew the people, he knew the bitterness. He felt them in the marrow of his bones. He also had a deep affectionate sense of identification with the fruit-pickers; and he was a California; and he felt a responsibility.²¹ Steinbeck felt the responsibility so much that he wrote his agent Elizabeth Otis. “I must go over into the interior valleys. There are five thousand starving to death
over there, not just hungry but actually starving,” He was so angry with “The Fascist group of utilities and banks and huge growers” that he wanted to “do something to know these murderers on the heads.”

Steinbeck’s novel _The Pearl_ (1947) too displays his concept of the group-man. But here, in addition to the idea that the pearl buyers are a group, we have the picture of an individual trying to break away from the group. Kino wants to get out of the stifling Indian village. His attempt to sell the pearl is considered by his brother as a revolt against everything. “You have defied,” he says, “not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid for you.” Kino, then has risen against two groups. The fear of the Indians is easily understood. Centuries of ignorance and poverty have made them accept their present status. The white Spanish population represents the same commercial class that is obliquely condemned in _Cannery Row_. Kino dreams that he will break through both the barriers. He can only break his knuckles against the iron gates of prosperity. An individual has no chance against an organized profiteering system. Knowing this Mack and the boys have developed the philosophy of contentment with what is available. They survive and cheerfully, too, in the midst of “ambition and nervousness and covetousness.” Kino learns the lesson the hard way. After he refuses to sell his pearl in the town, his brother asks him; “But suppose you are correct-suppose your pearl is of great value-do you think then the game is over?” If La Paz could offer so much trouble to a pearl fisher, how much more could the Capital Give? The merchants of the Capital might succeed in destroying Kino. The wisdom of his brother is
unheeded by Kino. He feels outraged. “Oh, my brother, an insult has been put on me that is deeper than my life. For on the beach my canoe is broken, buy house is burned,” he reacts. Having killed a man he is left with no option but to escape. When he flies north, he is pursued. The pursuit is only another instance of the ruthlessness of the profiteers. Until the pearl is thrown back into the sea Kino has no peace.

*The Pearl* is an allegory of the individual’s struggle for survival against fierce competition. At the time of writing the novel Steinbeck saw no chance of the individual’s success. Sympathy for his suffering and the plight of the ignorant Indian fishermen are reminiscent of Joeds and Tom, and the villagers of Santiago and Juan Diego, the boy in *A Forgotten Village*. The difference is that Kino does not rebel on behalf of the whole community. It is his own private enterprise in which he fails. He realizes that after all the pursuit of wealth requires the sacrifice of the very people for whose sake he wants wealth—his child, and probably, his wife. Though defeated in his purpose he is, morally, victorious.

It appears as if Steinbeck is suggesting that while an individual has every right to strike out a path for himself, he should realize his role as a member of a community. For man is a double thing, and he can not successfully be an individual before he has been a part of the group. It is with this attitude that *The Wayward Bus* is also written. Like *The Pearl* it is also an allegory, as it is made clear in the epigraph,

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I pray you all gyve audyence,
And here this matter with reverence,
By figure a moral playe;
The somonynge of Everyman called it is,
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That of our lyves and endyng showes
How transytry we be all daye.27

The moral is that every individual should learn to behave as part of one group. *The Wayward Bus* tells of people who refuse to form a group even in times of need.

The individual’s acceptance of the group though a painful realization of the biological truth that if life goes on, though individuals may perish, is dramatised in *Burning Bright*. Joe Saul is proud of his family, his blood and the child to be born. Learning of his wife’s pregnancy, he shouts excitedly; “My immortality is preserved . . . And it will be a piece of me, and more, of all I came from—the blood stream, the pattern of me, of us, like a shining filament of spider silk hanging down from the incredible ages.”28 But his dream of personal immortality is shattered when he learns that he is sterile and Mordeen’s child is not his child. Joe Saul breaks down. “My line, my blood, all the procession of the ages is dead. And I am waiting for a little while and then I die.”29 Friend Ed condemns Saul’s ego and asks him to accept the gift to love. He tells him, “—only great men have the courage and courtesy and, yes, the generosity to receive.”30 At last Saul confesses, “. . . I had to walk into the darkness to know—to know that every man is father to all children and every child must have all men as father. This is not a little piece of private property, registered and fenced and separated. Mordeen! This is the child.”31 He understands the unity of all life preached by Jim Casy. “It is the race, the species that must go on,” 32 says Joe Saul. The holiness of life is accepted, Ed through his compassion for Saul, and Mordeen through her love bring this realization for him.”33
"It reveals in positive terms his mystic conception of the unity of all life in the group animal, especially as this conception was presented in To A God Unknown, The Grapes of Wrath and Sea of Cortez."

*East of Eden* presents Steinbeck in a contrasting facet of his role as story telling craftsman. The longest of his novels, it manages to be intimate and personal in tone, establishing itself as a kind of genial father-confessor among his books. The contrast with *In Dubious Battle* is complete: one is diffuse in interest as the other is impact; the later is full of Conventional perambulations as the earlier is severely shorn of such devices. A diary Steinbeck kept for the benefit of his editor during the composition of *East of Eden*, and published posthumously, throws curiously little light on his creative method. But it is clear that in this effort he drew his inspiration from the symphonic form of which he was a devoted student. Into the novel he weaves three themes. Each is given its major and minor variations which play upon each other with harmonic intricacy, producing crescendos of cumulative power. The motifs reveal their interrelationship with ever increasing lucidity so that in the end the work is discovered to be a hymn to earth and to man as protector, expander, and fulfiller of its destiny.

The first motif may be indentified by the word "Westering". The compulsive movement of men and women across a sea and a continent, to establish a new society in a setting foreign to its origins but sympathetic to its need, is dramatized in the chronicles of two families, the Hamiltons out of Ireland and the Trasks out of Connecticut. They come together in the Salinas Valley, there to enact the scenes that are vital to Steinbeck's story of new creation, this time the
creation by man of his own world. This is, however, no usual family record of getting and spending, begetting and dying. The events are numerous, spectacular, often violent. They involve all the inevitable crises of conflict ranging from personal feud to war itself. But these concerns to individuals are offered as evidence that a far more significant story is in the process of unfolding. Steinbeck defines westering as the impulse of the group to transform itself into “one great crawling beast”\textsuperscript{35} compelled by the secrets of its nature to move through perils, survive disaster, and “get there.” This is, in effect, an account in allegorical terms of the great yearning of man ever and again to reenact the drama of Genesis.

The second motif searches out the personal compulsions which in each underlie the urgent thrust of the will to survive. In each generation of the family of the Adam Trask the conflict of Cain and Abel is paralleled. This, Steinbeck suggests, is “the symbol story of the human soul” and he undertakes to explore the maze of hostilities through which each man must make his way in the inevitable struggle for dominance of brother over brother. The same fateful pattern of ambivalence is evident in the relationship of father and son. As Steinback’s spokesman observes: “The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a large or small extent has felt rejections. And with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt.”\textsuperscript{36} Steinbeck’s two visions of the passion of Everyman, dramatized in Adam Trask’s struggle first with a violent brother and then with a difficult, demanding, sensitive son, play contrapuntally on each other until the significance of each phase is fully revealed. The “story of mankind” has been restaged, losing none of its
The third motif is also a familiar one but it is giving a new variation. What Steinbeck contributes to discussion of humanity’s Problem one—the conflict between good and evil—is his own concept of the doctrine of free will. Again he refers to the biblical story recalling that the Lord, in the severity of his love, says to Cain: “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.” Steinbeck became convinced that the king James version of the Bible errored in its translation of the significant word in this passage, the Hebrew verb “Timshel”. His redefinition makes it a word not of command but of counsel: thou mayest, rather than thou shalt, rule over sin. One critic believes that Steinbeck ultimately reduces man’s devoutness to animalism, that Steinbeck “presents man as a captive... of instincts and appetites only, blindly desiring and striving, not reasoning, judging, choosing but automatically responding to impulses and attractions”, Another, however, finds in The Grapes of Wrath “a contemporary adaptation of the Christ image” and indications of “some Christian meaning.” Still others have seen various of Steinbeck’s characters as pagans, pantheists, transcendentalists, and animals. The revealing fact in all this critical diversity is that the particular arguments hold up rather well; a roll-call of Steinbeck’s characters would indeed muster an army of separate creeds. I contend that this very variety of religious direction in his characters constitutes one of the important thematic patterns in Steinbeck’s novels.
each man creating his private religion to conform to the dictates of his nature, there is reason to believe that such a phenomenon must have existed since man first sought an answer to the mystery of his being. Arguing for the existence of a universal religious propensity, George Santayana wrote:

Even the heretics and atheists, if they have profundity, turn out after a while to be forerunners of some new orthodoxy. What they rebel against is a religion alien to their nature...but they yearn mightily in their own souls after the religious acceptance of a world interpreted in their own fashion. 41 And again: “Religion is an interpretation of the world, honesty made, and made in view of man’s happiness and its empirical conditions.” 42 Like Santayana, Steinbeck supposes that man is so constituted as to seek out a religion that suits his particular needs, and that if he finds none among those already existing, he creates his own.

Steinbeck does not attribute man’s religious sensibility to a series of observable causes; he insists that reductive methods can not be used to explain the nature of the soul. Even when Jung affirms, in his theory of racial archetypes, that modern man’s behaviour patterns are traceable to his earlier history (and, infact, to his animal ancestry), he denies that his knowledge of heritage in any way unveils the mystery of the existence of man’s individual and collective souls. We can, in other words, know only that man has always thought, felt and acted as he does now; we can know why. The “spontaneously” is particularly significant in the following judgment from Jung:

Man has, everywhere and always, spontaneously developed religious forms of expression, and...the human psyche from time immemorial has been shot through with religious feelings and ideas. Whoever can not see this aspect of the
Steinbeck’s view of man as religious being deals with the mind and with the soul of man and suggests a most-romantic-perhaps sentimental-approach to life. Conversely, his group-animal theory deals with man (in masse and individually) as a biological creature and seems to imply that Steinbeck’s approach to life is calculating and impersonal, that he is unconcerned with man’s spiritual self. But Steinbeck is first of all an artist, and if his awareness of man as an animal seems incongruous with his awareness of man’s spirituality, both notions nevertheless have one important thing in common as Steinbeck employs them in his fiction: both work metaphorically to depict the artist’s total vision of man’s duality. For critical purpose each must be studied separately as idea, but as I shall show in the third of this three-pronged scheme, Steinbeck unites the two in a final moral and artistic resolutions.

In an essay designed to show that metaphor “develops out of social conditions and in turn influences social behavior,” Weller Embler concluded in part that while our age has found its “master metaphor” in the machine, “it is apparent that our contemporary social similitudes are often drawn from the biological sciences.” Embler’s observation suggests how true a vision for our time is Steinbeck’s theory and metaphor of the group-animal. After alluding to Steinbeck’s short story, “The Leader of the People,” where westward-moving pioneers are “one big crawling beast,” and wagons moving across the plains are “centipedes,” Embler explains:

In Steinbeck’s search for a social philosophy which could meet the problems of the day, he turned for assistance to the biological sciences. In these he found
sound method, tested hypothesis, and, if it could be translated into language descriptive of human behavior, a body of us able information about subhuman life... And it became Steinbeck's habit to compare human beings with marine animals, with land animals, and with insects. It may be fairly said that Steinbeck's dramatic similarities between mice and men, between fish and men (Sea of Cortez), between centipedes and men, whether drawn from observation or embedded within the firm system of ecology, have changed the social thinking of many readers.  

And to this may be added that Steinbeck's group-animal metaphor, unlike machine metaphors (which imply futility), manages to convey a sense of the animal's conscious movement (implying hope).

In *Sea of Cortez* Steinbeck elaborates on the kind of observations that led to his group man theory. Here he describes the activities of certain groups of primitive sea animals:

There are colonies of pelagic tunicates which have taken a shape like the finger of a glove. Each member of the colony is an individual animal, but the colony is another individual animal, not at all like the sum of its individuals. Some of its colonists, girdling the open end, have developed the ability, one against the other, of making a pulsing movement very like muscular action. Others of the colonists collect the food and distribute it, and the out side of the glove is hardened and protected against contact. Here are two animals, and yet the same thing... so a man of individualistic reason, if he must ask, "which is the animal, the colony or the individual?" must abandon his particular kind of reason and say, "why, it's two animals and they aren't alike anymore than the cells of my body are like me. I am much more than the sum of my cells and, for all I know, they are much more than the division of me."

The first sentence of the individualistic reasoner's answer to his own question is very like a statement of Doc Burton's in *In Dubious Battle*. So not the human
being, but the tunicate or sea whip or sponge serves as model for the tunicate group organism. Steinbeck was later to say in *The Pearl* that "a town is a thing like a colonial animal".47

The precise biologist may point out that human groups hardly fit the glass of aggregation in which Allee puts tunicates, since the individual animals of the colony are contiguous. But to Steinbeck, as to Herbert Spencer, contiguity of parts matters little: he sees the same phenomenon in schools of fish, where the individuals are not in mutual contact, In speaking of the schools, he extends the conception from organized groups to whole species, to ecological communities, to all life:

The schools swam, marshaled and patrolled. They turned as a unit and dived as a unit. In there 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 through the school were not unit. We can not conceive of this intricacy until we are able to think of the school as an animal itself, reacting with all its cells to stimuli which perhaps might not influence one fish at all, And this larger animal, the school, seems to have a nature and drive and ends of its own. It is more than and different from the sum of its units...In the little way of San Carlos, where there were many schools of a number of species...[we perceived] 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 larvel shrimp to little fish to larger fish to giant fish-one operating mechanism and perhaps this 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.48
single animal, the human species, and that in turn is an organ of the single animal, which is the biosphere. And that is not at all; the whole is single organism:

...species are only commas in sentence,...each spices is at once the point and the base of a pyramid ... And then not only the meaning but the feeling about species grows mystery. 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 and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. 49

Here is the oversoul (to which Steinbeck alludes in the “Easter sermon”), and here is the great chain of being. Steinbeck’s statement is near to Leibniz’:

Thus men are linked with the animals, these with the plants and these with the fossils, which in turn merge with those bodies which our senses and our imagination represent to us as absolutely inanimate ... it is necessary that all the orders of natural beings form but a single chain, in which the various classes, like so many rings, are so closely linked one to another that it is impossible for the senses or the imagination to determine precisely the point at which one ends and the next begins—all the species which, so to say, lie near to or up on the borderlands being equivocal, and endowed with characters which might equally well be assigned to either of the neighboring species. (Lovejoy’s translation.)50

Steinbeck is certainly Leibnizian when he says that life “is a unified field of reality” in which “everything is an index of everything else.” The “feeling we call religious,” says Steinbeck, is “The attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing.” 51

In these higher pantheistic and panpsychic reaches we leave biology behind. Although his biological studies of animal aggregations shaped Steinbeck’s organismic theory of the human group, biological science does not really support
it, that is, all the evidence that he adduces can be, and is, explained otherwise. Steinbeck himself designates all such speculation as “It might be so.” Since in To a God Unknown he had already stated through Joseph Wayne the central idea expressed in the foregoing quotation, it is probable that his belief in the unity of all being was prior to his formulation of the group-organism theory as a special application of it. It may be that his reading of Emerson and Emerson’s Romantic predecessors first turned his mind in this direction. For the organic view of the world is a distinctive and fundamental feature of Romantic thought. The Romantics, revolting against mechanistic and formistic ideas, turned to the world of living things for a cosmic pattern. They likened the word to a living animal or plant, as Morse Peckham has shown: “[The metaphor] is a tree, for example, and tree is a good example,” being an image that they used often. The interrelation of a tree’s component parts is that “of leaves to stem to trunk to root to earth. Entities are an organic part of that which produced them. The existence of each part is made possible only by the existence of every other part.” Steinbeck has much in common with the Romantics. He is usually classed as a realist or naturalist, but these are mere labels, and they hardly suit To A God Unknown and Tortilla Flat. Moreover, Irving Babbitt the anti-Romantic and Jacques Barzun the pro-Romance agree on one thing, that realism springs from Romanticism. But in a deeper sense than that Steinbeck is an heir of the Romantic movement. The organic view of the world renews primitive animism at a more sophisticated level. To the animist, sky and earth, wind and storm, tree and rock are living entities. Out of animism springs myth, and so Steinbeck’s biological interpretation and his
In his discourse on the schools Steinbeck recurs to the idea expressed in *In Dubious Battle* that an individual may be a special organ of the group animal:

...we suspect that when the school is studied as an animal..., 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 the predator for the sake of the security of the school as an animal...There would seem to be only one commandment for living things: Survive! And the forms and species and units and groups are armed for survival, fanged for survival, timid for it, fierce for it, clear 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.53

One function of the individual unit, then, is to die for the good of the whole. Here and elsewhere Steinbeck asserts that the relation of predator to prey is mutually beneficial: in Norway, it seems, the hawks were doing the willow grouse a good turn by preying on them, killing those slow-moving grouse infected with a parasitic disease and thus preventing the spread of the disease to healthy birds. This leads to the conclusion, and Steinbeck does not hesitate to draw it, that no individual’s death matters at all, since it is necessary for the survival of the species; the commandment “Survive” is directed to the collective beings. For “to the whole, there is no waste. The great organism, Life, takes it all and uses it all....Nothing is wasted; ‘no star is lost.’” Even human sacrifice can be rationalized:

Something one has a feeling of fullness, of warm wholeness, wherein every sight and object and odor and experience to seem to key into a gigantic whole...Perhaps among primitive people the human sacrifice has the same effect
Thus natural selection and sacrament have the same meaning, and magic is truly the forerunner of science. The sacrifices of Joseph Wayne, Jim Nolan, and Jim Casy express as-one-meant with the universe.

Stanley Hyman and other critics have seen a change in Steinbeck’s social thinking from a kind of agrarian socialism in *The Grapes of Wrath* to an antisocial individualism in *Sea of Cortez*, in which he expresses a social Darwinism which Herbert Spencer would have heartily approved. He makes such statements as that a reservoir of unemployed is inevitable; that war is a diagnostic trait of human of beings; that pain, sorrow, disease, hunger, are necessary conditioning factors, to keep us tough and prevent our becoming an easy prey to the stronger; that hope is illusory, a diagnostic trait useful only as a “therapeutic poultice” or shock-absorber, and the principal source of “iron teleologies.” Again, man’s present mutation, says Steinbeck, appears to be in the direction of greater collectivism and “there is no reason to suppose... [that this mutation] is for the better.” For a collective state, like that of the Incas, becomes soft and corrupt: the aggressive, warlike Spaniards destroyed the Inca empire. Steinbeck may hedge a bit with an “It might be so” or a “viewing-point man” but this revised Spencerism is apparently the view which he accepts in *Sea of Cortez* as something like “the whole picture.”

There is really no change in his views, for such convictions as these were expressed in his novels of the thirties. For example, Doc Burton of *In Dubious Battle* saw labor troubles, unemployment, and wars as afflictions and drives of the group animal. Doc Burton is Ed Ricketts, and his doctrine dominates *Sea of*
again, we completely ignore the record of our species.”

In 1940 men were engaged in a war that nobody wanted (not even Hitler, it seems), says Steinbeck, and yet they had it, “a zombie war of sleep-walkers which nevertheless goes on out of all control of intelligence.” As Doc Burton said, individual men formulate reasons and purposes for going to war, but the group animal merely wants war, and there is nothing that individual men can do about it. So these non-teleologists, telling us to look at the whole picture, to see what actually “is,” direct us to the behavior of group organisms which are all part of the one world organism. We might suppose that we should study economic conditions, historical backgrounds, governmental policies, in order to arrive at the whole picture. But no, we must not “place the blame for killing and destroying on economic insecurity, on inequality, on injustice,...”

In a somewhat dubious fashion, studying socio-economic conditions of war has become blaming them, and the living actions, decisions, oppressions, become three abstractions that can be dismissed at once. One begins to suspect that “the whole picture” is preconceived.

Steinbeck’s non-teleological speculations are the foundation of his social Darwinism, organismic theory, and chain of being (the last in striking agreement with Leibniz, whose philosophy is thoroughly teleological). These are uneasy bedfellows, since social Darwinism favors aggression, go-getting, business success, heaping up of riches; whereas the organismic and panpsychic ideas look toward cooperation, harmony, and the family virtues ---there are reprehensible groups, but, like bad individuals, they are out of tune. Hence Steinbeck finds an ethical paradox, to which he recurs in *Cannery Row*: that though we profess love
gred, self-interest, graspingness, and rapacity,” yet the approved “good qualities are invariable concomitants of failure, while the bad ones are the cornerstones of success.” Men, he continues, secretly admire the bad qualities which bring success and riches, and though they regard Jesus, Augustine, and Socrates with love, they “would rather be successful than good.” So if a biologist objectively observed these phenomena in another species, he “would replace the term ‘good’ with ‘weak survival quotient’ and the term ‘bad’ with ‘strong survival quotient.’” Here Steinbeck puts his finger on a conflict of moralities in our civilization, but he has lapsed into the social-Darwinistic equation of survival with success in economy competition (and overlooked the present reality, that competition no longer accurately describes the economic), which means the acquisition of that property and wealth which cut one off from the “we.” Nevertheless, all the heroes of his novels for a decade illustrated the good qualities of friendliness, generosity, humility (though not always honesty): his paisanos are healthy when they have nothing to do with the values of property and business success and go into decline as soon as they acquire property. His point had been that these values did not matter and that no real success was won in realizing them. So he appears to express inconsistent views about viable qualities: the ruthless wealth-seeker has a “strong survival quotient,” and the poor but honest man has a healthier and more satisfactory way of life. Steinbeck attempts to reconcile these views by pointing to a “routine of changing domination.” The successful rich become soft in security and are replaced by men who had become strong in adversity; then the new dominates become soft in their turn. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Ma Joad told Tom
that hardships make the people tough: ‘Rich fellas come up an’ they die, an’ their kids ain’t no good, an’ they die out. But, Tom, we keep a-comin’.’” And in interchapeters of that novel Steinbeck shows that property and too great security have corrupted the owners, making them soft or dehumanizing them, whereas the pickers gain strength in adversity. But the point of the dominance-cycle theory is that success, survival, is gained through the bad qualities which are its concomitants. That is, the unsuccessful good men, toughened by hardships, adopt the bad aggressive qualities and win. The Joads, however, moved in precisely the opposite direction, towards greater friendliness and generosity; for their contingent success lay in the direction of greater cooperation and union with other men. The truth is that Steinbeck (and Ricketts) did not think the question through. With his natural selection in human affairs and his group organism he had stopped with Herbert Spencer, who died in 1903.

Steinbeck’s “agrarian socialism” is really Chestertonian Distributivism, a society of small-scale farmers working their own plots. First, the men who want land must be given some; second, the present owners must realize this or go under. In The Grapes of Wrath Steinbeck lectures the owners: “If you who own the things people must have could understand this, you might preserve yourself…. For the quality of owing freezes you forever into ‘I’, and cuts you off forever from the ‘we’.” That is, they do not recognize their human and cosmic identity, are no longer in harmony with nature, and are therefore vulnerable. Aroused by the migrants’ problems, Steinbeck expressed his characteristic views in social terms and envisaged a cooperative society based on small landholdings. Despite this, the vision was fitful; In Dubious Battle and The Grapes of Wrath waver between
optimism and doubt end without coming to a conclusion. Shortly afterwards in the Gulf of California, as Steinbeck repeatedly tells us, world and national affairs become remote. A world war was going on, and the collecting party hardly gave it a thought.

With Chesterton I believe that the most important thing about a man is his view of the world, and when we know Steinbeck’s philosophy the meaning of his novels becomes clearer. And since it is an inadequate philosophy for a novelist, the central theses of his novels are not likely to carry complete conviction, whatever his narrative and poetic skill. Here is the big fault. Great as Steinbeck’s novels of the thirties are, and they are truly great, they fall short of eminence, simply because Steinbeck lacked a genuine theory of society; for the group organism will not do. He was constantly trying to put man in relation to the universe instead of his fellows, like the Akkadian mythmaker who started from creation in order to define toothache’s place in the world. One might almost say that Steinbeck’s characters do not have social relations; certainly they do not have them as do the characters of Henry James, Dickens, George Eliot, Stendhal, or Faulkner.

One can learn something about marine zoology from Steinbeck’s Log as well as from Rickett’s phyletic catalogue. The book is a contribution to zoological science both valuable and useful. A pleasant feature is Steinbeck’s evident love of the work that he was doing and admiration for the creatures that he observed and collected.

Steinbeck’s another non fiction Bombs Away (1942), like The Grapes of Wrath, has plot, and the excerpts from the government publications paralleled the
interchapters from *Grapes*, in both books, the main characters show their mettle by surviving and learning from their initiatory experiences. If Steinbeck's bout of depression that occurred in 1942 can be directly traced to this book, as his letters seem to indicate, then it is possible that it was precipitated by his decision to write in the fiction format that he was familiar with instead of using the techniques of the journalist.

It is fitting that the theme that branded him as a propagandist in the eyes of some readers in *The Grapes of Wrath*—his concept of group-man is the focus of *Bombs Away*. This concept springs from Steinbeck's conviction, voiced by Jim Casy in *The Grapes of Wrath*, that all men and woman are "a little piece of a great big soul."59 While this theme attracted quite a bit of attention in *The Grapes of Wrath*, it actually permeates many of his works, Rama in *To A God Unknown* declares that a man "is not a man, unless he is all men."60. The term "group-man" was first used by Doc in *In Dubious Battle*, who tells Mac, "You might be an expression of a group-man, a cell endowed with a special function, like an eye-cell drawing your force from group-man."61 In *The Red Pony*, Grandfather describes that westward movement of the pioneers as "a whole bunch of people made into one big crawling beast."62

Of course the idea of group-man is also fundamental to the military, which attempts to play down individualism so that men can learn to function as a unit. In *Bombs Away*, Steinbeck describes the process by which a group of unruly boys is transformed into a unit of fighting men. Although this process is a complicated one, consisting of a plethora of examinations and drills, Steinbeck insists that Americans take easily to this kind of indoctrination because teamwork is a
and girls take part in team playing. From one ol’ cat to basketball, sand-lot baseball, to football, American boys learn instinctively to react as members of a team.”

By the end of Bombing school, the inductee has learned to enjoy conformity: “At first he had disliked the formation, but as he became precise in his step and carriage he grew to like them...He discovered something he had not learned, which the directionless depression had not permitted him to learn—the simple truth that concerted action of a group of men produces a good feeling in all of them.”

*Bombs Away* no doubt served its purpose well. It was “intended to be read by the mothers and fathers of the prospective Air Force men, to the end that they will have some idea of the training their sons have undertaken,”

But the mothers and fathers wanted more than a report on the technical features of their sons’ training. They wanted the illusion sustained that all was right with the war and with their sons’ participation in it. They wanted their war sugarcoated, and Steinbeck, was willing to let them have it their way. It was not wrong that Steinbeck should have written a book for the Air force; it is only unfortunate that in doing so he intruded so flagrantly upon his own ethical and esthetic standards.

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck tried to protect himself from charges of being a communist by presenting the problems he was concerned with in terms of the way they affected the Joads, thereby forcing his readers to consider the effects of these social injustices on an individual family. In *Bombs Away*, however, Steinbeck showcases the theme a common interest at the expense of the individual personalities of the inductees, who soon blur into a bland, generic flight crew.
Even though Steinbeck’s theme of group-man is just as strongly felt in *Bombs Away* as it is in some of Steinbeck’s novels, his attitude toward organized groups of men does a complete “about face” in *Bombs Away*. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck criticized the four organized methods of solving problems: “organized charity, organized religion, organized government, and organized private enterprise.” While it is true that the Okies do organize themselves into a small group under the leadership of Jim Casy, this group is actually closer to what Kennedy refers to as a kind of “Primal collectivism” consisting of a gathering of ragged men who have voluntarily come together and who do not require a rigid chain of command of fixed rules to regulate themselves. In *Bombs Away* Steinbeck’s disdain for organization surfaces to a slight extent in his assertion that the Air Force is “different” from other military organizations: “it must delegate its authority to the ground crew mechanic who is as responsible for the flight of a plane as the pilot.” Despite the flight crew’s veneer of democracy, the fact remains that the Air Force is basically a type of superimposed collectivism, the likes of which Steinbeck rejected whole heartedly in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Moreover, the purpose of the “organization” in *Bombs Away* has changed, instead of fostering life as the informal groups of men in *The Grapes of Wrath* do, the primary mission of the Air Force is to crush life. The Absence abroad the bomber of a “Ma” figure, who is the very epitome of love in *The Grapes of Wrath*, is a very telling omission. In *Bombs Away*, on the other hand, the characters are flat and lifeless. They are heavily documented types, not living, breathing people. This lack of credibility in these characters can be attributed in part to the emphasis he places on the group: “The Air Force is much more a collaboration than a
In the summer and Fall of 1943, John Steinbeck went to war as a correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune, writing dispatches from England, North Africa, and the Mediterranean. In 1958, these dispatches were collected and published under the title of *Once There Was a War*, a volume which, since its publication, has been one of Steinbeck’s least read and least critically appreciated works, noted briefly as passing or left to discreet by most critics. In his praise of this book, Marovitz suggests that “*Once There Was a War* can and should be read as a unified work rather than simply as a series of ephemeral human interest articles.” He points out that the book is unified by theme, setting, and character. “the theme” he states, “is man’s struggle for survival; the setting is the war zone; the characters are the civilians and servicemen existing under combat conditions.” Most importantly, however, Marovitz points out the “remarkable unity established through the consistent use of dream imagery.”

Though Marovitz’s discussion of dream imagery suggests convincingly that there is an understanding unity to be found in this book, it serves the even more important purpose of pointing us in the direction of a still more comprehensive structural unity than simply that of dream imagery or of setting, characters, and theme. For, if we look closely at the overall imagery running throughout the dispatches, with special attention to the opening pieces, the structure of what Joseph Campbell has termed the “monomyth” begins to assert itself.
Steinbeck’s other non-fiction, *America and Americans* (1966) is described as a book in text and pictures, of opinions unashamed and individual. The text is an informal commentary upon the emergence of something unique in the world: “America—complicated, paradoxical, bullheaded, shy, cruel, boisterous, unspeakably clear, and very beautiful.” The pictures, taken by forty of the best photographers in America, supplement the opinions of the text and brilliantly support Steinbeck’s faith in the uniqueness of American life. Many of them capture the special freshness of youth and the vital restlessness of adulthood that Steinbeck sees is the Americans. Others reveal the group phenomenon is America of shared feeling or purpose whether the group is united by joy or sorrow. *America and Americans*, then is a picture book commentary on American life which has its own individuality and purpose in Steinbeck’s special understanding of America and the graphic illustrations which enrich those in sights.

Two other Steinbeck’s works of non-fiction, *Sea of Cortez* (1941) and *Travels with Charley in Search of America* (1962), offer important in-sights into Steinbeck’s opinions and sense of direction in America and Americans. In *Sea of Cortez*, Steinbeck openly states his biological theory of man and society which informs his fiction and lies at the heart of America and Americans. His belief that the human group, as in the animal world, functions as a single organism provides the basis for his view that Americans, despite their vast differences, are a unified and individual body. Each American functions individually, but his primary purpose for existence is the renewal and perpetuation of the whole. Only when the group or body loses its sense of purpose or its capacity to adapt to change is its existence placed in jeopardy. In this sense, *America and Americans* represents
Steinbeck's examination of American life for evidence of the movement and adaptability which are necessary for survival even if that search may uncover the stagnation and entropy that means certain death for the organism.

The meanings of *America and Americans* lies in Steinbeck's selection and interpretation of the myths of American life. As the priest-exorcist, he celebrates the myths and rituals of American life which he holds in reverence as he summons forth the evils that have perverted the myths and have driven Americans to commit crimes against their neighbors and the land. In some respects, he is also the old man, the leader of the people, who draws upon all his wisdom and experience to examine the beliefs of America and warn the people against an approaching disaster by laying out before them the essential values which shaped the country and are now being abused. He can turn a stern Calvinistic eye on Americans and see the behavior which paves the way to an inevitable doom, but he can also be completely Emersonian in his own belief in the central possibilities which still exist in America.

Steinbeck establishes the relevance of myth on both an organic and historic level. His organic view of man and society suggests the sort of primitive animism from which spring the beginnings of mythology. J.G.Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, books known by Steinbeck, trace many of the beliefs and rituals still celebrated in modern times to ancient vegetation myths vitally connected with the cyclical patterns of nature. Steinbeck also supports his interest in myth with an idea that resembles C.G.Jung's collective unconscious. He believes that the American dream like all dreams, is
formed from powerful memories of real events which may be part of an individual's life or part of his merger in the historical pattern:

The national dream of Americans is a whole pattern of thinking and feeling and may well be a historic memory surprisingly little distorted. Furthermore the participators in the dream need not have descended physically from the people to whom the reality happened. This pattern of thought and conduct which is the national character is absorbed even by the children of immigrants themselves, no matter how they may wish it; birth on American soil seems to be required.73

Steinbeck locates one of the central myths of American life in our belief that all men are created equal. He offers his version of American history, shaped by individual efforts and group unity, as support for the validity of the myth. The settlement of the country, according to Steinbeck, came about through an individual determination to overcome a strange and hostile wilderness. Yet, despite the reality that every single man was out for himself, that individual groups sought only self-preservation, a unity was achieved. Steinbeck strongly suggests that the process, contrary to the original purpose behind the exploration and settlement of America, was nevertheless an organic one, formed by the strong individual and group instinct for survival and the natural adaptability of one part of an environment or body to another.

The perversion of the myths of equality had already begun before the myth, itself, was formalized into an accepted belief. The instinct for survival banded groups together, but once a minority merged with the majority, it hastened to add its particular ferocity to the drive to exclude other groups from the main body. Other myths were often formed to preserve the sanctity and separateness of the group from outsiders. The central mythic pattern of arrival, prejudice, acceptance,
and absorption failed in meaning particularly for two racial groups: the Indian and the Black. The substitute myths created to deal with them were destructive rather than hopeful in nature. After a brief attempt to bargain with the American Indian for what was rightfully his possession, it became convenient for the early settlers who wanted the land to convince themselves that the Indian was sub-human. It viewed from within the traditional beliefs that many settlers brought with them from Europe, the Indian was regarded as the devil’s agent. The less orthodox regarded him as a savage dangerous animal. Once it became obvious that the Indian, even though defeated, would survive the attempts to destroy his race, the new owners of the land shifted the ostensible purpose of the myth and treated Indian as a child, “incapable of learning and of taking care of himself.” 74 The perverse myth of the dangerous animal was replaced by the equally perverse myth of the dumb animal.

Steinbeck finds a dual myth behind the exclusion of the Black from American society. The Southerner, who needed the labor of the black man and feared his physical strength, found security in the belief that his slave “was a lazy, stupid animal, who was also dangerous, clever, tricky, thievish, and lecherous.” 75 The Northerner, who knew about the condition of slavery primarily through self-righteous sermons, travelers’ stories, and emotionally sensational novels, found it morally comfortable to believe that the Black was a mistreated brutalized, overworked, and starved creatures, sometimes a hero, sometimes a saint but never, by any chance, a man like other men. 76

After the Civil War, the dual myth altered on the surface, but it remained the sham in essence. The southerner turned for protection to local laws and tactics of terror to control the Black, who was now more dangerous than lazy or stupid. The
Northern, now forced to accept his Black brother, discovered that he, too, could only accept him on the same level as the Southerner had. Unable to use questionable means or secret terror because of his moral position, the Northerner found that he could exclude the Black by forcing him into a new form of slavery: "The servitudes of debt, of need, of ignorance, and the constant reminders of inferiority."  

The unwillingness to merge the Black into the American experience reveals another paradox of the American character. On one level, the act is perversion of the myth of equality which lies at the foundation of American beliefs and aspirations. Self-interest and self-preservation are as much behind the idea of separate-but-equal as they were behind the idea of slavery. On another level, the myth that have been created to deny equality to certain racial groups offer a perverse recognition of their individuality. What is twisted in that recognition is the failure to accept the Black other than he fits the stereotype of racist myths. Steinbeck’s point is that Americans “will not have overcome the trauma that slavery has left on our society, North and South, until we can not remember whether the man we just spoke to in the street was Negro or white.”  

The attempt to deny individuality except on the basis of racial identity involves exclusion from another myth which Steinbeck feels is as critical to the American character as the myth of equality. He regards the American’s belief in his self-reliance as the other critical factor in the formation of the American character. The myth of equality was primarily a creation of the 18th century and the writings of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin; the idea of self-reliance, however, was formed in the 19th century by the pioneer
movement, and given mythic significance in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and other transcendental philosophers. This belief allows the American to think of himself as uniquely independent and restlessly mobile. He sees his home as a symbol of security and comfort rather than a symbol of wealth and social position. He envisions himself as a great hunter or an adventuresome traveler, and no matter what his personal circumstances, still holds to the belief that America is the best of all possible worlds and that all possibilities remain open to each individual.

The myth of equality, once perverted, divides America and disturbs its natural unity. Steinbeck, however, feels that the perversion and potential loss of the myth of self-reliance is even more destructive to the American character. Any danger to the American’s belief is self-reliance which threatens the vital spirit of the people. Spiritual maladies, such as what Steinbeck calls paedosis, the desire of parents to see their frustrated dreams fulfilled in the lives of their children, corrupt the American character and insure a lifeless future dominated by feelings of fear and guilt. Advertising groups, calculating the situation, exploit the parents’ fears, using the children as a market for food, clothes, and various cosmetics, and further insure a future of alienation and spiritual emptiness. The new leader of the people is the Corporation Man. He represents all the negative characteristics which define the age in which he lives. His whole being, his work, his family, and his future, is shaped by his fear and admiration of the corporation. His life style, revered by so many factions of American life, is a tribute to the corporate status. The single driving force in his life is to conform to those patterns and ideas which will insure success for the corporation, and to convince others to conform by their simple
allegiance to the corporation’s products. The values of freedom and self-reliance are shunned and replaced by one definite goal-to make money for the corporate god.

Relating the activity to humanity behaviour, Steinbeck maintains that the phenomenon must be regarded as a “mystery” in much the same sense as the early Church called something a mystery because it was not accessible to reason and simply had to be accepted “fully and deeply as so” therefore,

a man of individualistic reason, if we must ask, “which is the animal, the colony or the individual?” must abandon his particular kind of reason and say, “why, it is two animals and they aren’t alike any more than the cells of my body are like me. I am much more than the sum of my cells and, for all I know, they are much more than the division of me.” There is no quietism is such acceptance, but rather the basis for a far deeper understanding of us and out world. 79

Later in *Sea of Cortez*, referring to school of fish, Steinbeck reinforces this idea of the group having a special function:

And this larger animal, the school, seems to have a nature and drive and ends of its own....directed by a school intelligence....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 function to perform; that weaker or slower units may even take their place as placating food for the predator for the sake of the security of the school as an animal.80

We shall later see how Steinbeck consistently converts these ideas into analogies in his novels, but we need only to remember the role played by the grandfather in “The Leader of People” to understand the relative importance and special function of units within the group. Without grandfather, the leader, there would have been no direction, no intelligent movement for the “crawling beast.” The thing had to have a head, says Grandfather. And it also had to have men of skill-the gloved,
muscule ‘hands’ of Steinbeck’s colony of sea animals. In “The Leader of the People” Billy Buck’s grandfather, the mule driver, is the man of skill who keeps the group in condition while the leader directs its moments. In The Grapes of Wrath, Ma Joad heads the family group while Al keeps the old truck in repair; and in In Dubious Battle, Mac the Communist organizer is the “boss” who shows the worker, London, how to manipulate the strikers into a united force.

Curiously, none of these “units” within the group is Steinbeck’s ultimate hero. We may love and respect Ma Joad, but she is bewildered, even in her persistent hope, by events she can not control; we may admire Grandfather for having been a leader of people, but most of all we pity him for his lost strength; we may marvel at Mac’s devotion to his cause and at his power, but we despise his brutal means to dubious ends. Always in Steinbeck’s novels however, is another figure who looms outside and above the groups. Viewing the group with detached compassion is always Steinbeck’s prototypical biologist-philosopher. As a biologist he observes the “animal” with scientific objectivity, hoping to discover in its behaviour an order and a meaning, within an ecological framework. As philosopher, still concerned with order and meaning, but knowing that objective reality is only part of the truth, he frees himself of conventional scientific restrictions and allows himself the luxury of subjectivity; he views the groups as men who, like himself, are spiritual being seeking their place within a mysteriously ordered cosmos. But this hero is a character in his own right, and as a character he is loved, respected, feared, and misunderstood by the others. He is loved because he gives solace to the weak; he is respected because he lends himself to the causes of the group and helps to keep it alive; he is feared and
misunderstood because he remains the outsider who never seems to wholly believe in the mundane causes of the group, and because his attitudes and methods transcend the group’s understanding. Like the “good men most biologists are” Steinbeck writes in *Sea of Cortez*, he is “temperamental, moody, lecherous, loud-laughing, and healthy.” But he also, as scientist, observers life, and he, “learns something from it.”

It is clear from the works of Steinbeck that he did not confine himself to the study of human being only. He looked upon humanity as an inseparable part of the whole cosmos in which a particle of desert sand, a lonely wandering dog, a neglected cat, a limpish rat, a lone tree or a flower, a leaping or a dead horse black and cold rock, a crayfish, a star-fish or a water snake had an important role to play. The life-force connects all forms of life on earth. This fact explains the abundant use of animal imagery in his novels. He was deeply aware of the behavior of several types of organism from the domestic poultry to scaled reptiles, insects, fish of different varieties, crabs, snails, turtles, cats, dogs, and even the common rats. He could never forget, it appears, while describing certain characters in his novels that they were no more than mere animals. So we find that their responses to changing situations have always a parallel with animal behaviour. They are like the animals even in their motives. Tom, in the beginning of *The Grapes of Wrath*, is very close in behavior and motives to an animal. He is hardly bothered by moral considerations and leads a life dictated mostly by instincts. The same is true of Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. Infact, in this novel there is a repetitive and recurrent use of animal images and references. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, there is “an isolated snail crawling painfully along the jungle
in soil", a land turtle dragging along its high domed shell over the grass and a stray dog crossing the road and dying when run over by the Jelopy of the Joads. In *Cannery Row*, he highlights the behavior of frogs. In *Of Mice and Men*, George compares himself and Lennie to animals 'pounding their tail on some ranch.' Robert Spillian rightly suggests that "his study of the friendship of the Lumpish Lennie and youthful George is believable as a revelation of a warped personality at the same time that is symbolic of man's eternal longing to return to the land" and that Steinbeck saw "animal motivation underlying human conduct."82

In *The Pearl* Steinbeck makes an extensive use of animal images, of dogs, wolf, fish and oyster. In *Cannery Row* he writes, "Our Father who art in nature, who has given the gift of survival to the coyote, the common brown rat, the English sparrow, the house-fly and the moth must have a great and overwhelming love....our father who art in nature."83 In the same novel, to equate human and animal activities, he makes use of the images of wolves, strictured bulls and the tigers with ulcers. In *Sweet Thursday* he employs the images of snakes and octopi, and in *East of Eden*, the snake image is dominant. It is used to describe the inner and outer reality about Cathy. Besides the novels, his short stories are also replete with animal images-a snake swallowing white rats looked upon by a lady in the story. The Snake, a while quail and a cart in the story "The While quail", the degrading state of the hero is shown through a number of animal image in "The Flight", the image of mare giving birth to a young colt in the *Red Pony* symbolizing death, birth and sufferings. The animal imagery is not ornamental or decorative; it is mostly functional, at times assuming the function of symbolic arguments. But on the whole it contributes to Steinbeck's
understanding of and belief in biological naturalism which at times takes him to the point of disregard of moral implications of human behavior. In fact, it is his biological naturalism that helps him in transcending the conventional borders of fiction. His reach goes beyond the well-established and accepted norms of thematic art. He finds “our father” in nature, governing the world, but at the same time providing man with the opportunity of developing or contracting his consciousness. Human consciousness capable of working out man’s salvation is an extra dimension, the dimension that animals lack. And in this difference lies the basic difference between man and animal, ‘Timshall’ is given to man and not to animals.

Steinbeck’s vision is a realistic and naturalistic view of human life along with romantic strains, but it is positive vision where man has the final choice and man himself is the centre of the universe. Steinbeck’s genius lies in extensive use of philosophy, theology, mythology, and symbolism to establish a world of reality; his tireless experimentation with varied subjects, themes and styles to give a total view of human life; his ability to grasp and portray man’s journey on different planes-physical, mental, psychological and spiritual; his masterful weaving of endless observations of the intricacies of the world with his undying and unshakable faith in man’s freedom and his spiritual strength. The various approaches to the problem of the individual man in society-romantic, naturalistic, existential, realistic-combine and blend in his works, and create a multi-coloured and multi-faceted world of human life on earth. By thus presenting the macrocosm of human life in the microcosm of American Society, he has
expanded the bounds of social realism, and given it an artistic perfection: this is his unique gift to fiction.
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10- *Ibid*.

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14- E.W. Tedlock, JR and C.V. Wicker, *Steinbeck And His Critics*, p. 188.

15- Ibid., p. 189.

16- Ibid., p. 190.

17- Ibid.

18- Ibid.


21- Lewis Gannet, “*Steinbeck’s Way of Writing*” *Steinbeck and His Critics*, p. 32.

22- Ibid.


25- *The Pearl*, p. 74.

26- Ibid., p. 90.


29- Ibid., p. 149.

33- Friend Ed talks of a journey he has to make and bids farewell to Joe Saul.

Those who wish to seek for hints may well find in this exit of Ed, the death of Ed Ricketts, Steinbeck's friend.


35- James Gray, *John Steinbeck, Pamphlets on American Writers*. No. 94,

(University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis), p. 19.


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