



CHAPTER II

THE CONDITIONS OF MODERN MAN AS SEEN IN STEINBECK

The increase of material advantage is a result of the progress of science. Many things that were not available in the past have become common to modern man. In the past people did not think of using a car, a radio, a telephone or a television in their daily lives. As material advantages increase, man's desire for them also increases. Steinbeck sees no essential harm in man's desire for things. He suggests in Sea of Cortez that this need is natural, and it makes man different from other animals.

Man is the only animal whose interest and whose drive are outside himself... whose drive is in external things - property, houses, money, concepts of power. He lives in his cities and his factories, in his business and job and art. But having projected himself into these external complexities, he is them. His house, his automobile are a part of him and a large part of him.²⁹

The same idea is reflected again in The Pearl.

For it is said that humans are never satisfied, that you give them one thing and they want something more. And this is said in disparagement, whereas it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior³⁰ to animals that are satisfied with what they have.

²⁹John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1959), p.148.

³⁰John Steinbeck, The Pearl (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1964), p.32.

This quality of mankind has played a large part in the world's ever increasing material progress. In America and Americans, Steinbeck says, "It is probable that the want of things and the need of things have been the two greatest stimulants toward the change and complication we call progress."³¹

Problems concerning things generally come from the importance man attaches to them, the meaning he gives to them and therefore the lengths he will go to obtain them. Possession becomes important because status in society depends to a large degree upon money and things. "...since every man wants admiration and perhaps some envy, we had only money and possessions to admire and envy."³² The desire to possess things is not easily kept in good proportion especially in modern times when material progress seems to have reached a peak in our lives. Things seem to be important because they are symbols of success in life. This desire is further emphasized by the mass media in modern times. "We manufacture things we do not need and try by false and vicious advertising to create a feeling of need for them."³³ When this desire is too much, man will become

³¹John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.172.

³²Ibid., p.84.

³³Ibid., p.174.

dominated by materialism. To be controlled by things and to be trapped by them are the danger that Steinbeck warns of. He points out that nowadays "...we are also poisoned with things. Having many things seems to create a desire for more things, more clothes, houses, automobiles..."³⁴

Steinbeck, like many other writers, uses the automobile as a symbol and a ^Psymptom of modern America. Many people are dominated by them. They feel the necessity to turn in the old model, though it is still ~~useful~~ useful and comfortable, for the newest one. Steinbeck gives the reason that "... since a family's image of success in the world, or status, is to a certain extent dependent on the kind of a car the man drives, he was forced to buy a new one whether he needed it or not ... A family with an old model, no matter how comfortable and sound, soon feels *déclassé*..."³⁵ Since all have new models, a man must try to have what the others have. Not so much because he needs them for their individual functions; the old one is still useful but because he feels they are needed as a proper background to his life pattern.

A comment on the concern for materialism of modern man is compared to the idea of material payment of the Indians in the Gulf during Steinbeck's trip in Sea of Cortez. Steinbeck points out the contrast between modern business

³⁴Ibid., p.172.

³⁵Ibid., pp.36-37.

and the simple life of the Indians. He does not pass judgment as to which is right or wrong but he indicates to the reader that the Indians care less for material things than civilized people because they are not yet caught in the web of modernization.

When the Indians came to the Western Flyer...
 We gave them presents, but it is sure they
 had not come for presents. When they helped
 us, it was with no idea of material payment.
 There were material prices for material things,
 but one could not buy kindness with money, as
 one can in our country.³⁶

In modern business, everything becomes money, even abstract things. In urban areas of modern, industrial societies we give time, energy, service a certain price. When we buy something, we do not pay only for the material of that thing. The seller must calculate the effort and energy spent upon that thing and also the time it takes. Time and effort are given a price and then are added to the thing to be sold. In the opinion of these Indians, it was impossible to put a price on abstract things. They say, "If one could stop time, or take it away or hoard it, then one might sell it. One might as well sell air or heat or cold or health or beauty."³⁷ What they say is reasonable and Steinbeck seems to admire their idea on material payment.

³⁶John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.291.

³⁷Loc.cit.

He presents to the reader that our daily business is the opposite and contrasts the two attitudes toward both abstract and material things.

And we thought of the great business in our country - the sale of clean air, of heat and cold, the scrabbling bargains in health offered over the radio, the boxed and bottled beauty, all for a price. This was not bad or good, it was only different. Time and beauty, they thought, could not be captured and sold...³⁸

Modern man has become accustomed to buying everything. "They bought immunity from fear in salves to go under their arms. They bought romantic adventures in bars of tomato-colored soap. They bought courage and rest and had neither."³⁹

Steinbeck does not say that these Indians who are not controlled by materialism are therefore better people. He gives the reason that they are this way only because modernization has not yet reached them. When material progress does come to them, they, too, will no doubt follow its "system" and give up their former idea about material payment. And once they are caught in the web of modernization, they will be unable to go back to their simple life of friendly relationships. Steinbeck seems to be saddened at the thought of what they will lose in order to become civilized.

³⁸Loc.cit.

³⁹Ibid., p.292

Once the Gulf people are available to contact, they too will come to consider clean feet more important than clean minds. These are the factors of civilization and their paths, good roads, high-voltage wires, and possibly canned foods ... A local 110-volt power unit and a winding dirt road may leave a people for a long time untouched, but high-voltage operating day and night, the network of wires, will draw the people into civilizing web, whether it be in Asiatic Russia, in rural England, or in Mexico.⁴⁰

Steinbeck does not preach a doctrine of renunciation, nor does he reject the things in our lives. He is primarily concerned about their effect on human relationships. The over concern for things makes men judge their fellow men by their outer surface, by their ways of dress, their cars, their houses. Things become the mask which hide the individual and prevent men from seeing each other deeply. In modern society, we generally do not see a man as he is but in terms of his success, his fame, his wealth. Henry Morgan in Cup of Gold learns many things when he is an indentured slave. He learns that men look at only the surface. "Men always believed him what he seems to be... if one were brilliantly dressed, all men presumed him rich and powerful, and treated him accordingly."⁴¹ Henry devotes his whole life to a search for wealth and power. He is so concerned with it that he

⁴⁰Loc.cit.

⁴¹John Steinbeck, Cup of Gold (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966), p.54.

forgets human relationships. What he gets in return is loneliness and alienation from his fellow men. Edward Wicks in The Pastures of Heaven tries to do everything that will make the neighbors think that he is rich. By pretending to be rich, he creates an image of wealth among his neighbors. His whole purpose in life which started as a game, ends as an obsession for wealth. Even his daughter becomes less a person than a part of his treasure. "He did not love her as a father loves a child. Rather he hoarded her, and gloated over the possession of a fine, unique thing."⁴² In the end, he is destroyed by his over concern for riches and must leave the valley.

In The Wayward Bus, Mr. Pritchard represents the modern businessman. He gives his wife an expensive fur coat which is a symbol of his wealth and social status. He loves to see his wife wear it and to hear other people admire it. Steinbeck explains in irony that "... the coat was the badge of their position. It placed them as successful, conservative, and sound people. You get better treatment everywhere you go if you have a fur coat and nice luggage."⁴³ This shows how superficially men relate to each other. The preoccupation

⁴²John Steinbeck, The Pastures of Heaven (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967) p.22.

⁴³John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966), p.46

with surfaces is reflected throughout the story. Mrs. Pritchard wants to own an orchid house, not because she loves flowers but because it is a sign of wealth and respectability in society. "People would say of Mrs. Pritchard that she had the darlingest little orchid house. It was precious and valuable. It was better than jewelry or furs. People she did not even know would hear about her little orchid house."⁴⁴ Their vacation trip to Mexico is not only for their daughter's education as they often tell themselves, but in order that they may talk about it later when they return. Mrs. Pritchard is already writing letters in her mind and imagining their effect upon her friends.

Human relationships can be severely damaged by materialistic attitudes resulting in increased isolation of men from one another. The over concentration on things rather than people is another factor in the communication failure. In a chapter in Cannery Row, Doc goes to the seaside of another town to collect octopi required for his experiments. While searching in the water, he finds the body of a dead girl. A man who lives nearby comes over to Doc and says, "You get a bounty for finding a body. I forget how much."⁴⁵ The man is

⁴⁴Ibid., p.171.

⁴⁵John Steinbeck, Cannery Row (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., p.166.

not interested in the person, only in the price obtainable for reporting to the police.

Another effect of the over concern for outer surfaces is the deterioration of moral values. Steinbeck in Sea of Cortez gives a biological view of what he sees as man's duality. If a choice must be made between success and goodness, man inclines toward success. In essence, man admires good qualities such as kindness, generosity, tolerance and dislikes cruelty, greed and self interest. "And yet in our structure of society, the so-called and considered good qualities are invariable concomitants of failure, while the bad ones are cornerstones of success."⁴⁶ Modern man tends to value success more than virtue. Its cause comes from the inner conflict between moral values and material success. Many values that were cherished in the past now seem to be out of step with the quickened pace of modern times. The idea of "The best man wins" seems contrary to "Love thy neighbor". Although still carried in sub-conscious, man finds many former values obstacles to the modern definition of social progress. Religious tradition teaches man to love, to help and to understand his neighbors but in the contemporary world men must compete with each other - compete for jobs, compete for markets, for customers. Competition in

⁴⁶John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.156.

the material world conflicts with "love thy neighbor" or even know thy neighbor. Steinbeck presents this conflict through Ernest Horton, a character in The Wayward Bus. Ernest tells Mr. Fritchard about an old man who once believed that the honest man is rewarded. "...and 1930 ... He found out that the most admired people were not honest at all. And he died wondering, a kind of an awful wondering, because two things he believed in did not work out - honesty and thrift."⁴⁷

The concern for success more than anything else can make many people care for the end rather than the means to that end. The end justifies the means to it. One may cheat, lie or steal in order to gain that end. Steinbeck feels that any success gained at the cost of human relationships is a loss to man in general. His care for the means is shown clearly through Doc Burton in In Dubious Battle and again in The Winter of Our Discontent where he presents the problem of a man who is carried forward by the values of society and is tempted by wealth and success; he trades his moral integrity for material success. This, to Steinbeck is the tragedy of modern man.

Ethan Allen Hawley in The Winter of Our Discontent who is a clerk in a grocery store is well known for his

⁴⁷John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966), p.188.

honesty. He lives happily enough with his family but people around him persuade him to acquire more wealth. He has never thought of material wealth as other than a happy family and a comfortable life but he begins to think otherwise when his son and his daughter complain about their relative poverty. Unexpectedly, there is an opportunity for him to get rich quickly although the means are unethical. He rationalizes that it is really not wrong and in the end he becomes rich. His success, however, is built at the expense and misery of his boss and of his best friend. Hawley has satisfied his family and friends; he is very successful in the eyes of society but he is unhappy and feels guilty.

Ethan's problem is a common one to modern man: how to achieve material success without the loss of peace of mind. Ethan exchanges his true "why" for a false "why" because the false one is more attractive and brings more social approval.

Before doing something wrong, Ethan has a conflict in his mind: should he be successful in the eyes of society or be honest? Steinbeck shows the influence of society on the individual in this novel. He seems to satirize the devotion to materialism by comparing it to religious devotion. When Ethan first comes into the grocery store, the store is described in terms of a cathedral:

A reflected cathedral light filled the store, a diffused cathedral light like that of the Chartres. Ethan paused to admire it, the organ pipe of canned tomatoes, the chapels of

mustard and olives, the hundred oval tombs
of sardines...⁴⁸

The comparison is more evident in another chapter
comparing the bank to a church and money to God. Joey Morphy,
a bank clerk who is Ethan's friend, says:

... comes nine o'clock on the nose we stand
uncovered in front of the holy of holies.
Then the time lock springs and Father Baker
genuflects and opens the safe and we all bow
down to the Great God Currency.⁴⁹

This passage indicates the importance of materialism in
the life of modern men. It has become a religion, an object
of devotion. He may or may not know he is trapped or dominated
by it but he accepts it. This attitude toward materialism
not only has an effect upon adults, but becomes the values
of children too. Allen, Ethan's son writes an essay for a
national "I Love America" contest, and is one of five boys
who wins. Later it turns out that he copied his essay from
the works of Henry Clay and another American statesman.
When his father learns that his son won the contest by dis-
honesty, Allen says to his father, "Who cares? Everybody
does it. It is the way the cookie crumbles."⁵⁰ Honesty has

⁴⁸ John Steinbeck, The Winter of Our Discontent
(London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1962), p.15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.137.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.279.

no special meaning to him. It is success that is important, not the means to it. He has taken this value from the adult environment he is measuring up to.

Steinbeck sees the danger in such an attitude towards success that rules of honesty and moral conduct which once were guides for human relations are no longer esteemed because they seem unproductive along the path to success. Increasingly man's sense of guilt which is so necessary in human affairs becomes impaired. A lack of conscience can cause irreparable damage to society.

It is a rare morning when our newspapers do not report bribery, malfeasance, and many other forms of cheating on the part of the public officials who have used the authority vested in their positions for personal gain. Of course we do not hear of the honest man, but the danger lies not in the miscreants but in our attitude toward them. Increasingly we lose our feeling of wrong. Huge corporations are convicted of price fixing and apparently the only shame is in being caught.⁵¹

The same attitude toward success is reflected in Mr. Fritchard who is constantly looking for new ways to expand his success in business. It does not bother him when he suggests an unethical way of profiting in business. He feels ashamed only when his plan is rejected by Horton who calls it a high class blackmail. Somehow he persists in the offer and tries to change Horton's attitude.

The progress of science has resulted in an ever

⁵¹John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.173.

increasing development of machines and their application to production. Machines are emphasized and they have greatly affected man's living. The Industrial Revolution introduced the age of mechanization. It could also be called the age of group-men, collectivism and mass production. Steinbeck is concerned with the danger of the industrial revolution to man rather than the positive aspect of it. He calls the effect of machines on man a mutation.⁵² In Sea of Cortez, he explains his attitude about this mutation and the harm he sees in it which may cause the extinction of the individuality of man.

The industrial revolution would then be indeed a true mutation, and the present tendency toward collectivism, whether attributed to Marx or Hitler or Ford, might be as definite a mutation of the species as the lengthening neck of the evolving giraffe.... If then this tendency toward collectivization is mutation there is no reason to suppose it is for the better... And our mutation, of which the assembly line, the collective farm, the mechanized army, and the mass production of food are evidences or even symptoms, might well correspond to the thickening armor of the great reptile—a tendency that can end only in extinction.⁵³

With the use of machines, man's energy is conserved but at the same time there are serious problems which result from them. "Machinery took the heavy burden from our shoulders. Medicine and hygiene cut down infant mortality to the vanishing

⁵²In the life history of a species, the sudden appearance of a new trait that breeds true and becomes eventually one of the characteristics of the species or of the new species thus formed.

⁵³John Steinbeck, The Log from The Sea of Cortez, (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.149.

point, and at the same time extended our life span. Automation began to replace our workers."⁵⁴ The use of machines and the increasing population has created a social and psychological problem for the individual especially for the old. "Quite often we retire a man at sixty-five when his mental powers are at their peak, and replace him with an inferior who happens to be younger. As a result we have a great burden of unhappy, unused, unfulfilled people..."⁵⁵ Further neurosis follows which comes from fear of being unused and unfulfilled. "...the young dread to grow up, the grown dread growing old, and the old are in panic about sickness and uselessness."⁵⁶

The control of machines over man is the thing that Steinbeck recognizes and warns of. He sees the danger of the mechanization of man himself which will drive man to collectiveness, then to a corporate personality and ultimately to the loss of individuality. The ascendancy of materialism and of machines over man are set forth in The Grapes of Wrath where the bank is described as a monster, incapable of being controlled by man. The concern for the profit of the owner of the land which the Joad family rents makes him forget human

⁵⁴John Steinbeck, America & Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.174.

⁵⁵Ibid., p.116.

⁵⁶Ibid., p.119.

relationships and prevents him from having sympathy for the condition of his fellowmen. Commercialism and his materialistic attitude make him cold and unsympathetic. "Some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold."⁵⁷ Yet, Steinbeck does not really call the land owners bad, he gives the system itself as a reason for their coldness. "And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves."⁵⁸ Inevitably, they are caught in a commercial system, a mutation which must be this way. If a business venture loses money, it will be unable to continue. The owners do not know the extent to which they are controlled by the system. They are so accustomed to commercialism that they see men, too, as machines or parts that they can replace anytime they do not earn profits.

The Bank or company were a monster ... the banks were machines and masters all at the same time. Some of the owner men were a little proud to be slaves to such cold and powerful masters... These creatures don't breathe air, don't eat sidemeat. They breathe profits, they eat the interest on money. If they don't get it, they die the way you die without air, without sidemeat. It is a sad thing, but it is so, it is just so. 59

The owner would let a man die rather than permit the Bank to die. They let farmers starve and their children as

⁵⁷John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.42

⁵⁸Loc.cit.

⁵⁹Ibid., p.43.

well, rather than let the Bank lose its profits. Steinbeck adds further that "...the Bank is something else than men. It's the monster. Men made it, but they can't control it."⁶⁰ The Bank is not a living thing but it appears more powerful than any individual man.

Steinbeck does not make the judgement that the bank is bad. What Steinbeck points out here is the complexity of the modern dilemma. The bank must make a profit as it has a total responsibility for many people and their material welfare. The Joads and the other families must get off the land because they are unprofitable and so that the Bank can continue its business. Neither result is desirable: forced migration or bankruptcy but in the new scheme of things it is corporate man not the individual who is important. Steinbeck points out the paradox that man, having created machines to serve him seems unable to control them and will surely be dominated by them. It is conceivable that one day the creation will be able to destroy the creator. This idea of the power of machines is brought forward directly in Sea of Cortez. Steinbeck gives an example the Sea-Cow,^a newly invented motor that pushes the boat and seems to be more powerful than its creator.

Recently, industrial civilization has reached its peak of reality and has lunged forward into something that approaches mysticism... if these

⁶⁰Ibid., p.45.

ghoulish little motors learn to reproduce themselves the human species is doomed. 61

Again in The Grapes of Wrath, the man on the tractor who is hired to pull down the tenant houses is described not as a man but only as a part of the machine. Man and machine have one mind.

The man sitting in the iron seat did not look like a man; gloved, goggled, rubber dust mask over nose and mouth, he was a part of the monster, a robot in the seat... He could not see the land as it was, he could not smell the land as it smelled... He loved the land no more than the bank loved the land. he could admire the tractor - its machined surfaces, its surge of power... but it was not his tractor... he was proud of the straight lines he did not will, proud of the tractor he did not own or love, proud of the power he could not control. 62

Steinbeck shows again that the man on the tractor is mechanized and trapped by the condition of the modern world. The man must earn money to feed his family and his children. The job he can get is to drive the tractor. The tractor is his pride and joy; and it gets his devotion. The tragedy is he has no thought outside of the tractor. He has become a robot and Steinbeck indicates that the man is not aware that he has become mechanized. → a robot

⁶¹John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.87.

⁶²John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.48.

In the age of machines, men must be machine-like to exist. They are like the man on the tractor who becomes a robot. They take little time to think of anything else because if they do, they will be unable to do their job. In Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck once visited a harbour at San Diego during war time. Here he observed:

... the men preparing thoughtlessly, like dead men, to destroy things. The planes roared over the formation and the submarines were quiet and ominous. There is no playfulness in a submarine. The military mind must limit its thinking to be able to perform its function at all.⁶³

He asks a naval officer whether he has thought about the disaster that will happen after he has given the signal "fire". The officer replies that he does not think of the destruction made by the bomb because it travels so far that he cannot see the destruction. Steinbeck suggests that the officer is obliged to be a machine man. Like the man on the tractor, if he has sympathy and imagination for suffering people he will be unable to be an officer. "... the whole structure of his world would be endangered if he permitted himself to think. The pieces must stick within their pattern or the whole thing collapses and the design is gone."⁶⁴ Steinbeck explains further that "... the men who directed this mechanism were true realists."⁶⁵ We can see from his

⁶³John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd.; 1969), p.105.

⁶⁴Loc.cit.

⁶⁵Loc.cit.



concern in his novels and in his non-fiction writings that he does not admire this realist who has no thought for humanity, who does not concern himself with destruction only because he does not see it.

The mechanization of individuals is particularly obvious in war time. In Once There Was a War, Steinbeck describes the crews on military transports as machines. "Men cannot be treated as individuals on this troopship... They are engines which must be given fuel to keep them from stopping. The products of their combustion must be taken care of and eliminated. There is no way of considering them as individuals."⁶⁶

This same idea about the loss of individuality is repeated again in The Moon Is Down. Colonel Lasser, a veteran officer, understands war and he knows better than his men that soldiers must do what the system orders without question. He explains to a young lieutenant:

You're not a man any more. You are a soldier. Your comfort is of no importance and your life isn't of much importance... Meanwhile you must take orders. Most of the orders will be unpleasant, but that's not your business. ⁶⁷

⁶⁶John Steinbeck, Once There Was a War (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1969), p.6.

⁶⁷John Steinbeck, The Moon Is Down (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.125.

Steinbeck is ag ainst any system that drains the individuality which he thinks is essential to man. In East of Eden, we find the following comment and perhaps this one quotation sums up Steinbeck's entire literary effort. It contains his belief and his chief concern.

There are monstrous changes taking place in the world, forces shaping a future whose face we do not know ... There is a great tension in the world, tension toward a breaking point, and men are unhappy and confused. At such a time it seems natural and good to me to ask myself these questions. What do I believe in? What must I fight against?

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. 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.

And now the forces marshalled around the concept of the group, have declared a war of extermination on that preciousness, the mind of man... It is a sad suicidal course our species seems to have taken.

And this I believe: that the free exploring mind of the individual human is the most valuable thing in the world. and this I would fight for: the freedom of the mind to take any direction it wishes, undirected. And this I must fight against: any idea, religion, or government which limits or destroys the individual. This is what I am and what I am about...⁶⁸

Steinbeck's concern and care for the individuality of

⁶⁸John Steinbeck, East of Eden (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1962), pp.113-114.

man is repeated again in Sea of Cortez, Sweet Thursday and even in his last writing, "Letters to Alicia",⁶⁹ written when he visited Asia in 1967. This is what Steinbeck values most. He suggests that the rapid changes in the modern world are destroying individuality by encouraging sameness and conformity. The development of the unit that Steinbeck often refers to as the "corporation" and which he feels drains the individuality is clearly explained in "About Ed Ricketts" and America and Americans. The corporation is a business system. "It may manufacture goods for sale, operate mines, manipulate money... its purpose is always to make money."⁷⁰ A member of a corporation is a person who wants to be wealthy and successful in the eyes of society. He is called a corporation man - a machine-like man. "His life, his family, his future - as well as his loyalty lie with his corporation. His training, his social life... the neighborhood he lives in ... are all dictated by his corporated status."⁷¹

⁶⁹"Letters to Alicia" were published as a series of letters in Newsday newspaper. The letters are about the experiences Steinbeck had during his trip in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and other countries in Asia. In these letters the reader finds his attitude toward Asian countries and the war in Vietnam. The Alicia to whom the letters are written refers to Alicia Patterson Guggenheim, late wife of Harry P. Guggenheim, editor and publisher of Newsday.

⁷⁰John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.86.

⁷¹Ibid., p.87.

Mr. Pritchard is an example of corporation man. His individuality and creativity have melted away in the corporation he works for. He is described as "... a businessman, president of a medium sized corporation. His business was conducted by groups of men who worked alike, thought alike and even looked alike... Wherever he went he was not one man but a unit in a corporation."⁷² Mr. Pritchard is so wrapped up in this corporate life that "He has given up his freedom and then had forgotten what it was like."⁷³ He trains his memory for figures and information. "He felt that such information was good to know and he had never questioned its value or why it might be good to know."⁷⁴

Creativity and broad-mindedness are not characteristic of the corporation man. He can have wealth and success but he must buy them with the loss of freedom and individuality. Some may not be aware of this exchange but they are quite willing to pay the price for it. Steinbeck expresses his worry about this loss again in America and Americans.

.. there is one thing the corporation cannot do. When it enters fields of individual creativeness, it not only fails but shrivels the creator. It cannot order the writing of good books and plays... Where it has cultures such fields, it has succeeded only in adulterating the product

⁷²John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966). p.26.

⁷³Ibid., p.27.

⁷⁴Ibid., p.99.

and eventually destroying the producer." 75

Mrs. Pritchard is as group minded as her husband. Her "corporation" is her narrow social circle. Steinbeck comments humourously on her that she never accepts or listens to the ideas of others. "She met the ideas of other people with a quiet smile, almost as though she forgave them for having ideas. The truth was that she did not listen." 76 She conforms to what her group wants and never questions her values or theirs. "Having few actual perceptions, she lived by rules. Education is good. Self-control is necessary. Everything in its time and place. Travel is broadening." 77

Conformity and sameness are characteristic tendencies of the twentieth century and of industrialization. There are several things which lead man to them, for example, mass production ^{and} modern economic systems. Most of the things we use in our daily lives are mass produced by machines in factories. These products are cheaper than the hand made items and more available. They are an advantage but at the same time they limit man's creativity.

Factory mass production, for example, requires that every man conform to the tempo of the whole. The slow must be speeded up or elimi-

75 John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Ltd., 1968), p.88.

76 John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966), p.41.

77 Ibid., p.43.

neted, the fast slowed down. In a thoroughly collectivized state, mediocre of efficiency might be very great, but only through the complete elimination of the swift, the clever, and the intelligent, as well as the incompetent. Truly collective man might in fact abandon his versatility... It is interesting and probably not at all important to note that when a human state is attempting collectivization, one of the first steps is a frantic call by the leaders of an increased birth rate-replacement parts in a shoddy and mediocre machine. 78

Not only mass production has an influence on our lives but also mass media, such as radio, television and newspaper. These things have much influence on social attitudes and behavior in modern times. In commercial business, the advertisements can make many people feel they want the things though in fact they do not need them. When production and people have become mass oriented, the individual and ~~the~~ individuality are submerged as things and attitudes are mass produced. "Mass method is bound to get into our thinking and to eliminate all other thinking. In our time mass collective production has entered our economics, our politics, and even our religion..."⁷⁹ Before going to Russia, Steinbeck was warned by many people that Russia was a dangerous place, that he would be lost or be tortured. Many who warned him never to go to Russia, knew ne

⁷⁸John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.265.

⁷⁹John Steinbeck, East of Eden (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1962), p.113.

one there. They received the information from newspapers or from books. Steinbeck asked a lady who warned him that he might not return whether she had known anyone or the name of a person who did not return. She replies that she knows no one but she still affirms that anyone who goes to Russia must disappear. Once more, Steinbeck does not say that mass media ~~are~~ ^{is} bad. He accepts ~~it~~ ^{them} as he accepts other changes of the time as inevitable parts of a scientific age. He sees the danger in believing mass media completely and the tendency to accept mass judgement, to confirm the idea of the group man at the expense of the individual. "And it seems to us now the most dangerous tendency in the world is the desire to believe a rumor rather than to pin down a fact."⁸⁰

This conformism of modern times is explained by Dr. Viktor E. Frankl, a professor of psychiatry and neurology at the University of Vienna. He states that social patterns and traditions which once guided man's thinking have disintegrated in this century to the point that it is possible that a man may not know what he wants or perhaps what he should want when the values of the past are no longer held. More and more his choices are governed by others and social pressures around him which determine his values. This condition aggravates the loss of identification and the search for fulfillment.

⁸⁰ John Steinbeck, A Russian Journal (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1970), p.5.

At the beginning of human history, man lost some of the basic animal instincts in which an animal's behavior is embedded and by which it is secured. Such security, like Paradise, is closed to man forever; man has to make choices. In addition to this, however man has suffered another loss in his more recent development, the traditions that had buttressed his behavior are now rapidly diminishing. No instinct tells him what he has to do, and no tradition tells him what he ought to do, soon he will not know what he wants to do. More and more he will be governed by what others want him to do, thus increasingly falling prey to conformism.⁸¹

It becomes ever more difficult to remain what one wants to be, to do what one might prefer or even take time to find out. To fill one's life with things is in itself a kind of conformity. Steinbeck says to a seer in Sweet Thursday who does not care for things or success that "The doctrine of our time is that man cannot get along without a whole hell of a lot of stuff. You may not be preaching it, but you're living a treason."⁸² The seer is viewed as a traitor to modern society because he refuses to be caught up in materialism.

With the rapidity of change, industrialization, mechanization and competition in modern times, many people are carried forward by the values of society and their tempo of life has to be quickened. From childhood, they must

⁸¹Viktor E. Frankl, Man's Search for Meaning (New York: Washington Square Press, 1968), p.168.

⁸²John Steinbeck, Sweet Thursday (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.58.

increase the quantity and quality of their studies, get better grades so that they can compete successfully for seats in higher education. When they have finished their studies, they spend most of their lives building wealth, constantly trying to get to the top in their profession, trying to have a bigger house, a bigger car, more and more things. Rarely does one seem to have time to live happily or reflect on the quality of life. Life seems to run aimlessly on without stopping - filling life with money and things. Those who want the simple life, who do not want to be a part of the rush of modern society are ignored. There are two choices to make: be in society and follow its values which one may not accept or follow one's personal inclination and risk rejection by society. Neither result may be desired but a choice must be made. Few men can reach a happy compromise. The hippies, for example, choose to reject society and at the same time are rejected. They are tired of a life of running and owning without stopping. They do not see the use of being successful as society determines it. They have the feeling that they cannot live without a genuine purpose and modern society does not seem to provide one. They want to be free and choose their own way of living. This problem is reflected in Steinbeck's novels. His heroes are the simple, the small who cannot run along ^{at} the rapid pace of modern society. Danny and his friends in Tortilla Flat, Mack and the boys in Cannery Row are called bums or hippies. Steinbeck likes these people who are not yet caught in the

web of modernization and try to maintain their own way of life. Again in Sweet Thursday, in a conversation with the seer, Doc clarifies Steinbeck's idea about pace and loss of individuality. He says to the seer, "I'm surprised they don't lock you up - a reasonable man. It is one of the symptoms of our time to find danger in men like you who don't worry and rush about."⁸³

In Cannery Row, Mack and the boys are rejected by society but Steinbeck obviously approves of them because they refuse to be caught by the sickness of modern times. This is seen when Doc explains to Richard Frost:

... that Mack and the boys know everything that has ever happened in the world ... I think they survive in this particular world better than other people. In a time when people tear themselves to pieces with ambition and nervousness and covetousness, they are relaxed. All of our so-called successful men are sick men, with bad stomachs, and bad soul, but Mack and the boys are healthy and curiously clean. They can do what they want. They can satisfy their⁸⁴ appetites without calling them something else.

Mack and the boys do not see the value of status in society; they have no desire for a secure position in any profession. When they get a job, they keep the job only long enough to get the little money they need. They have their own values which include a simple life without concern for respectability in the eyes of society. They apparently see

⁸³Ibid., p.57.

⁸⁴John Steinbeck, Cannery Row (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1967), p.186.

no use for being successful as society defines it and seem to look for something much more real and durable than the superficial relationships and things that our times call success. Steinbeck indicates that Mack has good will and honesty which are in contrast to the selfishness in competition of the environment around him. "Financial bitterness could not cut too deeply into Mack and the boys, for they were not mercantile men. They did not measure their joy in goods sold, their ego in bank balances, nor their love in what it cost."⁸⁵ To be ambitious, to strive for material success, values of modern society, do not provide answers for Mack and the boys.

In "The Harness", a story from The Long Valley, Steinbeck presents a man who conforms to what people expect from him. The harness is both physical and spiritual. Peter, the man in the story does whatever his wife tells him to. She orders him to wear a harness in order to improve his posture. His posture may be read as his status in society. "Peter gained an added respect because of his posture."⁸⁶ After his wife's death he feels a new freedom and throws away the harness. His new freedom is unsatisfactory because he lacks the courage to remove the spiritual harness. In the end he turns to his old way of life again. He is not happy but he feels secure,

⁸⁵Ibid., p.180

⁸⁶John Steinbeck, The Long Valley (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967), p.74.

knowing that he is doing what society expects of him.

To Steinbeck, enjoyment in life is choosing one's own way of living rather than seeking success in the eyes of society. Ed Ricketts who had a great influence on Steinbeck the man as well as his work teaches his children in "About Ed Ricketts" that it is more important to be happy than to be well accepted in society and risk being mechanized by it. Steinbeck says the same thing in his portrayal of Junius Maltby in The Pastures of Heaven. The kind of life that Junius Maltby leads seems idyllic and peaceful. Junius' definition of happiness does not include respectability in the eyes of society. He cares little about clothes, money, success in terms that society thinks important. Steinbeck seems to say that Junius has enough courage to relax and to enjoy life as he wishes. He lives near to nature by choice with his son and his hired man. Like Doc, whom Steinbeck admires, Junius is not a corporation man. Both he and his son live contentedly on the fringe of society until one day when Mrs. Munroe gives the boy clothes because she pities him and thinks "...his health is more important than his feelings"⁸⁷ The action of Mrs. Munroe makes Junius realize for the first time the necessity for establishing a relationship with society. He feels he has done an injury to his son by bringing him up in poverty

⁸⁷John Steinbeck, The Pastures of Heaven (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967), p.86.

without giving him the choice to live another way of life. Junius has lived as he likes and enjoyed his natural life but at the same time he thinks about his responsibility to his child. Reluctantly he takes his son to live in the city, the symbol of society and the machine age.

In Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck explains the same idea again that people will doubt those who do not conform. When Steinbeck goes on a trip to the Gulf of California, many would like to have such a trip as a rest from confusion and rapid changes. Many ask him the reason for this trip. Steinbeck as usual is searching for truth, studying nature and man's relationship to it. He neither goes for commercial reasons nor for increased reputation. Maybe it seems strange to the eyes of modern society whose expectations are more rational, more product oriented and less personal. Steinbeck has his own reason for this trip "...we search for something that will seem like truth to us; we search for understanding; we search for that principle which keys us deeply into the pattern of all life!"⁸⁸ But Steinbeck knows that it would be useless to answer those who ask him like this. They understand and raise no questions when he replies that he is looking for curios, for certain small animals. This is reasonable to them.

Toward the end of his life, Steinbeck changed. His works

⁸⁸ John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London; Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.170.

seem to lose ^{their} ~~the~~ vitality and freshness. The death of Ed Ricketts and the war changed him. He withdrew into himself. Travels With Charley and America and Americans are no longer universal in their messages. These final works are concerned largely with his personal feelings and his nostalgia for "the old days." He seems to long for the past. Once he returns to his hometown and he expresses his feeling that all is dead and he agrees with Thomas Wolfe's idea in You Can't Go Home Again that home exists only in memory. He regrets the passing of local characteristics, the security of the individuality once possible in rural areas and small towns.

It seemed to me that regional speech is in the process of disappearing, not gone but going. Forty years of radio and twenty years of television must destroy localness, by a slow inevitable process ... Radio and television speech becomes standardized, ...just as our bread, mixed and baked, packaged and sold without benefit of accident or human frailty, is uniformly tasteless, so will our speech become one speech.⁸⁹

Steinbeck speaks of the richness and beauty, the rhythm and accent of local speech. When national speech takes place, local speech will disappear. Steinbeck somehow explains, "What I am mourning is perhaps not worth saving, but I regret its loss nevertheless."⁹⁰

Not only does Steinbeck regret the loss of local speech

⁸⁹John Steinbeck, Travels with Charley in Search of America (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1966), p.106.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 107.

but also the town that once was peaceful and had its own characteristic that made it different from other towns. By the use of the word 'town', the reader recognizes Steinbeck means men; the same idea of the local speech is repeated. Small towns have become big cities crowded with big buildings very similar in design. Traffic congestion and crowded conditions are universal characteristics of any big city. It is not so much a question of advantage as the tediousness of seeing and experiencing so much sameness. While Steinbeck is in Seattle, he expressed his nostalgia for old times when change was not too rapid.

I remembered Seattle as a town sitting on hills beside a matchless harborage - a little city of space and trees and gardens, its houses matched to such a background. It is no longer so ... The traffic rushed with murderous intensity. On the outskirts of this place I once know well I could not find my way. Along what had been country lanes rich with berries, high wire fences and mile long factories stretched, and the yellow smoke of progress hung over all, fighting the sea wind's effort to drive them off ... Everywhere a frantic growth ... I wonder why progress looks so much like destruction.⁹¹

In the ~~world of~~ mass oriented ^{world} _A the group ^{and} _A the mass are stressed. The mechanization, conformism, the sameness are factors that lead to an impersonal world where individuality has little meaning.

⁹¹Ibid., pp.180-181.