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East of Eden: Steinbeck's proclamation
of human greatness

by

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INTRODUCTION

East of Eden (1952), the tenth of John Steinbeck's eleven novels, is a work that celebrates the greatness of the human soul. In particular, it celebrates the power of human beings to determine their own destiny through the heroic exercise of free will. As such, this novel represents a unique development in Steinbeck's concept of human potential, and it grants a power of action he had never before given to men and women.

East of Eden is what might be called a way of salvation. Not surprisingly, the novel has close ties with the Bible, particularly to the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel. Both theme and structure derive from this single ancient source. In Cain's rejected offering, the murder that follows, and the guilt and punishment which these bring on, East of Eden discovers the sources of human evil, its principal forms, and its consequences. In God's intervening admonishment--actually Steinbeck's crucial rewriting of that event--which attempts to turn Cain from the murder he is contemplating, the novel proclaims the means for people to escape evil and do good. "Thou mayest rule over [sin]" (Genesis 4:7), Steinbeck renders the key Bible passage. In that "thou mayest," which supplants the more theological and, linguistically, more accurate "thou shalt" or "do thou," is the shining centerpiece of the book. Much

celebrated throughout the novel in its Hebrew form-- "Timshel"--it is the idea that the human will is the strongest force on Earth and can overcome anything.

This overt use of the Bible makes East of Eden different from earlier Steinbeck fiction. But what one especially remarks over is the theme of this work, this sudden arising of a wonderful and wonder-filled faith in the effectiveness of human effort. For while previous stories and novels of Steinbeck's nearly always expressed a deep love for humanity, they never rose to such a height of glory in their view of what human beings can be. Nothing like "Timshel" the word that "says the way is open" (Eden 303) ever appeared in such a blaze of pure light as it does in East of Eden. This was something completely new.

It is useful to place East of Eden in the context of Steinbeck's career by briefly looking at four texts that preceded the publishing of this milestone work. They are Tortilla Flat (1935), In Dubious Battle (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937), and The Grapes of Wrath (1939). While certainly not all that Steinbeck produced from his beginnings as a writer in the 1930s to East of Eden in 1952, they provide sufficient insight into the development of his views on the innate power of the human being.

Early Steinbeck works grant little power to people to control their own lives, yet, for the most part, clothe them

with the glow of dignity. Tortilla Flat (1935), Steinbeck's first book to reach a large audience, does exactly that. For its heroes, a community of lazy, drunken, fornicating low-lives who accomplish little tangible good for themselves or others, are somehow still beautiful and curiously noble souls. For despite the general lack of productivity and rootlessness of their lives, they somehow maintain a core of transcendent dignity, uniqueness of personality, joy, and brotherly love. As an examination of the basic frailty of humanity, Tortilla Flat is a warm and kindly look at people's essential "trappedness" in a mechanistic universe. A person may not have strength to accomplish anything of significance, but he/she can still love and eat and drink and be merry.

With a significant darkening of tone and with sharper focus on the actual ineffectiveness of human action, In Dubious Battle (1936), Steinbeck's first successful large work, expresses the same basic message. On the surface, the novel appears to deal with the intense animosities and brutal excesses surrounding a strike in the California fruit groves. At a deeper level, though, the novel presents a bitter look at the inability of people to effectively direct and control their own actions. Illustrating his point mainly through the strikers, Steinbeck argues that the human being gains power to act only when part of a larger group.

Yet the price for such concentration and release of energy is the surrendering of the self to a destructive mob or monster mentality.

But even in this work, dark as its appraisal is, all is not grimness and horror. Steinbeck still finds reason to hold to his faith in human dignity. For in the character of Doc, the dispassionate and sorrowful observer of the strikers, Steinbeck affirms that people do possess the opportunity to have some measure of success. Specific social action may fail, but in learning, in the increase of knowledge and the refining of intellect, progress is possible. In both Doc's compassionate following of the events of the strike and of its effects on the strikers, as well as in his ongoing intellectual growth, In Dubious Battle argues that something good and of value lives in human beings. Within the self, in thought, feeling, and imagination, a human being can "do" something.

In Of Mice and Men (1937), with the pathetic failure of its two itinerant farm laborers, George and Lennie, to achieve their modest ranch paradise, Steinbeck gives us his saddest and most touching look at humanity's universal weakness. For there is something in the beautiful simplicity and frailty of their dream that is poignantly expressive of the human yearning for a better life. When everything is shattered because Lennie stupidly murders

Lefty's wife, the story becomes the most mournful of all laments over the self-destructiveness in human nature. Steinbeck's love for humanity continues at full force, but it is informed with deep sorrow and a passionate yearning that humanity be able to escape into some brighter world of its own making.

Interestingly, in The Grapes of Wrath (1939), a change begins to occur, and new strength begins to be granted human beings. Through the novel's main characters, the Joad family, who with thousands of others are fleeing sure death in the Midwestern dust bowl and seeking "salvation" in the dubious paradise of the California fruit groves, Steinbeck imparts new nobility to humankind. As in previous works, people are still seen primarily as victims of overpowering forces, and in fact many are destroyed by the hardships forced upon them. Yet the Joads and the mass of migrant people they represent are given a unique dignity and grandness of character for their ability to maintain their nobler instincts for community and sacrificial love in the face of great and undeserved suffering.

There is even in the figure of Tom Joad who rises up at the novel's end as the incarnation of the people's yearning for justice and deliverance, a new belligerence on Steinbeck's part against those forces (inner and outer) that oppress humanity. If no deliverance actually occurs in

Grapes of Wrath, there is at least something like the faint glow of it on Steinbeck's eastern horizon.

Finally, in 1952, following a painful personal crisis that involved the search for a way to live as well as a way to write (Benson 559), Steinbeck completed East of Eden, the next to last novel he would write. The most biblical of his works as well as the first to deal explicitly with the problem of evil (Benson 666), East of Eden is also the first of his fiction to ascribe the human being with power to change his or her life.

For in this story of a family's two generations and its eventual success in overcoming the forces of inherited evil, Steinbeck communicates a profoundly optimistic view of human potential. Never before had he argued that human beings were capable of both grand vision and the grand energy to achieve that vision. As Steinbeck critic, Lester Marks, observes, "In East of Eden, for the first time, Steinbeck went beyond affirming that man is great because he can survive the struggle (Grapes of Wrath being his ultimate expression on that subject: mine). His vision in this novel is of man victorious over evil" (18).

In other words, East of Eden represents the first full blossoming of a Steinbeck concept of real human greatness, of a belief in the potential for heroic action. Having for over 20 years warmly loved and sympathized with people and

with what he perceived to be the universal heritage of weakness, his concept of humanity and his attitude toward it change. Suddenly there is a belief in infinite capacity, an idea worthy to be responded to with some of the great and happy emotions. There is amazed discovery, and enthusiastic proclamation and praise. There is even the more contemplative and reverent feeling of awed and worshipful wonder. Steinbeck, himself, emerges as a different figure. If he does not quite rise to the full stature of a new religious prophet, a John the Baptist, he certainly is transformed into a writer aggressively concerned with the salvation of his fellow human beings. He becomes a zealot, a man with a cause, and a man determined to push his cause to set the world back on course. He becomes a man with the grandest of aspirations for both himself and his work.

The purpose of this essay is to present what appear to be the main elements in the optimistic view of the human potential for greatness in East of Eden. The discussion divides into two parts. The first explores Steinbeck's subtle use of the Cain and Abel model to suggest his theme of a human being's capacity for overwhelming strength. Emphasis is primarily on Steinbeck's delicate variation of details between the novel's two generations to repudiate the concept of people as by design doomed to live out unchangeable patterns of weakness and failure. The second

section methodically examines the novel's main teachings on the human condition. Concentration is on Steinbeck's prescription for escaping weakness through understanding the truth of "Timshel", the human being's limitless potential for freedom and power.

Because of the Cain and Abel story's central importance to this discussion, it is reproduced below.

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? 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. And Cain talked with his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now are thou cursed from the earth which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not hence forth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the Earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the Earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden (Genesis 4:1-16).

Called the "narrative and thematic core of all of East of Eden's three generations" (Marks 9), this story provides the basic pattern for the novel's most important events, and Steinbeck's manipulations of it are crucial to the expression of his theme. Its main elements are easily summarized. There are two brothers, and one day they bring gifts to God. God accepts one brother's offering but rejects the other's. The rejected brother becomes angry and resentful and though told by God to control himself, he revenges himself by murdering his brother. Soon God confronts the murderer; he is banished and a mark is put on him.

A close copy of the above tale repeats itself twice during the course of East of Eden. Within the first chapter we meet two brothers, Charles and Adam. Significantly, one of them, Adam, an Abel figure, is a "good" boy. He is gentle, retiring, and quiet. Detached from the world around him, he is one within whom "a rich full life went on" (Steinbeck, Eden 20). He lives in a beautiful world within his own mind.

The other son, a Cain figure, Charles, is a kind of "bad" boy. Dark and secretive, with a "leopard" (Steinbeck, Eden 21) prowess of body and mind, he is a boy with a strange lack of sensitivity to the way his actions affect others. "He was never sorry--ever" (Steinbeck, Eden 24).

There is also the God-figure (Ditsky, The East 44), Cyrus, the father of the two boys. Though he is no literal God, Cyrus' ferocious efforts to rule his "house and farm on a military basis" (Steinbeck, Eden 18), reflect in their aspiring to omnipotence a likeness to deity, even if it is to Satan.

Moreover, within the universe of this Trask family, Cyrus, the father favors one son, Adam, and rejects the love of the other son, Charles. There is also the crucial element of gifts brought to the God-figure: "a mongrel pup" from Adam (Steinbeck 30), and "a knife made in Germany--three blades and a corkscrew, pearl-handled," from Charles (Steinbeck, Eden 29). Predictably, Cyrus receives the dog with great appreciation. Lavishing his attention on it, he trains it, has it sleep in his room at night, and keeps it at his feet when he reads. The beautiful and expensive knife, though, is forgotten almost as soon as it is seen. Cyrus gives Charles a dutiful "Thanks" (30) and then it is never seen again. Finally there is an explosion of murderous rage as the rejected brother revenges himself on the person who has the acceptance he wishes was his. Charles walks away from the house with Adam one night, and after a brief outpouring of his pain, anger possesses him and he has only one thought: to return pain for pain.

"What are you trying to get away with?" Charles yells. "You're trying to take him away! I don't know how. What do you think you're doing?" (29). Within minutes Charles has become a mindless, but finely tuned instrument of vengeance. He moves "precisely," "delicately," as he goes on with the "bitter-frozen work" of being his brother's "executioner," finally leaving him lying unconscious on the ground. What saves Adam from sure death is that when Charles returns soon with a hatchet to finish the work, Adam has been able to hide himself in the water of a nearby ditch, and though Charles looks for him, he cannot not find him. This scene is quite telling in the subtle way it shows the monster of rage that Charles has become.

From his hiding place Adam could see only a darkness in the dark. And then a sulphur match was struck and burned a tiny blue flame until the wood caught, lighting his brother's face from below. Charles raised the match and peered around, and Adam could see the hatchet in his right hand.

When the match went out the night was blacker than before. Charles moved slowly on and struck another match, and on and struck another. He searched the road for signs. At last he gave it up. His right hand rose and he threw the hatchet far off into the field. He walked rapidly away toward the pinched lights of the village (31).

Almost paralleling the Bible story is a near confrontation between father and son. As soon as Cyrus, the ultimate authority figure in the boys' world, finds out what Charles has done, he takes his shotgun and goes out in a rage to find and kill the boy. Yet he never finds him (32).

Charles hears his father is after him and is able to hide out for several weeks until Cyrus' anger cools. By the time he comes home, Cyrus has no heart for severe punishments. He only makes Charles do extra chores around the farm (34).

It might seem at this point that Steinbeck turns dramatically away from his biblical model here, for Charles seems to escape from the "divine justice" that Cain has to face. But that is not the case at all. For Charles does have to stand before "God" and be called to account for his deeds, but it is the "God" of memory or conscience. This does deviate from the literal Bible narrative and from traditional exegesis as well, but clearly Steinbeck adheres to the line laid down in Genesis.

Charles does indeed have a disconcerting confrontation with an authority much larger than himself. His "punishment" may come more slowly than Cain's does, but it is certainly as psychologically destructive. Years later, in fact, when he is writing to Adam who is now in the cavalry, we find that the twin cares of their father's rejection and Charles' guilt for brutal violence have become a self-consuming obsession with him. He is a haunted and miserable man. He writes to his brother of his misery:

I want to say--I want to say--I mean, I never understood--well, why our father did it. I mean, why didn't he like that knife I bought for him on his birthday. Why didn't he? It was a good knife and he needed a good knife. If he had used it or even honed it, or took it out of his pocket and

looked at it--that's all he had to do. If he'd liked it I wouldn't have took out after you. I had to take out after you.... Seems like when you half finish a job and can't think what it was. Something didn't get done. I shouldn't be here. I ought to be wandering around the world instead of sitting here on good farm looking for a wife. There is something wrong, like it didn't get finished, like it happened too soon and left something out. It's me should be where you are and you here (37).

It is significant that as Charles writes this letter the old family house seems to stir with a preternatural life of its own. It is like "the whole house was alive and had eyes everywhere, and like there was people behind the door just ready to come in if you looked away." Even his dead mother's "rocking chair cricked for all the world like she was sitting in it" (37). In other words, Charles is a man that the past will not leave alone. He is followed around by it, and tortured by the things he keeps mulling over but can never resolve.

Finally, as an outward symbol of this inner agony, Charles receives the "mark of Cain." While prying a stone out of one of his fields, the bar slips and crashes "against his forehead." When the wound heals it leaves a scar, "a kind of tattoo," like a "long finger mark on his forehead" (Steinbeck, Eden 47). Given to him "almost as if from Nature herself" (Ditsky, Outside 21), the scar only deepens his sense of shame and increases his isolation from the community. "He conceived a shame for his scar," writes

Steinbeck (47). In other words, he becomes as Cain was, a banished man. In his anguish and sense of deepening gloom on his life he writes another letter to Adam to describe his scar and how it has estranged him from other people.

It looks...like somebody marked me like a cow. The damn thing gets darker. By the time you get home it will maybe be black...don't know why it bothers me.... It just seems like I was marked. And when I go into town, like to the inn, why people are always looking at it. I can hear them talking about it when they don't know I can hear.... It gets so I don't feel like going to town at all (47).

This is almost all there is to say about Charles. Though he builds an increasingly prosperous farm, and in so doing keeps "the respect of his neighbors" (Steinbeck, Eden 54), as a human being, or more in keeping with the novel's theme, as a responsible and strong moral being, he is finished. The rest of his life is all deepening gloom and decay of spirit.

Charles began to keep one slovenly woman after another. When they got on his nerves he threw them out the way he would a pig. He didn't like them and had no interest in whether or not they liked him. He grew away from the village...but one thing he had which balanced his ugly life.... The farm had never been run so well. Charles cleared land, built up his walls, improved his drainage and added a hundred acres to the farm. More than that, he was planting tobacco, and a long new tobacco barn stood impressively behind the house (54).

A man that bears "the bitterness of rejection" and the "burden of guilt for the sin of revenge," and is marked with a physical reminder of his shame, Charles "resigns himself

to being condemned" (Marks 11). He never gets out from under the deep darkness that oppresses him. He never breaks free of the soul-destroying pattern of rejection-violence-guilt. He never knows the soul-exalting, soul liberating powers of "Timshel." Though he certainly exemplifies "the rages of the ego at war with its frustrated self" (Ditsky, *The East* 47), he is denied knowledge that might show him the way out. What fighting he does accomplishes nothing. His nature, his situation, the possibilities for his life remain an impenetrable mystery, and a torment. Curiously, he never seems to get an opportunity to know anything different.

It is easy to see the Cain and Abel pattern operating in this. It is also easy to see the important thematic element of the terrible consequences of parental rejection. Granted Steinbeck takes liberties with the Bible story as he incorporates its elements into his novel. For example, the literal God of the Bible becomes Cyrus, a father, or the accusations and frettings of an accusing conscience and a plaguing memory. The mark of Cain is handled differently as well. Though in the Bible, God puts the mark on a man, in the novel the man in essence marks himself. So then, while there may be no literal God in East of Eden who men bring their gifts to and who punishes wrongdoing, yet there are persons and internal forces which by the great sway they have over people's lives represent deity in its power to

grant or withhold life. Though Steinbeck avoids literal duplication of Cain and Abel, we see that all its elements are there. And as in the case of Charles' unhappy story, we certainly see something of its awful essence.

Since Cain and Abel is called "the symbol story of the soul," and the "chart of the soul" (Steinbeck, Eden 310), it is no surprise that in the next generation of characters to arise, the same rejection - violence - guilt pattern is repeated. And in this memetic duplication we can observe two major points of the novel: first, that something like the Cain-Abel pattern operates universally; second, and related to the first, that the sins of the fathers pass to their children (McDaniel 36). At the same time, though, while basic patterns repeat, there are many subtle variations between the current generation and the one that came earlier. In this way, Steinbeck subtly "undercuts" the notion of a rigid "mechanical scheme" and an unbreakable "generation cycle" (Ditsky, The East 44). These subtle differences in the Cain and Abel pattern suggest that it is not an absolute law of human existence that all people must repeat Charles' tale of heavy woe. Rather, it indicates a weakness in this dominant tendency, and so suggests that escape from it is possible. Variation in the pattern allows for the possibility of change. It is change as great as is

offered by "Timshel," the key concept in Steinbeck's humanistic revision of the Cain and Abel story.

The Cain-Abel pattern is repeated again, but within a new family. Significantly, there are similarities and differences in the way the story works out in this new group of characters. Again, there are two brothers: Aron and Caleb. Aron, like Adam before is what we can now call an "A"-type or Abel character. Like "A"-types generally, Aron is one of the world's gentle people. Kind and otherworldly, he is like other "A"-types in that he is basically "good" and "not inclined to be aggressive" (McDaniel 35). Like Abel of the Bible "A"-types easily commune with the ideal, and perhaps unlike Abel, they tend to project an ideal world about them, even to the point of deceiving themselves about reality. So it is that Adam is able to see Kathy, the most wicked person in the novel, as "an image of beauty and tenderness, a sweet and holy girl, precious beyond thinking, clean and loving" (Steinbeck, Eden 133). And Aron, following in his father's footsteps, sees his girlfriend, Abra, a truly good girl, as a sinless "Lily Maid" and a "Goddess-Virgin" (Steinbeck, Eden 497). As a crucial difference in these two "A"-type characters, this father and son, Adam has the inner strength to eventually be delivered from his delusion that perfection can exist on the Earth, but Aron never has that strength. In fact, he

prefers physical suicide to giving up this cherished lie. That is enough difference between these two Abel-like figures to make them opposites in this crucial respect.

Aron's brother, Caleb (Cal), a "C"-type or Cain-type, character is likewise true to Steinbeck's basic characteristics for this category of persons. He is a "wayward son" (Demott 45), and like "C"-types in general he is dark, brooding, and "morbidly aware of the evil within [himself]." He is also violent. As an interesting difference between himself and another notable "C"-type, his uncle Charles, we note that Caleb's violence tends to manifest itself in psychological cruelty, in contrast to Charles' tendency toward physical violence. We note, for example, Caleb's perverse savoring of his discovery that his brother Aron is painfully sensitive to any kind of questioning about their supposedly dead mother. Cal was very happy on that day because he "had found another implement, another secret tool, to use for any purpose he needed. He could bring it out anytime, and he knew it was the sharpest weapon he had found" (338).

A more obvious example of Steinbeck's method, which both acknowledges a Cain-Abel pattern in life and then undermines any conception of it as absolute law, is seen in Charles' and Caleb's different responses to personal guilt. Charles, as has been observed, is strangely paralyzed from taking any

action that might resolve his torment. In fact, he actually seems to suppress his concerns, an action that leaves him tormented by the vague sense of unfinished business, that there "is something wrong, like it didn't get finished, like it happened too soon and left something out" (37). A good share of Charles' misery is that he is hounded by this mysterious and dreaded something that he does not have the courage to come to grips with.

Caleb, in contrast, digs for the truth about himself, even if, as Ditsky notes, it is a truth that "makes you dead" (The East 46). So it is that when Cal makes the shocking discovery that his mother is not only alive but also a notorious whore, he begins going to see her to try to answer the question of how much of her is in himself, and whether or not he is doomed to be just like her. Because he has an initiative that Charles lacks, Caleb is finally able to say to his mother, "'I'm my own. I don't have to be you.... If I'm mean, it's my own mean'" (466). Again, this is a crucial difference between these two characters of the same type, and one significant enough to undermine the notion that despair rules the world, that every life goes lockstep to a predetermined helplessness, bewilderment, and gloom.

In this second generation of characters, there is once more a figure of ultimate authority, Adam, the one who

can only be described as Satanic. Great power is in the hands of parents, who by giving or withholding their love, raise up or destroy their children. Though Steinbeck continues to interpret the God of Cain and Abel as the Godlike role of parents, he is in agreement with the Bible's claim that someone of absolute authority exists and possesses something like absolute power over a person's life. God, though for Steinbeck only psychologically speaking, exists. That God is the parent.

Action, in this second family of a father and two sons, also follows the basic pattern that was introduced earlier. Adam, who as a child was doted on by his father, grows up to repeat the same error. He loves his son, Aron, better than he loves his other son, Caleb. The reason is quite interesting, and it relates to the great grief of Adam's life: Aron's angelic face with its wide set eyes, "beautiful soft mouth," and "fine and golden" (336) hair reminds him of Kathy, a woman he had an inspired but deluded love for.

Here too, Steinbeck carefully avoids exact duplication. For while Adam has a reason (however deluded) for preferring Aron over Caleb, Cyrus' treatment of his sons is completely arbitrary. In fact, Cyrus' love for Adam is as much a mystery to himself as it might be to anyone else. He

replies to Adam's question about why he likes him better than Charles:

You asked a question. I guess I'll have to answer.... You're not clever. You don't know what you want. You have no proper fierceness. You let other people walk over you. Sometimes I think you're a weakling who will never amount to a dog turd. Does that answer your question? I love you better. I always have. This may be a bad thing to tell you, but it's true. I love you better (28).

This difference in Cyrus' and Adam's rejection of their sons represents another subtle repudiation of the belief that people are helplessly bound to the psychological forces of parental approval or of one's own "burden of guilt for the sin of revenge" (Marks 12).

In both generations the rejected son avenges himself on his more favored brother. Caleb, though, deviates from his uncle Charles' response, by taking vengeance on his brother early in their relationship, whereas Charles simply explodes in one monstrous display of hurt and anger. As already mentioned, Charles' violence is physical, while Caleb's takes the form of small acts of mental torture. Also unlike Charles, Caleb senses that people in general "liked Aron better" (Steinbeck, Eden 349). So Caleb takes vengeance on everyone. In other words Caleb lives with a perpetual chip on his shoulder. Charles, in contrast, at least as a young man, is quite a social type and is often down at the local inn drinking and talking with men.

Typical of his adversarial stance toward the world is what Cal does when he realizes that Abra, a newly made friend of the two brothers, likes Aron more than himself. Knowing the boys have no mother, Abra plays a pretend game in which she casts herself as a stately benefactress out rescuing poor castoff children.

She carried an enormous basket from which a turkey's feet protruded.
 'Little motherless orphans,' she said sweetly.
 'I'll be your mother. I'll hold you and rock you and tell you stories.'
 'We're too big,' said Cal. 'We'd upset you.'
 Abra looked away from his brutality (347).

With only a few words, Cal skillfully demolishes her story and destroys her fun.

There is also again the matter of gifts brought to "God". Aron's "gift" is a subtle one. He simply returns home from college for Thanksgiving and he is warmly received. "We didn't know what we felt about you until you went away" says Adam, "smiling" (542). Caleb's gift, given during Thanksgiving meal, is \$15,000 that he made by investing in bean futures, money he hoped would make up for a recent loss his father, Adam, suffered when a scheme to send lettuce to the east coast in refrigerated train cars went sour. As we expect, following the Cain-Abel pattern, the money is rejected, and it is heartbreaking.

Adam touched the new bills so that their edges came together, folded the tissue over them and turned the ends up. He looked helplessly at Lee (their Chinese servant). Cal caught a feeling--a feeling

of calamity, of destruction in the air, and a weight of sickness overwhelmed him. He heard his father say, "You'll have to give it back" (543).

One more time, Steinbeck insures that surface resemblances between Adam rejecting Caleb's \$15,000 and Cyrus' rejecting Charles' gift of a knife are undermined by crucial differences between them. For while Cyrus rejects Charles' gift for purely arbitrary reasons, as arbitrary as his preferential treatment of his other son, Adam actually has deep, personal, and justifiable cause for refusing Caleb's gift, heartfelt as the present is, and as desperate as the giver is for parental approval.

The problem is that at this point in the novel, the First World War has started. Adam serves on the local draft board, which is in the difficult position of deciding who goes to fight and who stays home. Mindful of his responsibility, he sends most, but he hates doing it and cannot "get over the feeling that the young men he passed into the army are under the sentence of death" (520). Unfortunately for Caleb, he made his money by selling the beans to the army. For Adam this is a horrifying connection. "'I send boys out,'" he says. "'I sign my name and they go out.... Not one will come back untorn. Son, do you think I could take a profit from that?'" (543). In other words, Adam rejects Caleb's gift as a legitimate, and even a commendable, act of conscience. The rejection comes

out of his own heavy sense of duty to the men he sends out to war; Cyrus' earlier "rejection" of the knife that disappears into his pocket and is never seen again has no such justification at all. Relentlessly, Steinbeck casts doubt on the notion of a "strict determinism" (Ditsky, *Narrational Self* 14) ruling human affairs.

This time, too, the rejected brother retaliates in a final, murderous act of revenge. Caleb, with his well developed skills in psychological torture, and knowing his brother's deep distress about questions concerning their mother, does what he believes will damage Aron most. He takes him to meet their mother, Kate the prostitute.

Cal's mind was numb. He did not even know that the air was cold with frost slipping down from the mountains. Three blocks ahead he saw his brother cross under a street light, coming toward him. He knew it was his brother by the stride and posture and because he knew it.

Cal slowed his steps, and when Aron was close he said, 'Hi. I came looking for you.'

Aron said, 'I'm sorry about this afternoon.'

'You couldn't help it--forget it.' He turned and the two walked side by side. 'I want you to come with me,' Cal said. 'I want to show you something.'

'What is it?'

'Oh, it's a surprise. But it's very interesting. You'll be interested.'

'Will it take long?'

'No, not very long. Not very long at all.'

They walked past Central Avenue toward Castroville Street (545-546).

The next we see of Aron he is lying about his age to the Army recruiter. And soon after that, the letter is in the Trask mailbox informing the family that he has been killed

in action. This time, too, Steinbeck undermines seemingly identical acts with crucial differences. Years earlier, when Charles went into his mindless rage and in an "outburst of passionate evil" (Ditsky, *The East* 45) tried to beat Adam to death, Adam was the direct and helpless victim of his brother's cruelty. In fact the whole event, the innocent walk that takes the brothers away from possible onlookers, and then the sudden outburst and the attack closely resembles the Cain and Abel story of the Bible. "And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him" (Genesis 4:8). The main differences between East of Eden and the Bible on this point is that Charles only beats his brother close to death. Intent is certainly there, but the opportunity slips from his grip.

Interestingly, Cal's attack on his brother veers away from both the biblical original and East of Eden's first version of this terrible event. Technically, Caleb does not murder his brother. Certainly Cal's act is the premeditated work of "a quiet, hateful brain" and of "hate...poisoning every nerve" (Steinbeck, Eden 544). A murderous intent is certainly there. But the crucial thing that sets Cal's act apart from both Cain's and Charles' attacks on their brothers, is that Aron is not wholly a bleating lamb, an innocent and helpless victim of a superior power that sweeps

him to his death. As Burningham notes, "Aron . . . commits suicide" (79). This exonerates Cal from at least some of the guilt for his brother's murder. Certainly Caleb knows Aron, with his glorified images of his long, lost, angelic mother, will not be able to take the ugly truth that his mother is really a whore. Still, Aron has some choice and must bear some responsibility for his own death. Besides this, the time from the horrifying revelation of his mother's identity to the time he actually falls in battle requires not only a series of decisions to be made on his part, but involves many other people as well, such as military trainers and those who make duty assignments. Cal commits no straightforward act of murder. Aron's death is quite complicated and the guilt is spread around in ways that do not occur in the Bible or in the family of Cyrus Trask. There is a lot of mud and murk in these waters.

This time through the Cain-Abel sequence, the "murderer" also receives a mark of Cain. Here, though, it brands only the inside of the rejected guilty man. Like Charles' mark, Caleb's is the mark of "guilt out of himself" (Steinbeck, Eden 602). It is also the mark of rejection and the mark of despair, the despair of a person who believes himself doomed by parentage and by the guilt of his wicked deeds to be ruled by evil his whole life. In "his weakness and his

filth and his murder of his brother" (Steinbeck, Eden 303), Cal cries out to Abra, the woman he has come to love.

I've killed my brother and my father is paralyzed because of me.... Abra, my mother was a whore.... I've got her blood. Don't you understand? I wanted to run away from my father's eyes. They're right in front of me all the time. When I close my eyes I still see them. I'll always see them. My father is going to die, but his eyes will still be looking at me, telling me I killed my brother (598).

Certainly this echoes Cain's chilling cry of anguish: "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). This is a man who has seen his life race forward to a crisis of such intensity that his survival is in doubt. Judgment falls swiftly on both Cain and Caleb. This is quite different from Charles and the quiet desperation of his slow slide downward into inner decay and ruin. Charles never knows this pitch of sorrow and guilt, the really sharp stab of conscience, the really intense awareness that he has isolated himself even further from a father's approval. Charles shuns this kind of piercing clarity. Preferring to let his sorrows and guilt haunt him from the shadows, his experience is one of a deepening and disturbing twilight full of unnamed menace. With almost monotonous predictability Steinbeck gently attacks the illusion that each life runs a predetermined course toward helplessness.

Finally, at this point, as Cal's life rapidly builds to intense crisis, Steinbeck makes a sudden and dramatic

departure from the Cain-Abel pattern laid out earlier with Charles. And it represents the truth that Steinbeck has hinted at all through the novel. Almost miraculously, he stops the rejection - guilt movement which is swiftly carrying Cal towards despair and suicide. Through Lee, the Trask's house servant, and a man newly enlightened to the overcoming greatness of the human soul as well as to his own responsibility to do good for others, Steinbeck reaches in to rescue Cal from the forces he ignorantly construes as far mightier than himself. A true friend to both Adam and Caleb, Lee stands the son before the father and pleads that Adam exercise his humanity--i.e., his powers of "Timshel"--and defuse the deadly forces threatening to overpower the boy, Caleb. Lee's great love attempts with all its strength to do a good deed. Says Lee to the bedridden Adam:

'Here is your son--Caleb--your only son. Look at him, Adam.'

The pale eyes looked until they found Cal. Cal's mouth moved dryly and made no sound.

Lee's voice cut in. 'I don't know how long you will live, Adam. Maybe a long time. Maybe an hour. But your son will live. He will marry and his children will be the only remnant left of you.' Lee wiped his eyes with his fingers.

'He did a thing in anger, Adam, because he thought you had rejected him. The result of his anger is that his brother and your son is dead.'

Cal said, 'Lee--you can't.'

'I have to,' said Lee. 'If it kills him I have to. I have the choice,' and he smiled sadly and quoted, 'If there's blame, it's my blame.' Lee's shoulders straightened. He said sharply, 'Your son is marked with guilt out of himself--out of himself--almost

more than he can bear. Don't crush him with rejection. Don't crush him, Adam.' Lee's breath whistled in this throat. 'Adam, give him your blessing. Don't leave him alone with his guilt. Adam, can you hear me? Give him your blessing' (602).

Because Lee continues to hammer, Adam relents; after a great struggle such that "the whole bed seemed to shake under the concentration" (Steinbeck, Eden 602), his hand lifted in blessing, "lifted an inch and then fell back" (602). By that one act, coerced and cajoled out of Adam by Lee, Cal is forgiven and freed from rejection and torment. Lee, though, who desperately wants every vestige of doubt about the reality of his father's love exorcised from Caleb's thoughts, goes on to press Adam--a man closer to death than before--for a still stronger demonstration of his affection for Caleb.

'Thank you, Adam--thank you, my friend. Can you move your lips? Make your lips form his name.' Adam looked up with sick weariness. His lips parted and failed again. Then his lungs filled. He expelled the air and his lips combed the rushing sigh. His whispered word seemed to hang in the air: 'Timshel!' (602).

By "a mighty effort" (Ditsky, Outside 39), Adam not only gives Cal a clean slate free of rejection and free of guilt, but through his last spoken word to his son, he also bequeaths that greatest truth he knows, the truth of "Timshel." That "truth" which is represented in Steinbeck's imposing of his will upon scripture, his humanizing of a theological text, becomes Cal's ultimate enlightenment, that

as a man he has strengths of soul that can overcome all evil forces, including those of rejection and guilt. He comes to the awesome and exalting revelation that he is "free to conquer evil" (McDaniel 38). As Steinbeck makes the Bible story of Cain and Abel mean what he wants it to mean, so Cal can do the same with his life. In "Timshel," "thou mayest," he has both the responsibility and the power to do so.

It is a nearly supernatural moment, and as Ditsky notes, "a scene of quasi-religious intensity--a visitation, an apotheosis, an epiphany...an awe-filled moment" (Outside 39). There is a rescue and a conversion, a "climatic transformation" (Ditsky, *The East* 24), of Cal's tale of old woe to a story of great new hope. It is also a moment that miraculously elevates Caleb to the novel's highest position and makes him its "hero" (Ditsky, *The East* 46). Young and awakened to the wonderful promise of "Timshel!" Cal possesses the special opportunity that no one else in the novel has: a long lifetime ahead of him in which to fight this good fight and to achieve his ultimate potential, a "stature with the Gods" (Steinbeck, *Eden* 303).

This obviously represents a total break from the spiraling descent into a living hell that is the typical experience of those who surrender themselves to the Cain-Abel, rejection-guilt pattern. It also represents the outright expression of that truth the novel has hinted at in

its meticulous exposing of the failure of rejection-guilt to operate as unvarying psychological law. Because Cal is set free by Adam, it becomes clear that the belief that this pattern rules the world with an invincible power that all people must bow before is a myth. The person who will fight against its pull can not only escape its cruel and enslaving power, but can also be a force for good in the world.

"Timshel," the truth that saves Cal, the triumphant proclamation that liberty, not slavery, is the high heritage of all that possess a human soul, suddenly makes everything possible. Humanity can not only overcome anything, it can not only hold its own against the evil forces in the world, but it can march and keep on marching until it climbs up to the stars. Perhaps, too, even that will still only be the beginning.

II

To further clarify and develop the view of the human condition presented in East of Eden, one necessarily begins with the novel's position on the source of evil: humanity's universal experience of rejection. Accordingly, and mirroring God's rejection of the biblical Cain's offering, Cyrus Trask overtly favors one of his sons, Adam, and just as overtly rejects his other son, Charles. And later in the next generation of Trasks, Adam, the son Cyrus accepted, repeats his father's errors. He too pours out affection upon one of his sons, Aron, while refusing to love the other one, Caleb. Significantly for both boys, the inequity of their respective situations comes into intense and painful focus on special occasions when each son presents a gift to his father. Closely following the Cain and Abel story, Charles presents Cyrus with an expensive imported knife (Eden 30), and Caleb presents Adam with a gift of \$15,000. In both cases, the gifts fail to please "God" (Ditsky, The East 44). Whether received with the nonchalance of Cyrus or the horror of Adam, who sees in the money the faces of hometown boys dying on the battlefield (Eden 543), the responses are in effect the same: the boys are rejected. The rejection of the boys' gifts, which symbolically are desperate pleas for love, is in each case a momentous event. For besides inflicting a great and bewildering pain, it also

unleashes forces that powerfully propel them to avenge themselves on their brothers. They practically "[have] to take out after" (Eden 37) the one their fathers love better. Virtually paralleling the Genesis account, Charles walks with his brother out into the countryside and attempts, but fails, to murder him there. But in the other rejected brother's case there is "success." Caleb drives Aron to a suicidal shame and horror. As a truism about the human condition, Steinbeck claims that people in general experience rejection, and then violently avenge themselves by destroying the innocent. "We are [all] Cain's children" (Marks 10).

This only sketches out the sorrow that dominates this part of the picture. For out of the rejection and the violence it provokes arises a persistent and tormenting sense of guilt and shame. In the biblical symbolism Eden employs, all people are "marked." A plaguing conscience and a nagging inner sense of "something wrong" (Eden 37) become humanity's universal anguish. Illustrating this, Steinbeck shows us Charles writing letters to his distant brother, Adam, and pouring out his sorrow over his father's coldness toward him and over the increasing estrangement from his neighbors (Eden 37 and 47).

Years later, in the second generation of Trasks, Caleb experiences the same thing. As the novel's other important

example of a rejected, violent man, Caleb presents a dramatically intensified version of the same process when he suddenly faces the fact that he has killed his brother and is the wicked cause of his father's debilitating stroke. "I have killed my brother and my father is paralyzed because of me" (Eden 598). In Caleb's lament and terror that he will live his whole life haunted by the undying image of his father's accusing eyes (Eden 598) we are shown a man almost destroyed in an instant by the swift vengeance of an aroused and vindictive conscience.

It is through these men that Steinbeck identifies the darker truths about humanity's universal experience of parental rejection which ushers every person into the realms of sorrow, anger, and regret. To make this point clear Steinbeck explains it in plain language.

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 rejection, and with rejection comes anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the rejection, and with the crime guilt--and there is the story of mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputated, the human would not be what he is. Maybe there would be fewer crazy people. I am sure in myself there would not be many jails. It is all there--the start, the beginning. One child, refused the love he craves, kicks the cat and hides his secret guilt: and another steals so that money will make him loved; a third conquers the world--and always the guilt and revenge and more guilt (270-271).

In theological terms, appropriate for a fictional work both biblically derived and focused on fundamental human

issues, rejection is the "original sin" (Ditsky, *Outside* 39). Virtually everyone suffers the pain of it; virtually everyone reacts with anger and violence; and because of that, virtually the whole world languishes under "a great burden of guilt" (Eden 268). But there is more, for in a humanistic analogue of the biblical concept of inherited evil, the "sins of the fathers are visited on their sons" (McDaniel 30). The contagion of rejection, with its attendant destructive consequences, passes from one generation to the next, with the potential to infect the whole of human history. Cyrus rejects Charles. Adam rejects Caleb, and so on, all the way back to the beginning, and possibly, all the way out to the end.

Steinbeck's preliminary definition of the human condition, then, is not a cheerful one. For life in this world--which lies east of Eden and is, therefore, fallen--begins in enslavement to the "everlasting patterns of guilt and rejection" (Ditsky, *The East* 45). A doom as mysterious and bewildering as God's rejecting and then punishing of Cain rests on individuals and on generations. Potentially, at least, this makes the entire human experience one of darkness, helplessness, and sorrow. It also makes Steinbeck's initial look at the human experience a rather dreary and discouraging one. "There is a blackness on this valley" of the world "as though an old ghost haunted

it out of the dead ocean below and troubled the air with unhappiness" (Eden 146).

But in East of Eden, Steinbeck does more than feel the inside of grisly old wounds. Though he does want the injury to be painfully felt, he has a medicine to prescribe and a program for complete recovery. Like fundamentalist preachers he presses home the sickness to make men anxious to submit to the remedy. "Innocence," which is really ignorance, "eventually must come to know evil" (Marks 10). In its basic form, the remedy, Steinbeck's "prescription for becoming" (Ditsky, The East 45) is this: Those who have done wickedly in the past must now courageously begin to do good. In other words, those who have allowed rejection or hurt or anger or guilt to rule their lives must now make a determined effort to resist the force of these inner tyrants. They must cease to be a whipped and driven people, and must begin to live consciously and deliberately. They must do more than Lee who, when the Trasks purchase their first automobile, proclaims stubbornly. "'I'll try to understand it, but drive it I will not'" (Eden 365). Rather, there must be an attempt to both wisely understand and to decisively act. Moreover, this noble rule of life applies to all actors in the scheme that has so far been delineated. Both sorts of people, those who like Cyrus and Adam reject others, and those who as Charles and Caleb bear

the pain of that rejection and the guilt for revenge, must submit to this way. Starting now, each must say to himself or herself, "I take responsibility" (Eden 306) and cease to be the unhappy instruments of the world's and their own destruction, and begin to be instruments of their own and its rejuvenation.

Understandably, the main burden of responsibility for redeeming the world lies with those who by rejecting others first invited evil to earth and so pushed others into criminality and guilt. As their past cruelty to people "warped history" (Eden 34) toward evil, so now their weighty obligation is to reverse the process by beginning to love people. In so doing they will "cancel out a lot of wickedness" (Eden 89) and extricate people from the onslaughts of pain and anger that provoke much of the world's violence and its sick conscience. This is what Adam does at the end of the novel when, at Lee's impassioned urging, he admits responsibility and blesses the guilt-ridden, despairing son, Caleb (Eden 602). We sense the peculiar power ascribed to this decision to love when we realize that Adam's act, the uplifted hand over the son before him, has clear connections to the Old Testament patriarchal blessing of the eldest son. An act typically involving a supernatural passing down of a special covenant of blessing, its being evoked adds rich suggestiveness of a

release of power that changes Caleb's destiny from "a sentence of death-in-life to a new enlightenment" (Ditsky, *The East* 45).

Continuing to remark upon these deep scriptural resonances, we note that Adam does more than bless Caleb through a powerful affirmation of his love for him. Though this is a great and liberating act, he does more. With presumably his life's last energy, Adam bequeaths his son the secret to the power to live strong in the world. With his last "rushing sign," he passes down the great human "legacy of Timshel" (Burningham 83), instantly transforming his son into a man of power. Whatever Cal has done in the past, he can overcome it. Whatever forces will rise against him in the future, he can vanquish them. For Cal has been assured that his father accepts him. He has become confident in his possession of free will. He knows he can now rise and take hold of his own life and begin to do good. "All impurities burned out," he is a man "ready for a glorious flux" (Eden 600).

Significantly, we also observe that Adam can bestow this deathbed blessing only because he has recognized both the moral demand that he must save his son, and that as a human being endowed with free will, the truth of "Timshel", he can find the strength to do so. This is even though Cal, his "wayward son," (Demott 45) has not only killed his favorite

boy but is also responsible for his own hopeless physical state. Mightily, Adam resists the desire to isolate and destroy his boy. Instead, he renounces such surrender to evil, and determinedly pushes on to the good. "Timshel" the great, if difficult, truth bolsters his resolve so that in his last act in the world, he courageously delivers both himself and his son out of evil.

Thus, two things lie at the heart of East of Eden's approach for escaping the tyranny of evil. First there must be an inspired conviction in the reserves of power contained in the human soul. This is the meaning of "'Timshel' thou mayest," what critic Brad Burningham describes as "the principle of individual action that Steinbeck glorified in Eden" (10). Second, there must be a vigorous and sustained renunciation of past destructive ways and a similarly vigorous and courageous effort to do good. This is the novel's "code of courage" (Ditsky, The East 45). With these foundational beliefs, those who used to reject and hurt people can now love and heal them. And those who in pain and anger destroyed the innocent can now do good for them.

Put as a moral imperative, the basic message of East of Eden is this: To be saved, you must take up the "immediate assumption of manliness, the ready shouldering of responsibilities" (Ditsky, Outside 38). You must put forth the "mighty effort" (Eden 39) and do the thing that "should"

be done. We probably do not err if we discern a dogmatic tone in the novel's pronouncements. "The law was designed to save not to destroy" (Eden 90) reads the text, and in this is something like a perception of a universally applicable code of conduct. Though East of Eden refrains from providing specific rules of behavior, it does insist that right behavior exists, and the responsibility for one's actions is a fundamental truth of human existence. Moreover, one's position on that responsibility is the determining factor for whether a life goes upward to freedom and light or downward into darkness and the mire of evil. It is what "makes a man a man" (Eden 304). These, then, are the novel's underlying structural principles.

East of Eden, though, probes deeply and becomes quite specific in its analysis of people's striving to do good. One area the novel gives special attention to is the problem of guilt, part of the world's "hidden sorrow" (Eden 146) and what one critic goes so far as to call Eden's "one imposing theme" (Marks 9). Though Eden does remark that "Cain is maybe the best known name in the whole world" (Eden 766), this view seems an extensive focus on only the negative at the expense of the work's profound optimism. It does, however, indicate the importance of the subject in Steinbeck's examination of the human condition.

If there is one basic prerequisite for those who would rise to the higher life, it is that they possess the knowledge of good and evil. There must be that fundamental recognition that "there is one story in the world and only one," the story "of good and evil" (Eden 411). Or, as Ditsky describes it, people must have received "the world's terrible gift" (Outside 19). And, as a general, though not absolute, rule, it is the Cain figures, those who "seem morbidly aware of the evil within them" (Ditsky, The East 45-46)--Charles, Caleb, and Tom Hamilton--who are so endowed, and so afflicted, with an active moral sense. Without this basic capacity to suffer over personal evil, even to the point that "small sins [seem]...great" (Eden 401), and to desire to do good, a man or woman has no chance for redemption by the power of love and the exertion of "Timshel."

Thus, that Charles can write letters to his brother, Adam, pouring out his anguish over parental rejection and over his estrangement from his neighbors is a "good" thing. For it indicates the presence of conscience, and a potential for salvation. Charles, unfortunately, has an infected sense of good and evil and knows only the "terrible" side of the gift of conscience, its stern accusations. In terms of the Cain and Abel symbolism that figures prominently in the novel, Charles knows only the distress of the scar on his

This, then, is the novel's teaching on this point: Terrible as the horrors can be that rise out of the conscience, they come as a gift, and a very necessary human "grace" for any who would take the road to greatness. The need to be morally "fighting for [one's] life" (Eden 294) is foundational to this way. This helps explain why in East of Eden's exegesis of the biblical Cain and Abel story, it is the tormented Cain who is seen as the protagonist. For having done evil--as all people do--he inwardly suffers for it, and yearns to attain greater things. "The tree of knowledge of good and evil must be picked from" (Ditsky, The East 45). That comes first; the better things follow. Acknowledging personal evil always precedes the exertions that lead to greatness.

Conscience has supreme importance, and one might even argue that the person without conscience is doomed without knowing it. But if the novel grants special importance to the ethical faculty, it is also acknowledges it to be an immensely powerful force, and even a dangerous one that must be managed with wisdom. For it does not always act rationally. Charles' obsession with guilt and shame which slowly consumes and destroys him makes this dark side of conscience quite plain. Conscience, then, must have a guard around it, and it must be controlled. For if let loose, it can bring down the soul "like a silent earthquake" (Eden

276), or it can grow to monstrous size and smash one's confidence of ever being strong and free and of doing good. No one who is as Charles, branded with a sense of unworthiness, can dare dream of greatness or can courageously throw himself into the pursuit of it. "It's me should be where you are and you here" (37) Charles writes to his brother, but never finds strength to make such yearnings into reality. Dreams of change, let alone heroic efforts, appear to such tormented souls as the most outrageous of pretensions.

The novel identifies two types of guilt as special sources of problems to people: One involves the human tendency to attribute too much influence to parental wrongdoing. In other words, people often believe themselves condemned to follow the paths of wickedness their parents or even grandparents traveled on. This is the problem of criminality, or guilt, by inheritance. Adam, for example, shudders to see the "ghost" of his brother Charles "peering out of the eyes" of his baby son, Caleb (Eden 263). The second type of guilt involves the common tendency to believe that one's own crimes deserve the severest self-punishments. In what can be a manifestation of a perverse sort of pride, people often delude themselves into thinking that having committed evil deeds in the past disqualifies them from the quest of doing good today. To those caught in a torturing

sense of guilt of either kind, the thought of being strong and doing well can seem the most ludicrous of things to imagine for oneself. But to both problems, Eden's answer is the same: You must muster the "savagery" (Eden 256) to boldly renounce this sickly preoccupation with evil and valiantly pour out your strength and escape such debilitating thinking. The ideal is to be like Abra, Caleb's girlfriend, who, "while she knew the weaknesses of men, she still liked them" (Eden 346). Those who know their own guilt must not condemn but accept themselves.

This does not suggest that East of Eden makes light of these concerns. For it does recognize that, tragically, misconceptions about guilt overthrow many who want to do good. On the issue of inherited evil, East of Eden grants that people do indeed feel compelled to repeat the sins of their parents and that corruption does to an extent flow in the blood. Cyrus does show a damaging favoritism to his sons, and Adam does contract the propensity and commit the identical wrong against his offspring. But at the same time, East of Eden rejects the belief that "genetically" communicated evil (Marks 15) dictates behavior. Though many languish under the false notion that parental wickedness dooms them to moral mediocrity, or worse, to unmitigated wickedness, such thinking is a poisonous delusion. Actually, each person's situation resembles that of Caleb

and Aron, who though of the same mother and father and also twins, are born separately "each one in his own sack" (Eden 194). The opportunity for individuality runs deeper than the compulsion toward similarity. In reality, no person has by circumstances of birth been cast into a slavery to evil impulses. Tellingly on this point, at the end of the novel, Adam conquers the inherited tendency to reject his son and learns to love him. He overcomes the bad blood he received from his father.

In East of Eden neither "blood or circumstances" (Gribben 40)--in all but the extremist of cases--decide the fate of man or woman. One's choices determine everything. The human will holds the only true sovereignty. Though an awesome position to exist within, it is Eden's teaching that "the responsibility for salvation is...put wholly on the individual" (Marks 15). The quality of one's mother or father has no power to either pull one down into the fires of hell or to raise one up to the glory of heaven. The individual decides his/her own fate. Every person's situation is like Caleb's. Having discovered he has a whore for a mother, and having suffered for months fearing that biological law will force him to be like her, he finally comes before her to proclaim that he, not her, determines the outcome of his life. "I don't have to be you," he says. "If I'm mean, it's my own mean" (Eden 466).

Regardless of Kate's influence in shaping him (and she has had some), Cal's wisdom and force of will have the ultimate say in what he becomes and accomplishes. He may resemble her in his drive to rule other people, rising as he does to "a natural and cold position of leadership in the school yard" (Eden 422). Or, he may also resemble her in his tendency to inspire fear in others and through that to earn, not love, but "respect" (Eden 421). But even so, he still has the final say on his actions. To generalize this to a truth about one's stance toward inherited guilt, we reason that because Caleb can successfully assert his independence from such morally corrupt beginnings, then all people must and can do the same.

The other guilt, guilt for personal wrongdoing, such as Charles' beating Adam and Caleb's driving Aron to suicide, receives the identical admonishment. People must cease from such self-indulgent punishing of themselves for harms done and evils committed. Obsessive preoccupation with personal guilt brings no benefit, but only saps resolve to reform and do good. It will make one "become an old man" (Eden 276) before it is time. In extreme cases, it can drown the soul in a despair too great to rise from. Certainly, Charles' slow deterioration, seen particularly in his relationships with the women he takes in and throws out when they have spent their usefulness (Eden 54), illustrates the cancerous

effect guilt and despair can have upon the best capabilities of human beings.

A more dramatic, and sadder, portrait of one whose self-condemnation develops into an insanity that eventually destroys him is given in the figure of Tom Hamilton. Though outside of the main flow of the story, Tom provides Steinbeck's primary example of the dangers that lie in an excessive concern with personal guilt. Ironically, considering his final outcome, Tom enters the novel as "a potentially vast moral being" and one who can legitimately claim to be "aspiring to Godhood" (Burningham 4). He brims with the almost magical moral capabilities of a "pure" man and a "dragon killer" and "a rescuer of damsels" (Eden 401).

At the same time, he is a Cain character, a man with a troubled conscience. And he is one of the worse sorts, due to his possessing an unrealistic belief in the "perfectibility of [his] nature" (Burningham 4). It is a serious abnormality because it causes him to morbidly exaggerate the evil within him such that it destroys his perception of what good he has. "Tom had not joy enough," and it worried his father (Eden 253) explains the novel in its description of Tom's condition. Being predisposed to dark and bitter broodings, when he accidentally kills his sister, Dessie, Tom cannot escape the conviction that he has committed the unpardonable sin. He believes he has

uncovered an evil within that knows no remedy, an utter and irredeemable wickedness that he supposes allows him only one course. Pathetically, he surrenders to the absurd belief that he must bear full responsibility for Dessie's death. It happens the afternoon of the day of the funeral.

Tom sat down in the evening and looked around.... He knew that pretty soon his name would be called and he would have to go up before the bench with himself as judge and his own crimes a jurors.

And his name was called, shrilling in his ears. His mind walked into face the acusers: Vanity, which charged him with being ill dressed and dirty and vulgar; and lust, slipping him the money for his whoring; dishonesty, to make him pretend to talent and thought he did not have; laziness and gluttony arm and arm. Tom felt comforted by these because they screened the great Gray One in the back seat, waiting--the gray and dreadful crime.... The Gray One was Murder" (Eden 408).

When the Gray One finally "shouldered up front" (308), he brings no surprises. Tom's enormously enlarged sense of responsibility destroys all thought that he might ever do good. Hope of reaching previous aspirations to Godhood wither to nothing and only one thing remains for him to do. Engulfed wholly in an unnecessary despair, he commits the wholly inappropriate act of self-execution. Such waste of marvelous potential is one of the novel's more wrenching tragedies. For Tom really had much good within him.

Surrender to guilt, regardless how black one's parent's or one's own crimes appear, can never receive commendation. It is always inappropriate. Rather than allow defeat,

Steinbeck requires people to renounce inner demands for punishment. Having rejected such pronouncements of permanent failure, the individual must follow the way Caleb takes in the novel's last moments. Having discovered in Adam's raised hand of blessing that his father loves him, and having received the shimmering mantel of power the novel calls "Timshel," he casts off guilt and looks to the duty that lies before him. East of Eden requires the exercise of "a forgiving sort of courage" (Eden 45). Individuals must learn to let shame and sorrow go by them, and get on with the important business of doing good.

Certainly, it is Caleb's exiting from the cloud of guilt and his sense of having entered a life of grand and heroic venture that gives this final scene its significance. Adam's blessing of love and identity produce interior events of great, if invisible, drama and moment. In this "climatic transformation" (Ditsky, The East 46), an instantaneous conversion occurs: a "kind of necessary miracle takes place" (Ditsky, Outside 40). "Having faced the fact of his guilt" (Marks 10), Caleb experiences deliverance from the shame and the power of it. He is "[freed] to conquer evil" (McDaniel 38) within and without him.

To grasp the depth of this self-forgiveness one looks to the archetypal example of Cain, he whose shame and potential for deliverance represent all people's experience. Though

the guiltiest of men, Cain continues to possess the ever-available opportunity to resist evil and to go the good way. For "in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he still has the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win" (Eden 303). All people live as Cains and Calebs, who, though they wear the darkest of guilty stains, can, at any time, arise and cleanse themselves and enter the glorious life. Nothing can destroy the soul's ability to reform and regenerate itself.

Ruthlessly, Steinbeck demolishes every obstacle that prevents people from taking charge of their lives. With thoughtfulness and method, he "cuts the feet from under weakness and cowardliness and laziness" (Eden 304). He strips off every excuse, insisting that people rise out of the mire of sorrowful lives, or sink deeper into it because they choose to. Ultimately, every person sets the course of his/her life, and carries the whole responsibility for its honor or its shame. Because no force can withstand the concentrated human will, every person possesses the means of his or her own deliverance. Those that will throw themselves against inner evil will overcome it. Those that will not, will themselves be overcome. All people receive exactly what they ask for. This enthusiastic, if unsentimental, message goes out to everyone, urging each to confidently and energetically join in the battle for his/her

own salvation. The novel gives no countenance to expressions of gloomy fatalism such as "death and sadness.... You just have to wait long enough and it will come" (Eden 398). Rather, strength and completeness lie within reach of all who will reach for them. That is Eden's credo.

The insistence that individuals courageously force their lives into new patterns is, therefore, a demand that people take up a life of moral struggle. It calls people to receive the heroic vision that sees the glory in becoming "a battleground between good and evil" (Steinbeck, Letters 428-429). In other words, men and women must take up the way of continuous conflict and live the paradox of a life that possesses "a dreadful kind of beauty" (Eden 36). We see something of the enormity of this demand in Adam's deathbed struggle to free Caleb. Though virtually paralyzed by a stroke only hours before, physically weakening, and demoralized by the death of his favorite son, Adam faces perhaps the most difficult moment of his life. It is demanded of him, through Lee, that he immediately offer love to one he has not only never loved but the one who has brought this irreversible disaster upon himself and his family. "'Adam, give him your blessing.... Give him your blessing!'" insists Lee (Eden 602).

That at this moment, "the whole bed seem[s] to shake" (602) beneath this physically immobilized man (Eden 602) signals that he has entered this difficult conflict. That he can lift his hand up "an inch" (Eden 602) in the Old Testament patriarchal gesture of blessing signals he has obtained victory. The requirement to love overcomes the desire to punish and destroy. Soul overcomes passion. Then comes a moment of rest. Difficult as blessing Caleb was, Adam has not done his utmost. He must do more, and so must any that would follow him. For the message of East of Eden is that to serve the right requires exertions of force and stamina that go beyond the reasonable requirements of a great and courageous effort. It can require one to go the whole way, to totally expend his/her life, to push past exhaustion and on even to extinction, and to die that others may live.

Adam does this, but not at first. When Lee demands he more strongly demonstrate his love for Caleb--"'Can you move your lips? Make your lips form his name'" (Eden 602)--that request initially stuns him. From his sickbed, Adam "looks up" to his friend and to the immense labor asked of him, and a "sick weariness" (Eden 602) fills his face. Having just completed one grueling struggle, he is being required to immediately enter the throes of another. That Adam does even more than Lee asks and bequeaths Cal "and all humanity"

(Burningham 77) the vision and power of "Timshel" signals the totality of his victory. With an ultimate and, therefore, heroic burning up of his last energies, Adam is able "to break the hold" of the "pattern of evil" (Ditsky, The East 45) both in himself and within Caleb. He fights the battle with all he has within him, and he has victory. But it costs him his life, and that is the message: heroic deeds can only be performed heroically. There is "a lot of worm wood" in this "ladder to the stars" (Eden 301-304).

Another important side to this aggressive warrior stance toward doing good is seen in Lee's role in the above. Clearly, Lee's machinations lay behind the entire process. For example, when a terrible despair over news of Aron's death and Adam's stroke threatens to destroy Cal, it is Lee that intervenes. With an inspiring speech on the heroic demands of life (one either surrenders "to the slag heap" or takes on the pursuit of "perfection" (Eden 600), he temporarily stays Cal's acceleration toward self-destruction. It is Lee who has the idea that Adam could save Caleb by blessing him, and who, by the strength of his personality, forces the boy to submit to his attempt to save him. "'Come along, Cal.... You'll have to come'" (Eden 601). Minutes later, Lee brings Cal into the sickroom to stand before his father and literally forces Adam to face the requirement that he help his son. "'Here is your

son--Caleb--your only son. Look at him Adam'" (Eden 602). Because of Lee's forcefulness, Adam sees what he must do and bestows the redeeming gift of love and the spiritual gifts of vision and power. All in fact occurs only through Lee's oversight and control, a role that goes beyond the limited "intercessory" one that critic, Barbara McDaniels, assigns him (38). Lee certainly overrules no person's faculties, but clearly he is the one shaping events and the one behind Adam's eventual blessing of his son. It is impossible to imagine things going as they do without Lee's aggressive determination to shape them according to his vision for them.

In marked contrast to Steinbeck's earlier disbelief in people's ability to shape their own and others' lives, Eden's "code of courage" admonishes one (at times at least) to constructively interfere in other people's affairs. The personal experience of salvation through love and "Timshel" incurs on one the solemn obligation, when the occasion warrants it, to aggressively force others to face their responsibilities. There is little doubt that Lee perceives his role in this light. Moreover, we also note that Lee's intervention--invasion describes the act better--possesses a certain violence, for it does override others' wills and insists brutally that they see themselves as Lee sees them. This is despite the gentleness with which Lee conducts

himself throughout. Lee's action also has a certain violence to it in his willingness to physically threaten Adam's life for the sake of the actions he believes Adam should take. Cal's objection to Lee's pressuring his father, "Lee--you can't" (Eden 602), no doubt springs from Cal's realization of how far Lee is willing to go to make Adam "come around." Clearly Lee has entered this situation with one objective: to see Cal saved. If it costs Adam's life to obtain that end he does not tremble over paying the price. So, then, times come when one must do things that cause pain to others, not for the pain's sake, but because the pain is unavoidable in the pursuit of a higher good.

There is deep emotional and moral seriousness here. An especially rich example of it occurs in Lee's response to Cal's horrified request that Lee go no further. Says Lee, "'I have to.... If there's blame, it's my blame'" (Eden 602). This is profound for it means that Lee has looked into this situation, and, with great soberness, concluded that he has to risk Adam's life on the chance of saving Caleb's. Life can justifiably be exchanged for life.

East of Eden insists that those who possess moral health have a solemn obligation to sometimes push their way into the lives of the morally ill and to forcefully administer the "medicine [that] acts like a poison" (Eden 306). Physically and emotionally, Lee's action hurts Adam. He

sacrifices him. But from Lee's perspective it is justified, and it is even more. For, in his gravity and decisiveness, and the coolness with which he faces "existential doubt" (Ditsky, *The East* 43), the risk of harming Adam, Lee demonstrates true heroic courage. Boldly he steps to the center of his neighbors' business and does what he judges will resolve their crisis. Judgment and action: these are the main actors in this deep and exciting "drama of the self identifying and justifying itself" (Ditsky, *The East* 48).

Most significantly, at the heart of East of Eden's optimism about people's ability to control their own lives is a highly charged belief in the invincible strength of the human will. It is expressed in the Hebrew word, "Timshel," or "thou mayest", a term the novel derives from God's gentle reminding of Cain that he possesses sufficient strength to resist the forces propelling him toward the murdering of his brother, Abel. "Thou shalt rule over sin" (Genesis 4:7) reads this foundational passage of the Bible. Retranslated to "thou mayest," it becomes Eden's ultimate expression of humanity's inborn freedom of action. Thus God's personal guarantee to Cain that he has access to power that is adequate to master the passionate inner voices demanding Abel's murder becomes Steinbeck's assertion of human autonomy. Shifting attention from the Diety without to the strength within, Steinbeck declares that any person cab have

the mastery over whatever forces afflict, tempt, tyrannize, or torture him/her. Something within the soul of the human being possesses an innate, kingly sovereignty over all creation. It is a "divinely official approving of the imposition of human intelligence over an unruled, unruly Nature" (Ditsky, *Outside* 15). It is a God-given authority to act meaningfully, and effectively in the outer world of physical nature, the outer world of one's neighbor, and in the inner world of the mind and spirit. Humanity is constructed to exercise the single most important influence upon all of creation.

In other words, enshrined (the religious associations are intentional) within the human soul forever lives a kernel of infinite power. The courageous exercise of the will provides access to its great reservoirs of strength. It is a strength more than sufficient to break the hold of any evil and to overcome any obstacles in the way of completing all that is necessary to accomplishing any true good. This is an amazing concept, but it is certainly the one behind the novel's exultings over the human soul, "that glittering instrument...a lovely and unique thing in the universe" (Eden 304). One might even make the daring suggestion that to praise the soul as "glittering" intends comparisons to the infinite starry heavens and implies that the human being carries a universe within him or herself; or, perhaps, that

the human being is in some deep way united to the universe or is the universe. Such suggestions are astounding, however completely appropriate to the profound optimism the novel expresses in the infinite potential available to humanity if it wants it. Arisings to the stars and to perfection and to Godhood require resources provided by such large dimensions to the human soul. Aspirations to infinity can only be driven by infinite energy. It is no wonder, then, that Ditsky speaks of the "Epiphany of 'Timshel'" (Narrational Self 14), and that the mere speaking of the word--i.e., Adam's last word to his son Caleb--can have such profound effects and instantaneously convert Cal to the higher life. It is a concept, which, while natural, as opposed to miraculous, draws upon realms of power that are virtually limitless and outside of the everyday experience of human beings. "Timshel," then, represents the birth of a large and glorious new sun over the hitherto dark and conflicted realms of human action, a wonderful new source of vision power.

Clearly, something akin to this glorious truth lies behind every event in the novel in which human beings break out of old destructive patterns. It certainly guides and inspires Adam in his mortal struggle against fatigue and anger to bless his dark and guilt-stained son, Caleb. Certainly, it lies behind Lee's impassioned urgings that

Adam free Caleb from the pain and power of rejection and guilt.

It is most definitely there, though in a mystery, in the unspoken, but resounding "Yes!" that surges up in mighty voice from Cal's heart in response to his father's presentation to him, in his moral debasement, of the exalting gift of "Timshel." In that special moment that the novel has foreshadowed through an unbroken series of increasingly powerful demonstrations of the efficacy of "Timshel," all shame and rage and bitter guilt are burned to nothing. Caleb experiences a glorious arising of a mighty confidence in the treasure he carries within his soul. That the novel ends here, with a pause and with silence, is utterly appropriate. For as Adam dies and his last word, "Timshel," still reverberates in the air, it becomes clear, as Ditsky observes, that a "miracle" (Outside 40) has occurred. This is the novel's climax, a moment of amazement and awe, as the speaking of "the sacred word" (Demott 45) suddenly awakens a helpless and forlorn man to the ineffable depths and heights and breadths of the all-conquering energy within his soul. In an instant it turns him from the midnight of despair and opens his eye upon the universe. Were Cal to speak now, he would echo, though in more triumphant tones, Samuel Hamilton's earlier experience of this miraculous concept. "It was your two-world

retranslation, Lee, 'Thou mayest.'" It took me by the throat and shook me. And when the dizziness was over, a path was opened, new and bright" (Eden 309). It is with this sense of worship that the novel ends.

Steinbeck's novel, East of Eden, proclaims that people choose to live in one of two very different worlds. The first, represented by the series of events following God's rejection of Cain, and the one most people are initiated into by parental rejection, is the world of the victim. Charles Trask presents the prime example of this type of existence. Through him we see into this dreary world occupied by "sad and punished" people. They are people who, like Charles is, are trapped in misery by thoughts of themselves as the helpless thralls of rejection and guilt. Deeply hurt by parental rejection and burdened with guilt for avenging themselves on the innocent (Marks 10), such persons--as Charles does, and Cain apparently does as well--eventually lose heart and see themselves as condemned to desolate lives. They only "know about the ugliness, but don't know about the rest," the potential for goodness and beauty (Eden 385).

Charles, for example, never attempts to bridge the chasm between him and his neighbors, but simply watches it widen. He fatalistically surrenders to this intensifying isolation and then writes of it to his brother, Adam. Eventually, a

life lived in such torment and estrangement from others leads to a deteriorating self-respect and loss of one's humanity. Charles' treatment of women, who he takes in, uses, and then coldly disposes of, illustrates, in an extreme case, the awful damage of soul that results from parental rejection and the world of violence and guilt it throws people into. It is a sad and gloomy country to be a citizen of.

Though East of Eden feels for the plight of those who suffer within this dark realm, it asserts that their misery need not be permanent. Burdens and sorrows are not the genetically or circumstantially programmed rule for life. People can change things. For despite what appears to many to be a sentence of gloom upon humanity, East of Eden rapturously proclaims that within human beings are resources of great energy. This is "Timshel," or "thou mayest." Retranslated from God's word to Cain that he can "do well" should he choose to, it is Steinbeck's own declaration that the individual has, as an inborn component of his/her nature, enough power to conquer any and all the dark forces that afflict him or her. Lee demonstrates his awareness of this power when he courageously faces the possibility that demanding a blessing for Caleb might kill Adam. Adam demonstrates it when wrestling against hatred and resentment; he not only affirms a new love for Caleb but

goes beyond that and passes on the most precious gift he possesses, the word "Timshel." Caleb, too, demonstrates the same, when, in the novel's last action, he courageously throws off guilt and shame and rises up as a new man of vision and strength. In "Timshel," "what might be the most important word in the world" (Eden 303), are strengths and capacities for action that can deliver out of any captivity, and can take the courageous spirit into the realms of victory.

Moreover, the novel also preaches an aggressive involvement in the freeing of others and in requiring them to live up to their responsibilities. Certainly Lee does this to Adam. Adam, if he does not invade Cal's life--actually a debatable point since his "gift" of "Timshel" is unsolicited and represents an imposing of his view upon another--he certainly is the one who ultimately saves the boy. The salvation of others, in its tenderer and more violent offices, is the sacred charge of all who are themselves saved, for those that already live in glory feel the great calling to pass on to others the wonderful truth that human nature is by definition heroic.

East of Eden is most of all "a celebration of soul" (Eden 359) and a hymn to that untapped glory that could light up the world and make the lives of individuals and generations far better than they have ever been before.

This is the claim of East of Eden. It is a remarkable, stirring, and grand one indeed.

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