Moral Experience in *Of Mice and Men*: Challenges and Reflection

Richard E. Hart

Bloomfield College

Does John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* contribute anything to morality and thinking about morality? Does the obvious social message and social consciousness of the work tweak the moral imagination and invite critical philosophical reflection? Some scholars and critics have appreciated what I call the "moral dimension" of the book, while others have expressed considerably less regard for that aspect. Skeptics seem to have gathered around the perennial charge of sentimentality and moral simplicity. Perhaps the most famous allegation of that kind came from Alfred Kazin in his definitive study, *On Native Grounds.* Kazin sharply attacked *Of Mice and Men* for its sterile "moral serenity" that led to the "calculated sentimentality" of the story.[1] Edwin Berry Burgum echoed Kazin when he wrote that Steinbeck "swung in his various novels from the extreme of a deep and legitimate admiration for working people to that in which all values are paralyzed in the apathy of the sentimental."[2] Similarly, John S. Kennedy stated that Steinbeck "can be acutely sensitive and true for a chapter, then embarrassingly sentimental and cheaply trite."[3] Are such characterizations reflective of what Charlotte Cook Hadella calls "critical elitism"or are they somehow on the mark?[4] If accurate, then *Of Mice and Men* would seem to be of little relevance to serious reflection on morality. Rather, it would be scarcely more than a popular little book/play for the masses who are absorbed by the sentimental. And as Jackson Benson has written, "'Sentimental' is the ultimate pejorative in modern literary criticism, tending to disqualify anything so labeled from further serious consideration."[5]

Hadella astutely points out that "for five decades *Of Mice and Men* survived charges of animalism, sentimentalism, melodrama, and trite social protest."[6] In the 1980s assessments began to change. John Timmerman praised Steinbeck for "exploring the enduring questions of the nature of humanity, of good and evil, of tragedy and triumph."[7] Many readers and critics have surely been moved by the sense of social responsibility they find in *Of Mice and Men.* Louis Owens contended that Steinbeck's vision of America "is an ideal of commitment to humankind and to the environment, a holistic reverence for life. In this light, *Of Mice and Men* emerges as a skillfully rendered dramatization of the precepts to which Steinbeck dedicated his life's work."[8] *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* would seem to enhance and extend Owens's regard for Steinbeck as an early ecologist with a humanistic moral sensibility.[9] Finally, Hadella observes that Steinbeck's "stories themselves raise ethical questions," while Michael Meyer applauds him for being "the moral conscience of the American reading public."[10]

What is to be made of such contradictory views when applied to the subject of morality in *Of Mice and Men*? It cannot be simultaneously a simple-minded morality tale and a genuine provocation to the reader's thinking and feeling. I propose an approach to this novel that is both consistent with Steinbeck's philosophy (loosely speaking), and which allows the text to address a variety of moral issues and questions. I distinguish here between moral philosophy (as traditionally understood) and moral experience. By experience I mean simply undergoing the moral drama and tension and conflict that the characters in the story witness and reflecting sensitively on that experience (theirs and ours).

Though I am a philosopher for whom ethics is a specialty, I choose not to approach *Of Mice and Men* as a moral theorist, considering it generally fruitless to ponder whether Steinbeck represents and applies a certain type of ethical theory—is he a Kantian deontologist, a utilitarian in the manner of Bentham or Mill? Does he embrace "virtue ethics"? Is he Aristotelian or Platonist or Marxist in leaning, absolutist or relativist? There can be no reasonable or definitive answers to such questions because Steinbeck was not interested in philosophical theory divorced from lived experience. This is not to say, however, that he was not interested in morality and raising ethical questions in and through his work. When a reporter for the Associated

Press asked what is the major function of an author in today's society, Steinbeck replied, "Criticism, I should think."[11] He was, indeed, a social critic, and such functioning can be highly conducive to meaningful thinking about morality. In a postscript to a questionnaire for a graduate student at Ohio University, he commented on his philosophy: "And as to the questions as to what I mean by—or what my philosophy is—I haven't the least idea. . . . I don't like people to be hurt or hungry or unnecessarily sad. It's just about as simple as that."[12] His approach to morality and philosophy may be simple, but that does not necessarily make it trite and sentimental. As Hadella points out, with *Of Mice and Men* and other works, Steinbeck "wished to challenge his audience's sense of values."[13] When a reporter asked what his last novel, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, was about, for example, Steinbeck replied in one word—"morals."[14] Steinbeck was interested in morality and shed important light on it in most of his fiction. The exact sort of light—and what we do with it—is what most interests me here.

This focus on experience and the thinking and feeling it engenders, rather than on philosophical theory, is motivated in part by what I take philosophy "in" literature to be. Literature (and other arts as well) are uniquely powerful vehicles for philosophical exploration. They do not, however, provide logical arguments for this or that position or theory. The writer's function is not to construct or defend a particular philosophy or ideology. A story or a poem is not a series of propositions woven together by the force of reason. A work of literature shows, it exhibits, it offers multiple and unique perspectives not always available to reason and argument. It causes the reader to undergo the experience of how something looks and feels. If honest and well constructed, it has the capacity to present the "truth" of a situation (factually and emotionally), and such truthful experience has the power to make the reader think about life, society, and the world. Albert Camus once remarked that his *Myth of Sisyphus* essays gave a theoretical explanation of his philosophy of the absurd while his novel, *The Stranger*, enabled readers to witness and to feel such ideas as lived through human characters and situations. Both Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus are excellent interdisciplinary examples of the interconnectedness of philosophy and literature. Both help to explain and justify the approach to fiction I am taking here.[15]

Of Mice and Men presents dramatic situations and characterizations that allow us to see and hear and feel ethical dilemmas and such social

problems as racism, sexism, and economic exploitation in an immediate, firsthand way. Such issues are dramatically contextualized so as to provoke reader reflection. One cannot escape the moral burdens and provocations of the story. Steinbeck, of course, offers no resolutions or sweeping answers. Such is not his purpose or function. He means to agitate, to provoke, to anger, to cause doubt and raise a multitude of questions. In the manner of Socrates, this is the first honest step toward philosophizing.

What I have said here about literature is also consistent with what may loosely be called Steinbeck's philosophical method, nonteleological "is" thinking. As Hadella observes, with *Of Mice and Men* "Steinbeck was breaking new ground philosophically as well as formally in writing his play-novelette. By 1936 he had become very interested in non-teleological thinking, the scientific philosophy that concentrates on the conditions of existence rather than on causes and effects of these conditions."[16] Of prime importance here are the "conditions of existence," what human existence in a particular setting is really like from the inside. What do such conditions feel like when actively experienced? Hadella points further to Steinbeck's reluctance to explain causes and effects—how existence got to be a certain way and what it is leading to. This approach lent itself to a holistic, integrated vision of humanity and nature in which all things are literally united. This point of view carries important implications for morality because it "accepts things as they are without assigning blame to individuals or situations."[17]

In *Of Mice and Men* Steinbeck basically reports something that happened on a ranch (the original title was to be *Something That Happened*). He does not take sides and does not engage in normative ethical reasoning. He portrays rather than judges. Readers, or the audience for the play, are left to draw their own conclusions and to contemplate the good and the bad, the callous and the indifferent. Steinbeck knew that readers would raise their own questions and provide their own explanations; he believed that honest writing has as its basic theme understanding humanity. This refers to the characters created by the author as well as the audience for the story. Humans feel and think. Thinking and feeling typically are rolled into one. When they encounter a moral problem either in life or in art, humans feel badly. They are often confused and want to know what caused it and how it could possibly be remedied. It is our natural disposition to ask why

and search for answers. Though he doesn't theorize or explain, all this is perfectly compatible with Steinbeck's focus on responsibility and what people owe to each other. As an artist and a teller of stories, he does not assign blame or make an "argument" for right or wrong, leaving the reader to carry forward the moral burden of the things that happened. As Hadella observes, "Happily, the novel proved to be a successful marriage of form and philosophy. With a dramatic structure focusing on the characters' dialogue and actions, Steinbeck achieved a narrative intensity that is largely untainted by authorial voice."[18]

Moral issues weave their way through *Of Mice and Men.* There are moral dimensions in the depiction of love and friendship as well as the profound moral dilemma George faces at the end of the story.[19] Critics have discussed as well the immorality of economic exploitation as represented in the class, ownership, and power structures of the ranch. Clearly, the great dream that George and Lennie share concerns human camaraderie and a realization of a sense of community. But the dream is largely about escape from an economic prison and the immorality of a dispossession and extreme poverty that restricts human freedom and opportunity. Two other moral issues, however, have perhaps not garnered quite as much attention—sexism and racism.

A discussion of sexism in the story must focus on Curley's wife, the only woman on the ranch. But her situation and the gender discrimination she is forced to endure has a moral impact on the male characters as well. She is a morally ambiguous character, with two distinct sides to her personality and behavior—both associated with male-dominated, sexist attitudes of the time and culture. Both sides of her personality grow directly from such pervasive gender attitudes and values, and each says something important about Steinbeck's portrayal of the situation of women at that time.

Curley's wife is not given a proper name. Apparently she does not merit it. Or could her anonymity be a deliberate suggestion that she is not just an individual, but represents all women? On the surface, she is cast as the classic seductress, the wily female who is the despoiler of paradise. She manipulates men into lust and sin through her aggressive sexuality. She exploits the sexual impulse in an effort to get things her way. She's the killer of male-centered dreams of fraternity and independence. Steinbeck seems to offer her as a crude, unsympathetic stereotype, as a

nice-to-touch object—perhaps, on one interpretation, as simply a projection of misogynistic hostility toward women. With the possible exception of Slim, all the men on the ranch are suspicious of her. They don't like her, except to look at her, fearing that she is nothing more than "jail bait." But in all this is she her own person? Does she act freely—always knowingly—whereby the veil of moral responsibility would naturally descend upon her? Or has she been conditioned by society to utilize her assets as a mechanism for survival, likely the only one she knows? Is she largely on automatic pilot? In any case, what is to be said about the morality of her situation? Is there a larger story to realize about her?

Curley's wife views herself as a commodity, an object of sensuality. Clearly, she is regarded as property, as chattel of the ranch like the other powerless workers. But is her self-realization a willing thing, and is she comfortable about it? Are readers? Hadella argues that "free will . . . hardly seems to exist for people like Curley's wife and Lennie," that "she plays the only role she knows how to play."[20] Quickly disillusioned by the severely limited role of wife of a cruel and brutal ranch owner's son, she dreams of escaping to Hollywood, a totally unrealistic fantasy. Hadella's focus shifts from the earlier depiction of a manipulative bitch to that of a person "whose life is severely limited, a sympathetic character."[21] Mimi Gladstein points out that "there is a school of Steinbeck critics who respond to the castigations of Steinbeck's limited and repellent portrayals of women by explaining that Steinbeck's purpose in doing so is to critique woman-less or woman-oppressive culture."[22] Cutting women out of the male fraternity that the ranch symbolizes, then, creates a sterile condition that lacks diversity and wholeness.

Steinbeck's own account of Curley's wife supports such a sympathetic reading, for he described this character to Claire Luce, who played the part on Broadway and wanted to understand her role more fully. Curley's wife, Steinbeck wrote, is "a nice, kind girl and not a floozy. No man has ever considered her as anything except a girl to try to make. She has never talked to a man except in the sexual fencing conversation."[23] He also suggests that to really know Curley's wife would be to love her, that she is a trusting yet hardened girl accustomed to a male-dominated society, pretending to be something she is not, alone and unloved. Hadella observes that "*pretend* is the operative verb here, and it is on this question of pretended worldliness

versus innate evil that an assessment of Curley's wife depends." It also rests, perhaps, on coming to grips with an "American society in which vulnerable, unfortunate young women must survive."[24]

At one point Curley's wife reveals for a moment her less sharp, more human side, speaking of her profound loneliness—similar to that of the ranch hands—and her unfulfilled need simply to have someone to talk to. Whereas the ranch workers apparently have one another, she has only a self-obsessed, hateful little husband who talks but does not listen. She's not some foolish kid, she tells Lennie, Candy, and Crooks in the scene in the barn. She could have had a bright future in Hollywood: "I tell ya I could of went with shows. Not jus' one, neither. An' a guy tol' me he could put me in pitchers."[25] Her naive beliefs about the "guy" and about what her life could have been reinforce the sad truth of her social as well as mental confinement. In this scene she reveals the hardness driven into her by life as she vents her resentment at being left behind with Lennie, Candy, and Crooks while the others go into town on a Saturday night. She admits that she has come because she is desperate for conversation. When Candy reveals the dream of the place he, George, and Lennie were going to share, she immediately douses it by cutting the men down at the knees. Guys like them, she says, are all alike. Give these men a little money, and they would spend it on whiskey. She seems to know them much better than they could ever know her.

When Curley's wife encounters Lennie alone in the barn, she again insists that she never gets to talk to anyone and is terribly lonely. For someone so spiteful, hard, and calculating, she surprisingly develops a momentary rapport with Lennie and his simple impulses. She consoles him over the dead puppy and speaks soothingly in convincing him that it is OK for him to talk to her. When Lennie protests that George forbade him to have anything to do with her, she cries, "Wha's the matter with me? . . . Ain't I got a right to talk to nobody? . . . I ain't doin' no harm to you."[26] She does not fully comprehend the fateful, awful reality of her situation: "Seems like they ain't none of them cares how I gotta live. I tell you I ain't used to livin' like this. I coulda made somethin' of myself. . . . Maybe I will yet."[27] Yet maybe not. She recalls once again that she had believed herself destined for stardom in the movies because some man thought she was a natural. She could have had beautiful clothes; she could have spoken on the radio. She

does not seem to fully grasp the pathetic image of such a "future" in which, even in success, she would have become all the more a surface object, a nice thing to touch but not to know or to love. One of her would-be rescuers was to have written her from Hollywood, but she thought her mother must have stolen the letter. How could her own family stand in the way of her freedom, her being somebody? She marries Curley to escape from the narrow confines of her home, breaking away from what she perceived as family repression, only to find herself ironically confined to a ranch, wife of a relatively well-to-do little monster. The social and cultural context, it seems, will not permit her to better herself, regardless of where she is.

When Steinbeck prepared the play script for the Broadway production, one of the only two modifications to the novella involved an expanded role for Curley's wife. In Steinbeck's letter to actress Claire Luce he had tried to give a broader, sympathetic account of who the woman really was, what made her tick. In this letter he addressed social context and described the character more fully. In the play version he expanded her role in the barn scene with Lennie, "giving her an opportunity to tell Lennie about her childhood—dialogue that adds a sympathetic dimension to her character."[28] She tells Lennie of a violent, alcoholic father who once tried to run away with her only to be stopped by the authorities. It was an escape she longed for, perhaps setting the tone for the rest of her life. Indeed, in the barn scene in the play she carries a suitcase that she intends to hide, waiting for an opportune moment to sneak away to Hollywood. Hadella points out that "even in pursuit of her personal vision, she has no solid notion of herself as a worthwhile person. Her dream is to . . . become a cinematic image that occupies no space in the real world."[29] She is at base all about loneliness and the barriers that reinforce it. She unwittingly joins forces with all humans who also yearn for warmth and contact. As Hadella surmises, Steinbeck's little story "has something to tell its audience, not just of mice and men, but also of *women* who may find themselves in a world where they are unknown and therefore unloved."[30]

So what does Steinbeck tell his audience, and what does the audience say in reply? Hadella has it right, I believe, regarding the morality of sexism in this story. For a time the audience may see Curley's wife as a coy, one-dimensional manipulator. But once the broader parameters of her situation are revealed, she must be increasingly seen as a victim. Moral

questions become an inevitable part of the audience's experience. We wonder what this woman has done to deserve such entrapment. Nothing, it seems, except to be born in a particular time and place. We are left to wonder whether freedom to be and to do must, as the existentialists told us, be at the very essence of humanity. In the realm of morality, freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. Can one be held morally accountable for actions if the freedom of choice has been denied? And what of the immorality at the heart of vicious gender stereotypes that make mere caricatures out of real human beings? Any and all reductionistic images of others, whether predicated on gender, race, or class, are simply unacceptable and immoral. Steinbeck is not, however, preaching about morality, as perhaps I am. He does not have to. It is neither his inclination nor his purpose. If an author approaches a story with honesty and renders characters in their totality without bias, the moral issues emerge on their own—with a life and integrity of their own within the dramatic context. Curley's wife's drama, her loneliness and frustration, is nothing less, for the reader or theater audience, than rumination on the morality of how people are to be understood and treated. Freedom, individuality, the respect of others, and opportunity are at the very heart of morality. The opposite is repression, the spiritual death of a human being. Curley's wife stands as a glaringly bitter and ironic illustration of the immorality of narrow minds and the social conditions that produce them.

Besides sexism, racism is perhaps the most poignant moral issue in *Of Mice and Men*, which confronts the full effects of prejudice, principally on a lone black man, but also on the whites who live and work around him, to reveal a debilitating moral erosion. The obvious textual identification of racism involves the use of the derogatory "nigger," "god-damn nigger," or even supposedly complimentary references to how well the "nigger" plays horseshoes. But the use of such hateful words is but a surface reflection of deeper, underlying happenings and social structures rooted in racial misunderstanding and rejection.

Crooks, the black "stable buck," lives for all intents and purposes an existence of bondage, absent the chains. He is different, separated physically and psychologically from those with whom he works daily. In part, this separation is a result of the economic system of slavery resulting from ignorance and warped attitudes. Louis Owens describes Crooks as

> an animated reminder of America's slave-holding economy, his twisted back evidence of the human cost of that economy. The fact that Crooks's family once possessed a farm identical to the dream-farm George and Lennie yearn for underscores his commonality with these men who are fodder for the machine, but the volume of the California Civil code for 1905 that sits on Crooks's shelf testifies to his awareness of difference.[31]

Any felt commonality with whites is, however, extremely short lived. Difference that leads to isolation and unbearable loneliness is the prime moral force embedded in the tragic existence of Crooks.

A highly detailed description of Crooks's separate living quarters, complete with a manure pile right under the window, is one of the most vivid, powerful, and succinct depictions of racism's effects in American literature. The very arrangement of his room and its contents reflect his situation as a proud, aloof man. When Lennie appears in his doorway Crooks proclaims his "rights" to have the room all to himself, to be left alone. In his mind he can justifiably reject just as much as he has been rejected. Sadly, he lives in a permanent syndrome of rejection: "I ain't wanted in the bunk house, and you ain't wanted in my room."[32] Why is he not wanted? Solely because he is black, and the others think he stinks like Candy's old, sickly dog. Crooks, then, can play horseshoes "outdoors" with the men, but he is not permitted to go "inside" to their living space.

Probably for the first time ever, Crooks shares with a white person, Lennie, some details of his childhood when his family had a chicken ranch and he played with white children, some of whom were nice. The boy could not understand his father's disapproval of his playmates. But his subsequent life experience, including the present ranch, made him understand his father's reasons. His life situation is summed up in one sentence: "If I say something, why it's just a nigger sayin' it."[33]

Crooks, like Curley's wife, simply needs someone to talk to, someone to be with, some way to overcome his ostracized social condition. Although Lennie appears to be a momentary talking companion, Crooks takes advantage of his slow-wittedness, torturing him with talk of George's never returning and Lennie's being locked up in a booby hatch. That mild-mannered Crooks would feel impelled to attack a similarly

helpless person is witness to the moral depravity of his circumstances. When Lennie becomes physically threatening, Crooks retreats into his story of isolation and misery: "A guy needs somebody—to be near him."[34] Such racism culminates in sickness and people on both sides being crazy with hurt and sadness.

Crooks is also stubbornly skeptical about the dream that George, Lennie, and old Candy share for a place of their own but gradually changes his mind as something magically comes over him, allowing him, probably for the first time in his life, to dream of happiness and liberation. He offers to work for nothing but his keep on this dream farm. But at that very moment, Curley's wife arrives, momentarily bemoaning her own loneliness and desperation and then belittling them and crushing their dream into oblivion. If she cannot have a dream, neither can they. Then a terrible transformation comes over Crooks. After but a fleeting moment of contemplating a better future, like a frightened turtle Crooks retreats into his racial shell. Among the most insidious effects of racism is this unrelenting denial of freedoms—even the freedom of thought and dreams.

Here occurs an explosive merger of the ugly forces of sexism and racism. As Hadella writes, "Both Curley's wife and Crooks are obviously starved for companionship and acceptance as both are systematically ostracized from the ranch community—Crooks because of race and Curley's wife because of gender."[35] Nothing less than a volcanic moral collision is realized when Crooks becomes agitated to the point of trying to throw Curley's wife out of his room and threatens to tell the boss on her. She retaliates with a merciless scorn that opens the floodgates of her own pent-up frustrations and anger, asking whether he knows what she can do to him if he dares speak, threatening lynching. The moral outrage of the situations is revealed in the change in Crooks as he reduces himself to nothingness—all personality and ego gone. When she leaves, Crooks urges the others to leave also, telling them that her words are true and that he has no desire to work on their dream farm.

The scourge of racism has exacted its full toll, leaving behind a decent man of interests and background who is now reduced to nothingness. The mental beating he has absorbed made him a stranger even unto himself. The only stand he can make on his behalf is to proclaim his rights to have

his own protected space, to be totally alone, rejected by everyone. What may appear as his autonomy is a defense against chronic loneliness and illness. A proud man is left with nothing to be proud of except his isolation. A few vengeful words from a desperately trapped white woman, whose husband has power, are sufficient to extinguish even a passing dream of improvement. Her words are emblematic of a lifetime of social injustice, centuries in truth, all based solely on race.

But the others are morally injured as well. Curley's wife, helpless victim of discrimination herself, becomes victimized in a second way. Her only recourse in life is to be hateful and inhuman. She can only assert herself by spewing racial venom on a helpless old black man, someone she perceives to be lower than she is. She neither hates Crooks nor desires to see him killed. But the unbalanced, depraved moral universe that both inhabit makes her into the spiteful bitch everyone expects. And Candy does behind not, probably cannot, understand the deeper meaning behind Crooks's statement that he does not want to work for them on the farm. He does not grasp the social and psychological realities of racism that lie behind and beneath the words. Like Curley's wife, Candy and the other men are likewise victims of the blinding powers of racism. All are caught in a moral drama beyond their control, one which they did not create. They are unwitting actors on a stage arranged by forces—historical, economic, political—beyond their own capacities to understand.

By portraying the lived realities of racism and sexism—in dramatically ugly but honest terms—Steinbeck wants us to go inside the skins of all those affected by the shaping conditions of social existence and to feel their bitter loneliness and desperation. He invites us to join the characters in their dreams of a better life, confront moral issues, and ponder moral questions as they grow out of the experience of his characters. Literature shows, it highlights, it lobbies in its own mysterious ways for a rethinking of the world we live in. Steinbeck believed that honest and true literature was all about trying to understand human beings—what makes them up and what keeps them going. Through the experience of sexism and racism as I read and feel them in *Of Mice and Men*, moral questions become as compelling as they are inevitable. In this view I believe I am true to Steinbeck's purpose.

NOTES

1. Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, 1942 (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), 309.

2. E. W. Tedlock Jr. and C. V. Wicker, eds., *Steinbeck and His Critics* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: University of New Mexico Press, 1957), 104.

3. Tedlock and Wicker, *Steinbeck*, 120.

4. Charlotte Cook Hadella, Of Mice and Men*: A Kinship of Powerlessness* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 20.

5. Jackson J. Benson, *The Short Novels of John Steinbeck* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 5.

6. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 23.

7. John Timmerman, *John Steinbeck's Fiction: The Aesthetics of the Road Taken* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1986), 8–9.

8. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 23.

9. Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney Jr., eds., *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997).

10. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 35; Michael Meyer, "Travels with John: My Journey as a Steinbeck Scholar," *John Steinbeck: A Centennial Tribute*, ed. Stephen K. George (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 147.

11. Thomas Fensch, ed., *Conversations with John Steinbeck* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 79.

12. Fensch, *Conversations*, 27.

13. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 9.

14. Fensch, *Conversations* , 70.

15. For more on the relations between philosophy and literature, in particular morality as treated in literature, c.f. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) (particularly the essays on Orwell and Nabokov). Also, Justus Buchler, *The Main of Light: On the Concept of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

16. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 12.

17. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 12.

18. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 14.

19. See my essays "The Concept of Person in the Early Fiction of John Steinbeck," *Personalist Forum* 3.1 (Spring 1992); "Steinbeck on Man and Nature: A

Philosophical Reflection," *Steinbeck and the Environment: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Susan F. Beegel, Susan Shillinglaw, and Wesley N. Tiffney Jr. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); and "Steinbeck and Agrarian Pragmatism," *The Agrarian Roots of Pragmatism*, ed. Paul B. Thompson and Thomas C. Hilde (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000).

20. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 49, 50.

21. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 43.

22. Mimi Gladstein, "Steinbeck and the Woman Question," *John Steinbeck: A Centennial Tribute*, ed. Stephen K. George (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002), 110.

23. Elaine Steinbeck and Robert Wallsten, *Steinbeck: A Life in Letters* (New York: Viking, 1975), 154–55.

24. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 71.

25. John Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 1937 (New York: Penguin Bantam, 1984), 86.

26. Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 96.

27. Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 96.

28. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 68.

29. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 71.

30. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 73.

31. Louis Owens, "Deadly Kids, Stinking Dogs, and Heroes: The Best Laid Plans in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*," *Steinbeck Studies* (Fall 2002): 4.

32. Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 75.

33. Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 77.

34. Steinbeck, *Of Mice and Men*, 80.

35. Hadella, Of Mice and Men, 58.