

The Moral Philosophy of John Steinbeck, Stephen K. George, ed. Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2005. xv + 201 pp.

This collection of thirteen essays offers suggestive and thoughtful explorations of the various moral dimensions of John Steinbeck's works. Editor Stephen K. George has assembled a group of authors from various disciplines including English, Philosophy, and the Religion; some are established Steinbeck scholars while others offer new voices. They discuss a wide range of books, from the famous (and infamous) *Grapes of Wrath* to the lesser known *Wayward Bus*, and include both Steinbeck's fiction and nonfiction. Topics of racism, sexism are discussed as well as the common themes of Steinbeck's celebration of work and compassion. The book is divided into two main parts. The first explores Steinbeck's moral commitments, while the second attends to themes of specific works and the moral challenges his characters face.

The authors tend to embrace the basic presupposition (assumed by some and explicitly developed by others) that literary works show us and heighten our awareness of how we feel about moral situations and dilemmas. As contributor Richard E. Hart notes, literature typically aims to present us moral experience (rather than moral philosophy) that helps us get inside the skins of those who suffer the effects of racism, sexism, and cruelty. Literature performs a unique and valuable role in moral thinking both by providing us opportunities to attend to the details of character-development and by prompting critical self-reflection. Some of the contributors (e.g., Hart and Allene M. Parker) argue that Steinbeck is especially good at the latter, presenting his readers with shocking scenes such as those at the end of *Of Mice and Men* or *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck leaves it to his reader to work through and resolve conflicting thoughts and feelings about George killing Lennie or Rose of Sharon nursing the dying man.

Some essays are brief but suggestive. These include a provocative essay ("John Steinbeck and the Morality of Roles: Lessons for Business Ethics") in which Joseph Allegretti argues that Steinbeck often illustrates the dangers of losing oneself in one's role, especially on the job. Allegretti convincingly shows that Steinbeck's works can be employed in courses on Business Ethics to heighten

student awareness of the tensions between job roles and personal development. Allegretti ends his essay with a list of themes relevant to business ethics that readers can find in various Steinbeck novels. John H. Timmerman's essay on the ethics of fiction is additionally suggestive. Timmerman introduces an intriguing distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic ethics of a novel: the former concerns the qualities that reveal the ethical position of the work, while the latter addresses how the author presents the work to the reader. Timmerman argues that Steinbeck's intrinsic ethic is deontological (focused on duty) while his extrinsic ethic is teleological (purposive, searching, participatory for the reader). Also on the short side is John J. Han's essay that unearths utilitarian strands in Steinbeck's novels. Han rightly acknowledges that he is noting instances of, rather than demonstrating Steinbeck's widespread commitment to, utilitarian thinking. Indeed, other essays in the collection (e.g., Timmerman's and Patrick Dooley's) convincingly show Steinbeck's frequent appeal to a sense of duty (or "I got to") and attention to rights and basic needs (in contrast to wants).

Most of the essays provide sustained analysis of specific characters and situations, and this is a chief virtue of the collection. Terry Gorton, for instance, offers a nuanced discussion of Elisa Allen from "The Chrysanthemum" that challenges stereotypical readings of her character. He reads her as a vibrant female character whose gift is in her nurturing hands. Stephen George and Sarah Appleton Aguiar provide rather different interpretations of *East of Eden's* Cathy Ames Trask. While Aguiar argues that Cathy follows Alice in Wonderland by distancing herself from the absurd world around her, George develops a thoughtful case that fear and hatred drive her cruelty. George offers a careful analysis of cruelty, both its causes and its remedies, and complements this with illustrative passages from Steinbeck's novel.

The book offers a variety of insightful philosophical perspectives. Although relevant, the voices of Emerson or Royce are largely absent from the discussions. By contrast, Aristotle's virtue ethics is invoked quite frequently (and rightly), especially when author's explore character development. Moreover, Frankl and Levinas are included to positive effect. Barbara A. Heavilin explores the relevance of Frankl's view of overcoming an existential vacuum and Ethan's development in *The Winter of Our*

Discontent. Michael D. Hansen employs Levinas' understanding of ethics to develop an interpretation of Jim Casey and the Joads that is both appreciative and critical. Hansen's essay embodies the virtues of the best articles in the book: narrative details are related to moral ideas in a complex manner such that each illuminates the other.

In sum, this collection includes a healthy diversity of reflections on moral reasoning in and through the works of one of America's literary masters. A recurrent theme is that attempts to censor Steinbeck typically mask (or at least fail to appreciate) the moral complexity of his characters and the situations they face; these essays consistently demonstrate this point. As noted above, the shorter essays tend to be suggestive and would be ideal for use in courses that call for student interpretation. Other, typically longer articles tend to offer more substantial philosophical reflection; these would suit courses in Ethics as well as Philosophy & Literature. Moreover, though, I recommend the book to anyone interested in mining the complexities of Steinbeck's moral insights.

Patrick Shade

Rhodes College

Maurice Hamington, ***Embodied Care: Jane Addams, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Feminist Ethics***, University of Illinois Press, 2004, 181 pp.

Hamington's book provides an excellent combination of analysis and research into the most important components of an ethics of care. It is useful both as an exemplary text on the subject as well as a research resource. The book provides important distinctions between this growing field of ethics and a more traditional approach. It is loaded with practical examples and historical figures and their contribution to the field. It also provides a creative analysis and integrates several approaches.

Central to the discussion is the role of the body both for epistemological purposes and for promoting habits of care. Care, contends the author, is basic to human existence. Using this premise he develops his own approach that shifts ethical considerations to context, relationships, and affective knowledge. Using these