

Review

Redefining Group-man: An application of the “flexible phalanx” theory

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Steinbeck's earlier works, “The Vigilante” and *In Dubious Battle* are described with a tangibly cynical tone towards the nature of man, and the destructive potential of misguided “phalanxes.” However, his later works, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Cannery Row* offer a positive and even hopeful view on the potential of these phalanxes. The reason for this shift lies within Steinbeck's development of “influential actors” and their ability to cultivate democratic communities.

Key words: Steinbeck, phalanx, group-man, grapes of wrath, in dubious battle, cannery row, the vigilante, Berardino.

INTRODUCTION

Steinbeck (1933) wrote “Argument of the Phalanx,” a short essay exploring his ideas on the relationship between the individual and the group. According to him, the group acts with “a drive, an intent, an end, a method, a reaction which in no way resembles the same things possessed by the men who make up the group” (76). Steinbeck's (1933) use of his “phalanx” or “group-man” develops, complicates, and evolves as he explores the possibility of both constructive and destructive group-man within his fiction. His earlier works “The Vigilante” (1938) and *In Dubious Battle* (1936) present a critical view of the dangers and destructive possibilities unharnessed “phalanxes” present, while his later works *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and *Cannery Row* (1945) offer a more redemptive and productive view on the potential of group-man. The reason for this progression lies in Steinbeck's treatment of what is called “influential actors,” and their ability to foster democratic, participatory communities.

Concept/ definition

Steinbeck's phalanx theory is inspired by similar theories in organismal biology that suggest the group “acts as a

causal unit on its own parts” (Astro et al., 1973: 63). Steinbeck borrowed the term “phalanx” for his own theory from Roman legion battle formations in which the soldier units resembled “high domed turtles because of the manner in which they carried their shields above their heads” (Astro et al., 63). Steinbeck's (1933) group-man hypothesis was created in an atmosphere of social unease with the rise of fascism, communism, industrial unionism, and other mass movements. His essay entitled: “Argument of the Phalanx,” can be understood as “a brief social and psychological study of behavior” to make sense of “the social atmosphere of the 30s” (Salazar, 1999: 99). Though perhaps influenced by the strictly scientific attempt to explain group behavior, Steinbeck's theory seems to stray away (perhaps not intentionally) from scientific objectivity and takes root in subjective sociological analysis. Rather, Steinbeck's phalanx theory should not be accepted as pure science, but as an attempted explanation in discussing certain aspects of social and moral behaviors. As they are presented in his literature, the paper will additionally argue that the phalanx theory must be understood as more of a flexible guideline in examining questions of human potential instead of a codified prescription of human action. This

extended “flexible phalanx” argument as its own theory, apart from mere expansion of the original theory itself, includes the influential actor as a *necessary* entity for the creation and preservation of the creative phalanx. That is, the success of the creative phalanx relies on an “other” outside of the phalanx itself.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to assess the difference in Steinbeck’s treatment of destructive and productive phalanxes between his earlier and later works respectively, the paper draws upon biographical works, primary resources including his novels and newspaper articles, along with academic criticism concerned with the Phalanx theory explicitly. The criticism discussed, and indeed much of the criticism in existence in regards to the Phalanx theory, is used as a superficial explanation in determining why groups of men within Steinbeck’s fiction act as a unit. Where the criticism falls short and where the paper attempts to venture is investigating the explicit change Steinbeck makes in his description of his “group-men” during his later novels, and their capacity for positive production. Additionally, the paper contends the agent of this change lies within Steinbeck’s treatment of a single individual—the “influential actor.”

The paper attempts to situate itself within the Phalanx Theory’s critical discourse by citing specific examples within Steinbeck’s fiction where the theory and its depiction of group-man is manifest. The paper draws upon previous criticism to corroborate these instances. The paper then takes Steinbeck’s primary resources in the novels he authored and examines his treatment and portrayal of the “influential actor.” The paper forms its position of the role of the influential actor explicitly from the pages of the fiction itself.

Application/ analysis

Steinbeck (1933) in a letter to his good friend George Albee discussed the idea of phalanxes for his future novel entitled *In Dubious Battle* (1936). Steinbeck reflects on the destructive capacity for group-man’s “emotions of destruction, of war,... of hatred, of fear” (Steinbeck and Wallsten,1975:80). The novel, which Steinbeck wrote in 1934, manifests these anxieties in fictional form. The inspiration for *In Dubious Battle* came from his interviews with two communist union organizers hiding in the Monterey area after organizing a strike in the San Joaquin Valley (Benson, 1984: 296). The novel, however, would fictionalize “the geography, facts and characters” blending “the different strikes and the union officials he had witnessed and met in California in the first half of the thirties,” providing the “perfect application of his phalanx theory” (Salazar, 1999: 100) The diegesis of the novel,

consequently, focuses almost explicitly on the conflicts between separate group-men in the Growers’ Association, the Vigilantes, and the apple pickers.

In the novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936) these collectives of men almost always either exploit or endanger one another. They are, due to some sort of moral or structural deficiency, all examples of negative, destructive phalanxes. Their insufficiency, subsequently, degrades into some form of “violence.” The Growers’ Association, the cooperative of landowners in the valley, (whom the pickers seek to strike against) is consistently depicted as predatory when there is an opportunity for profit—capitalizing on the impoverished pickers’ inability to make long trips into town for provisions after grueling days in the fields. The laborers, at the mercy of the Growers’ Association’s store prices, are forced to pay almost all their wages for food above market prices. Jim Nolan, the novel’s ill-fated “hero” (or “half hero”) discovers this as he converses with the old “tree-topper” Dan. As Dan makes his way from the fields, he tells Jim:

Guess I’ll go over to the store and get me a can of beans. These damn fools pay seventeen cents for a pound of canned beans. Why, they could get four pounds of dried beans for that, and cooked up that’d make nearly eight pounds... Well, what time have others got? Women work all day, men work all day; and the owner charges three cents extra for a can of beans because the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries (*In Dubious Battle*,56).

Though Dan is aware the Growers’ Association is taking advantage of the pickers, he still plans to “go over to the store and get [himself] a can of beans.” Despite the price being unfairly inflated, “the men are too damn tired to go into town for groceries.” In order to turn a profit, The Growers’ Association as a destructive phalanx collectively and purposefully keeps the prices high and the fatigued laborers impoverished. Though not physically violent, the Growers’ Association as a phalanx does work jointly as a larger entity to enact a kind of violence against their employee’s well being—providing enough wages to eat but not enough to nourish. With the possibility of greater fiscal gain, the landowners do not hesitate to keep their employees living in tents and shacks; selling them food they know their workers cannot afford.

Acting in concert with the Growers’ Association, the town vigilantes are depicted as another destructive phalanx. While the owners form a group-man to gain profit, the town vigilantes form a group-man because of their inherent prejudiced nature. Steinbeck depicts these men as allowing themselves to be swayed by extreme political ideology as a justification to be violent (perhaps representative of those aligning with Communists and Fascists overseas). The town vigilantes’ ideology is perhaps best embodied by a newspaper clipping the strikers’ action. It

reads:

We [the town] believe the time has come to take action. When transient laborers tie up the Valley's most important industry, when fruit tramps, led and inspired by paid foreign agitators... carry on a campaign of violence and burning, bringing Red Russia into peaceful America, when our highways are no longer safe for American citizens, nor their homes safe from firebrands, we believe the time for action has come (230)!

Through this appeal to extremist ideology, the conflict between the town and the strikers is amplified from a local wage strike into a heavyweight political battle between "Red Russia" and a once "peaceful America...no longer safe for American citizens." As a destructive phalanx, the vigilantes burn a farmhouse, destroy a sympathizer's place of business, and murder Jim in grove outside the striker's camp. Jim's mentor and fellow communist organizer, Mac perhaps best recognizes their capacity for violence in telling Jim:

Why, they're the dirtiest guys in any town. They're the same ones that burned the houses of old German people during the war. They're the same ones that lynch Negroes. They like to be cruel. They like to hurt people, and they always give it a nice name, patriotism or protecting the constitution. But they're just the old nigger tortures working... I guess they're about the worst scum in the world (131).

Here, Steinbeck (1936) seems to expand this criticism of the destructive ideological phalanx by tracing it through history. The town vigilantes in the rural fields of California swayed by charged diction and jingoistic sentiment are, in effect, equated to the people that "burned the houses of old German people during the war" and "lynch Negroes" all in the name of "patriotism" or "protecting the constitution." By drawing in the historical comparison, Steinbeck extends this critique of the town vigilantes to man's disposition towards xenophobic "cruelty." They are not the patriots, or "[protectors] of the constitution" but "the worst scum in the world" (131).

However, Steinbeck's (1936) historical tracking of the violently nationalistic phalanx does present a problem for his theory. By depicting the townspeople as "the same" as the older destructive groups, these particular types of people are presented as *inherently* malicious. The "They" Mac mentions becomes expanded to encompass an entire type of people and their nature. Their sentiments are engrained within this nature as the "They" "always," independent of time, location, or ideology, will be "cruel." The attempt to provide a complex phalaxical explanation as to why these people are violent, if this is the case, seems unnecessary if some types of people are innately "cruel." Their nature, it would follow, could be simply accounted for with a concession that there are just simply

"good" and "bad" people. However, in shifting to an extended view of the phalanx, it is possible to focus on Steinbeck's interest in this group-man's *capabilities*. The individual's nature, whether inherent or scientifically caused, becomes less important than their potential for destruction as a group. It is this flexible understanding of phalanx that preserves the spirit and intent of Steinbeck's disillusionment with mass movements and his critique of the malicious "They."

Even though the strikers are depicted as being taken advantage of and abused throughout the novel, they are also made into a destructive phalanx. Steinbeck purposely, in the communist striker leaders Jim and Mac, creates "a hero in two persons" who have "voluntarily given up their individualities" (Magny as qtd in Astro (1973), "Steinbeck, or the Limits of the Impersonal Novel" 69). Though both Jim and Mac seem to organize the strike with the good intention of securing stable wages for the pickers, both men's growing engrossment in the Party and the Party's goals diminish their sensitivity to the real needs of the strikers, which Steinbeck may suggest, "may well be attributed to his inability to think as an individual about real needs of individuals" (Astro 70). It is both Jim and Mac's stringent obedience to a closed system of Party methods that makes the striker phalanx fail. The men force their ideology upon the workers instead of encouraging democratic, creative participation. Mac, in an attempt to coercively guide the strike, tells a picketer to:

...nominate London, here, for chairman. They'll put him in all right. They'll do almost anything... London, soon you're chairman, you tell 'em to have order. You give 'em a list of guys, about ten, and tell 'em to vote for those guys as a committee to figure things out (*In Dubious Battle*, 80).

Instead of allowing the workers to vote for their own leaders, Mac takes the election into his own hands and uses his position to manipulate the structure of the protest to his will. It is this choice to manipulate instead of include the workers coupled with a rigid obsession for Party's interests instead of the interests of pickers that corrupts the phalanx. The picker's identities, along with the identities of the dual heroes Mac and Jim, are fused together into a kind of perverted "Colossus" (115), with the potential to "run like a mad dog, and bite anything that moves" (53).

The failure as a democratic group-man disintegrates into violence. After settling into their camp, the strikers go out (now under the indirect control of Mac and Jim) to a nearby orchard *en masse* to scare the scabs (replacement workers) that have now taken their jobs. The strikers,

...swarmed on them, cursing in their throats. The [scabs] fought for a moment, and then went down... The fury

departed as quickly as it had come. They stood away from their victims. They panted heavily. Jim looked without emotion at the ten moaning men on the ground, their faces kicked shapeless. Here a lip was torn away, exposing bloody teeth and gums; one man cried like a child because his arm was bent sharply backward, broken at the elbow. Now that the fury was past, the strikers were sick, poisoned by the flow from their own anger glands. They were weak; one man held his hand between his hands as though it ached terribly (141-142).

The strikers, in their “fury,” lower themselves to the level of the vicious vigilantes—engaging in the same kind of hateful violence perpetrated against them. The sanctity of their cause and their moral high ground as the abused is lost as they attack innocent pickers not unlike themselves. Steinbeck illustrates the senselessness of this violence and the venality of the “phalanx” in the emptiness Jim experiences as he walks amongst the carnage. Instead of feeling vindication or achievement, Jim looks on “without emotion.” The strikers too, after the violence, become “sick, poisoned by... their own anger.” This feeling of emptiness and sickness as a symptom of being a part of a negative, destructive phalanx is carried over into another of Steinbeck’s stories—“The Vigilante.”

Steinbeck published “The Vigilante” in October edition of *Esquire* Magazine in 1936 and later included it in his collection of short stories *The Long Valley* in 1938 (Meyer, 2009 “The Vigilante”). Steinbeck’s protagonist Mike, after being part of a lynch mob, experiences hollowness though only:

...Half an hour before, when he had been howling with the mob and fighting for a chance to help pull on the rope, then his chest had been so full that he had found he was crying. But now everything was dead, everything unreal; the dark mob was made of stiff lay-figures. In the flame light, the faces were as expressionless as wood. Mike felt the stiffness, the unreality in himself, too... a cold loneliness fell upon him (*The Vigilante*, 134).

After being a part of this group-man, Mike feels a barrenness similar to what Jim and the strikers experience. The “unreality” does not just affect Mike but the mob in its entirety. In its reckless destruction, the mob “reflects Steinbeck’s premise that the group-man can alienate man from himself,” (Astro 70). They, perhaps in their last collective action, share together in the hangover of a destructive phalanx. The great catharsis in dispensing justice for the betterment of community, like Jim and the strikers had strived for, ultimately eludes the mob—leaving them only with “unreality” and “cold loneliness.”

The desolation both Mike and Jim feel is undoubtedly Steinbeckian symptom of the negative group man. Their detachment and inability to find any sense of accomplishment highlight Steinbeck’s own personal critique on the fruitlessness and moral bankruptcy of the mobs. It is

this personal critique, however, that introduces another complication in the application of his phalanx theory. Steinbeck’s own moral judgment within his portrayal of negative group-men precludes him from applying any workable objective scientific position. In short, Steinbeck cannot fully include an impartial socio-biological theory to his literature without compromising the biting moral critique that constitutes the nucleus of these stories. However, if taken as an examination of the *potential* of group-man as suggested earlier, Jim and Mac’s sickness (along with Steinbeck’s chastisement) simply become a consequence of the failed phalanx and its squandered constructive possibilities. Steinbeck’s ruling no longer has to remain impartial, while his obvious disapproval of the perversion of the mobs is kept intact.

As Steinbeck continued writing into the late thirties and mid forties, his portrayal of group-man and of group man’s potential shifted as he began to explore the value of positive, constructive phalanxes through his literature. *In Dubious Battle*, which first gave the plight of agricultural workers in California some public attention, Steinbeck visited a number of migrant worker camps in Central California. He worked the land shoulder to shoulder with the field laborers and reported his observations of the pickers’ living and working conditions in a series of articles for the San Francisco News during the autumn of 1936 called the “The Harvest Gypsies.” The workers were almost all displaced Midwesterners trying to escape sandy crop-killing winds of the Dustbowl (Fontenrose, 1963: 67). Later, in 1937, upon returning from New York after working on a stage adaptation of “Of Mice and Men,” Steinbeck drove across Oklahoma and joined in with migrants who were heading West in hope of a better life (Fontenrose, 68). After these research-intensive years spent on the road and in the camps, Steinbeck published perhaps his greatest novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

The story of the Joads in their journey across the United States and their struggle in California is a realistic portrayal based on Steinbeck’s personal observations. The Joads, like the true migrant families trucking across the long hot highways of depression era America, face financial decline, collapse of morale, and desertion. However, just as the family seems to disintegrate, Steinbeck begins his exploration of the positive, creative phalanx in the birth of the “roadside group-man” between the Joads and Wilsons. Steinbeck illustrates the positive capacity for this roadside group-man in chapter 14:

In the evening, a strange thing happened: the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home became one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families, of a hundred people; that a birth there in a tent kept a hundred people with the birth-joy in the morning. A family, which the night before, had been lost and fearful

might search its goods to find a present for the new baby... And a new unit was formed. The dusk came, but before the dark went down the new family was of the camp (*The Grapes of Wrath*, 193-197).

The creation of this “one family,” sharing the dream of the “golden time of the West” represents creative group-man ideal Steinbeck seeks to consider throughout the novel. Something as trivial as giving “a present for the new baby” becomes a statement in striving to create a community and a cure for those “the night before had been lost and fearful.” The arduous burden of a sickly “child” is taken up by “twenty families, a hundred people.” It is through this graciousness, care, and unification that the impoverished families are even able to make it to the West. Like the nameless “twenty families” Steinbeck mentions, the Joads and the Wilsons combine into a positive roadside group-man to bear the sickness of one, and ensure the success all.

The Joads meet the stranded Wilsons as they pull onto the side of the road in hopes of finding a place to fill their radiator and allow a “sicker”n hell” Grandpa Joad a break from the road (136). After a brief exchange of pleasantries, Sairy Wilson quickly offers to let Grandpa Joad rest on their mattress. After Grandpa dies in the Wilson’s tent (presumably from a stroke), Sairy helps Ma Joad prepare his body, while the men outside decide what to do with the corpse. Here, the cohesion between the two families is further enmeshed as Pa seeks the Wilson’s advice on how bury the body, asking if they have “Any more stuff to say”—echoing Steinbeck’s description of familial democracy earlier in chapter 10: “And without any signal, the family gathered by the truck, and the congress, the family government, went into session” (139-99).

By asking the advice of the Wilson’s, the burden of the Grandpa’s death becomes transmuted into a problem for the Joads and the Wilsons as a whole. The Wilsons as a part of the new roadside family are given a say as to the death of, now, one of *their* family members. Their relationship, in addition to kindness and sharing, becomes democratic. As the Wilsons and Joads deliberate, they form a “circle.” Here, piggybacking off of the Wilson’s kindheartedness and willingness to share what little they have, Steinbeck reinforces the image of unity and equality through the ring—symbolically marrying both the Joads the Wilsons together.

The democracy, community, and egalitarianism spawned in the roadside phalanx are later institutionalized in the “Weedpatch camp” (285). Run by a “Central Committee” elected directly by the people, the camp is depicted as self-governing and able to function without the police (287). The Central Committee and its sub committees (including the Ladies’ Committee) in the novel take it upon themselves to both integrate the new families into the camp and host dances.

On the first morning, the Joads stay in the camp,

“Ladies Committee of Sanitary Unit Number Four” visits Ma Joad and “try to make [her] feel at home” by showing her around the camp explaining the rules the migrants had voted to enact (312- 13). Even this slight gesture on behalf of the committee goes a long way in salvaging Ma’s dignity and making her family feel included in the camp as a part of the community— “[perking]” her up more than she had been “in years” (319). This sense of community created by direct democracy is magnified later in the camp’s throwing of the “best dances in the county” “every Saturday night.” The combination of music (played but the camp members themselves), and communal dancing amongst is shown as having an almost magic quality in forming a sense of fellowship. Jule, one of the campers, mentions:

Here, dances have done funny things. Our people got nothing, but jes’ because they can ast their frien’s to come here to dance, sets ‘em up and makes ‘em proud. An’ folks respects ‘em ‘count of these here dances (340).

The ability of the migrants to throw their own dances and police them themselves, Steinbeck seems to suggest, plays an integral part in preserving the camper’s dignity and making them “proud.” These government camps are presented in the novel as a kind of model for the future of displaced Midwestern workers in the West. Even as Tom leaves the Joads at the end of the novel he tells Ma:

I been thinkin’ how it was in that gov’ment camp, how our folks took care a theirselves, an’ if they was a fight they fixed it theirselves; an’ they wasn’t no cops wagglin’ their guns, but they was better order than them cops ever give. I been a-wonderin’ why we can’t do that all over... All work together for our own thing (341).

The Weed-patch camp, in affording its campers self-governance, equality and community, becomes a constructive phalanx. Its people work together to survive, preserve dignity, and produce a viable structure for others to follow in the future. Steinbeck (1936) based much of his portrayal of the Weed-patch camp on his own experiences in visiting various government camps in doing research for his collection of articles “Harvest Gypsies” (mentioned previously). In his visits, he found:

The result has been more than could be expected. From the first, the intent of the management has been to restore the dignity and decency that had been kicked out of the migrants by their intolerable mode of life...The result of this responsible self-government has been remarkable... The central committee makes the laws that govern the conduct of the inhabitants (“Harvest Gypsies” Article 4).

Here, Steinbeck’s purpose for including the government camp in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is apparent. His

personal opinion on the success of the real-life government camps bleeds over on to the pages of his literature and are likely responsible for the success of the fictional Weed-patch camp. Though the government camp phalanx appears to fit Steinbeck's theory as an optimum group-man, the problem of the "influential actor's" involvement in its success is introduced.

If the government camp (representative of a positive phalanx) was generally observed to be more successful in keeping its units thriving through maintaining a sense of dignity, democracy, and community—if this is the optimal circumstance for a phalanx—then where lies the problem? The state of the collective is happy, healthy, and peaceful. The problem in the Weed-patch camp as a successful phalanx lies within the role of the Federal Government as an influential actor. It is the government and the government's assets that allow for the existence of the camp. The running water, the paid overseer, and the very housing structures themselves rely on receiving resources (costing according to Steinbeck's calculations "\$18,000") without immediate reciprocation from a generous "other" ("Harvest Gypsies" Article 4). The material for this success, in short, is provided by a higher and more powerful outside entity.

Even the roadside phalanx spawned between the Joads and Wilsons, though undoubtedly positive, eventually divorces and disbands without an influential actor. When the families stop for water near the California border, an alienated Noah Joad decides to leave the family to "a walk on down [the] river" to "catch fish" (208). After this desertion, the Wilsons follow suit choosing to stay behind to allow Sairy to "res' an' get strong" (217). Ma Joad, the leader of the family, is unable to keep them together and eventually acknowledges "It's time to go" (219). Indeed, even Tom Joad's transformation into the "socially responsible individual" empowered by "the gospel of reform" at the end of the novel comes too late for the preservation of Joad-Wilson phalanx (Astro, 1973).

Perhaps best exemplified by "Doc" in "Cannery Row," the influential actor must take it upon himself to guide and foster democratic, participatory communities to ensure the success of a positive phalanx. In a kind of whimsical micro illustration of the dangers of the destructive phalanx, Steinbeck describes the aftermath of a party thrown at "Doc's" house by the rowdy but well intentioned "Mack and the boys" without Doc's presence.

The lights blazed in the laboratory. The front door hung sideways on one hinge. The floor was littered with broken glass. Phonograph records, some broken, some only nicked, were strewn about. The plates with pieces of steak ends and coagulating grease were on the floor, on top of the bookcases, under the bed. Whiskey glasses lay sadly on their sides. Some-one trying to climb the bookcases had pulled out a whole section of books and spilled them in broken-backed confusion on the floor. And

it was empty; it was over (*Cannery Row*, 115).

Though Mack and his group collectively pull their money for weeks to buy party favors, without Doc's hands-on guidance, the party quickly becomes damaging and chaotic. The tipped over items in the Doctor's labs playfully parallel the collapsed bodies after the strikers attack the scabs in "In Dubious Battle." The way Steinbeck surveys the wreckage of the house is amazingly similar to Jim's open-eyed astonishment at the carnage he and the striker phalanx caused. Even the emptiness, earlier described as a "symptom" of the negative group-man, is revisited by Steinbeck in describing the end of the party: "And it was empty, it was over."

Arriving home to a house destroyed by a party thrown without his permission or participation, Doc, out of anger, strikes Mack. Doc, however, immediately settles down and asks Mack to "Go wash [his] face" (119). He pours a beer for Mack and asks calmly "what happened?" deciding not to make Mack pay for the damages (knowing Mack cannot nor will ever be able to afford them) (120).

After some time, Doc even sees the worth in Mac and the boys, calling them "true philosophers" and marvels at their ability to "survive...in the world better than other people" (129). This forgiveness and ability to find the best in people speaks to Doc's generosity, maturity, and love for others. He, through this kind of higher understanding and care, separates himself from his relatively inconsiderate peers. This attests to Steinbeck's belief in the "influential actor" as essential to the positive phalanx, consciously guiding potentially destructive masses towards their more compassionate potentials.

Later on, in an attempt to make up for the bad party, Mack and boys decide to throw Doc another party. After a curious prodding by Mack about his birthday, Doc discovers Mack's intent. Doc's:

...reaction to the idea was not simple. He felt a great warmth that they should want to give him a party and at the same time he quaked inwardly remembering the last one they had given./ ... He glanced about considering what things would have to be locked up. He knew the party was going to cost him plenty (156).

Despite knowing the party will undoubtedly ruin his house again and will "cost him plenty," Doc outweighs his apprehensions with his care for Mack and the entire community (who Doc finds out is also invited). In his desire to do good for his friends and neighbors, he begins to make preparations for the party himself.

His best records he carried into the back room where they could be locked away. He moved every bit of equipment that was breakable back there too. He knew how it would be—his guests would be hungry and they wouldn't bring anything to eat. They would run out of liquor early, they always did...Doc ordered fifteen pounds

of steaks, ten pounds of tomatoes, twelve heads of lettuce, six loaves of bread, a big jar of peanut butter and one of strawberry jam, five gallons of wine and four quarts of a good substantial but not distinguished whiskey. He knew he would have trouble at the bank the first of the month. Three or four such parties...and he would lose the laboratory (156).

Here, Doc takes it upon himself to sacrifice his own money and time to ensure the second party is a success. By preparing and investing selflessly, despite knowing "he would have trouble at the bank the first of the month," Doc is able to guide the course of the festivities. With his attentive guidance, the party "[roars]" from "end to end of Cannery Row" and becomes an event for the all citizens of the sleepy sea village. Doc's role as an influential actor continues even after the party is over. The morning after, Doc cleans the aftermath of previous night's festivities all on his own. His experience, as the influential actor, is not the same as the others. It requires the planning, investment, and foresight his peers lack. The unnoticed sacrifices and "trouble" he must go through are his load to carry alone. What was once only destructive is transformed through Doc's love and expense into a successful, participatory community event. The focus Steinbeck affords Doc in these last few lines of *Cannery Row* again elevates Doc above his friends and out of the phalanx.

The Doctor in *In Dubious Battle* (1936), perhaps comparable to Doc in *Cannery Row* (1945), creates an interesting problem in the "flexible phalanx" theory. Both doctors are depicted as educated, morally upright, non-biased, and caring towards their fellow men. The Doctor, similar to Doc's self sacrifice in caring for his neighbors, volunteers his time to Jim and Mac to care for the hurt strikers—despite not believing in their cause. They are, as characters situated to guide the phalanx, essentially equal in potential.

The difference in their roles, and thus their capacity to foster the success of their respective phalanxes, lies within their willingness to proactively create a positive phalanx. While Doc spends his own resources and provides a controlled environment for the party group man, the Doctor in *In Dubious Battle* takes a more distanced and observational approach. In seeing the phalanx form in the camp, the Doctor tells Mac and Jim,

I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like a single man. A man in a group isn't himself at all: He's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you (113).

Instead of engaging personally in the formation and guidance of the phalanx, the Doctor seeks to simply "watch these group-men." The strikers' potential as a phalanx is reduced to "cells" and "organism[s],"—not the creative community they could be. Additionally, the Doctor in his position of distance makes no effort to correct the

perversion of democracy created by Mac and Jim. His position of privilege and of education is squandered in his will *not* to participate. It is the Doctor's academic distance, rooted in the unbendingly neutral scientific approach that makes the phalanx fail and disintegrate into violence.

Conclusion

As Steinbeck explored the potential of both constructive and destructive group-man within his works, a strict, inelastic "scientific" phalanx theory cannot account for the "inherent" volatile nature of certain men, the injection of his own the moral judgment, or for the role of the influential actor within his own fiction. With the use of the flexible phalanx however, a more effective portrayal of group-man can be made while maintaining the spirit and intent of Steinbeck's masterful messages.

Though the flexible phalanx helps in explaining the evolution of Steinbeck's thought in examining positive and negative phalanxes, it remains unclear whether the influential actor was meant to have any real world application. The closest Steinbeck gives his reader is the government-run Weed-patch camp—a hopeful experiment subject to collapse with the strong winds of an unkind congress. Even at that, it lacks the organic community involvement Doc of *Cannery Row* seems to possess. The endlessly kind and forgiving Doc, after all, is a creation of his fiction. He is a perfect character to facilitate a perfect end. Perhaps he is presented simply as a kind of goal for powerful men to strive towards—a bright idea always ahead and just out of reach to illuminate the path as mankind moves along, step by step, searching for that perfect combination of influence and love to guarantee a creative, democratic community for all.

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