CHAPTER 3

NON-TELEOLOGICAL OR "IS" THINKING
John Steinbeck, a product of his time and milieu, reflects as clearly as modern American writer the positive and negative aspects of the American travel experience. In three books of travel, *The Log From The Sea of Cortez* (1951), *A Russian Journal* (1948) and *Travels With Charley* (1962) and in a series of essays as *Once There Was a War* (1958), he alternatingly displays the spirit of open curiosity which enlarges experience as well as the closed belief that ours is the only way to live. Additionally, the body of his travel literature tells us about the author's own search for meaning. It also assists us in our search for order by illuminating the highly paradoxical nature of the American character.

From the time when his consciousness was sharpened by first hand observation of the political crisis in California's agricultural valleys, Steinbeck developed in his writings a series of remedies for the social evils he saw. These remedies reflect his belief in man's ability to pursue meaningful social goals. The thematic substructures of his greatest social novels, *In Dubious Battle* and *The Grapes of Wrath* are laced through with the novelist's teleological belief in the value of human progress. Steinbeck celebrates man's ability to emerge ahead of his accomplishments and grow beyond his concepts, when those concepts are framed by a recognition of the unity of all life in a regulated, ordered cosmos. The battle in *In Dubious Battle* is dubious in that Steinbeck shows how neither blind partisan action nor detached observation can solve the pressing problem faced by the dispossessed and the downtrodden. And *The Grapes of Wrath* ends in triumph as Steinbeck creates in the character of Jim Casy a man of messianic vision who converts an understanding of the unity of life into a gospel of social action.
It seems quite strange that Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) was followed by *The Log from the Sea of Cortez* (1941) which is the narrative record of the Steinbeck-Ricketts marine collecting expedition to the Gulf of California in the Spring of 1940. In this unusual work of travel literature, Steinbeck ostensibly abandons his commitment to concepts of social progress and expresses a sort of perfect scientific vacuum. He seems to question that factor of civilization which we call progress. He celebrates the unadorned life styles of simple Indians of the Gulf who may someday remain “to sun themselves”, to eat and starve and sleep and reproduce while “a great and good-like race” of North Americans “fly away in four motored bombers to the accompaniment of exploding bombs, the Voice of God calling them home.”

When, however, all the facts about the composition of *The Log* are revealed, it becomes clear that the gospel of anti-progress stated in that volume is not Steinbeck’s. Rather it belongs to the book’s co-author marine biologist Edward F. Ricketts whose belief in the value of what he calls “non-teleological thinking” (which calls for understanding – acceptance rather than propaganda for change and which is defined in an essay of the same name in the narrative) informs the philosophical structure of the entire *Log*.

Beyond an attachment to nature, a scientific outlook, an inductive approach to experience, and an organismic conception of nature as a whole, there is one other aspect of Steinbeck’s thought prior to meeting Ricketts that should be examined in some detail is his adherence to non-teleological thinking. “Teleology” is one of those words whose meaning easily slips away and whose applications always seem a bit fuzzy. It comes from the Greek telos, meaning
"end" or "purpose". We often use the word to refer to design or purpose in nature and the existence of "God's plan". In the words of Webster's Third New International, we use the term to describe.

"the fact of the character of being directed toward an end or shaped by a purpose-used of natural processes or of nature as a whole conceived as determined by final causes or by the design of a divine Providence."²

Teleological thinking is goal-oriented. It is often linked with the idea of progress. It is usually associated with religious interpretations of the universe, and frequently tied to the idea of free will. Non-teleological thinking, in the traditional sense, is thinking that is mechanistic. One event leads to another, and what happens is directed by physical laws. There is no possibility of freewill. All events are determined- and there is no way of knowing whether or not there is divine Providence, an overall design.

A great part of the difficulty with the terms comes out of circumstances that our culture, including our literature, operates on the basis of causal and purposive assumptions, and our very language has teleological implications. If one applies the term "teleological" very strictly, it is very hard to escape from it—in other words, to speak totally non-teleologically. Further complicating the problem is that Ricketts- the term "non-teleological" is his, not Steinbeck's-like so many self-educated men, attached his own meaning to words, and his use of "non-teleological" is partially his own. But it is major word in his vocabulary. It involves a concept much under discussion by the two men, and has become a key term in Steinbeck criticism in recent years. It also makes the place where Richard
Astro, the most informed writer on Steinbeck's philosophy, sees the most significant conflict of ideas between Steinbeck and Ricketts.

It would appear that from very early, from his high school days or before, Steinbeck was, in the traditional sense, a non-teleological thinker. The precise source of these ideas in his life is impossible to trace. We can guess that it was probably a mixture of influences and events: a rejection of Christianity, because it represented for him middle-class respectability and because it seemed irrelevant and untrue; his early fondness for such writers as Mark Twain and Jack London; conversations during his college years with men in the field who advocated a socialist-atheist point of view; and exposure to the materialistic philosophy of Harold Chapman Brown.

Whatever the actual combination, Steinbeck presented almost from the beginning of his published work a world that was mechanistic and independent of the desire of man and the presence of God. There may be enough immediate physical cause to provide some logic, but by and large, there is the pervasive sense that things just happen. People who act by their dreams are defeated; people who try to change things are usually unsuccessful. The best that man can hope for is to be able to adapt to what is and to survive. There is even a natural selection in his work. The weak, the deformed, the deficient-Joy in *In Dubious Battle*, the red pony, Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*, the grandparents, the Wilsons, and Noah *In the Grapes of Wrath*- do not survive. The healthy, amoral poor who deal with life on biological basis are usually the people who can, like the paisanos and Mack and the boys, adapt the best. The middle class has been duped by a teleological value
system that tends to make it easy prey either in the natural jungle or in the social jungle. To quote from Harnold Chapman Brown:

In religion we hold to our dogma, extol the humble and praise the unworldly, yet, in practice, the humble are trampled upon, and the unworldly are neglected or merely the objects of a somewhat cynical wit.³

Perhaps in William Emerson Ritter’s organismic whole there is, technically, a sense of internal teleology. But if “the whole depend [s] on the orderly co-operation and inter-dependence of its parts”,⁴ the only teleology for Steinbeck in this is the cause and effect of the gears in a machine. We don’t know why one gear bears against another, or why this lever goes this way and another goes that way- it just does. Nor do we know if the whole machine has some purpose or overall design, nor can we suppose that there is some Great Mechanic in the sky. Man can never really change the operation of the machine in any significant way; all he can do is to try to understand what aspects of the machine may be available to him to examine. For Steinbeck, looking and understanding are always the keys, and thus each man must be a scientist. In Ritter’s words,

The comprehensive study of nature when man is fully included in nature must be pursued with a mental technique adequate to conceive individual objects (of which the conceiving human being itself is one) and all objects to be so related to one another as to constitute the general order of nature, the universe...The results (of Ritter’s study of various biological processes) imply that all men should be naturalists, in the sense that they should be sympathetic in their feeling for nature, painstaking in acquiring knowledge of nature, eager in identifying their wholeselves with nature, and critical in examining their own mental and physical processes in order to validate both their feelings and knowledge.⁵

Of Course, Steinbeck was not alone among American authors in presenting man as a small speck in an indifferent universe (Crane & Twain), or as victimised
within a society characterized by social Darwinism (Sinclair and Norris), or as subject to the harsh laws of nature (London), or as controlled by the physical chemical scheme of a mechanistic universe (Dreiser). But his affection for the alternative to an anthropocentric view of life is unique. He was the only major writer within the American tradition of naturalism who reacted to science in a positive way, embraced a scientific perception of the universe with enthusiasm, and really knew something about science.

Because of his attachment to science, Steinbeck’s approach tends to be more neutral, less dominated by irony and disillusionment. In realism-naturalism, one sees clearly and therefore is led to reject traditional or personal projections onto reality. One would like to believe in romance, in poetic justice, in a grand design and in a personal God, but in light of the evidence, one cannot. The resulting disillusionment, as in the case of the correspondent in Stephen Crane’s “The Open Boat”, often leads the individual to the anger of someone who has been swindled. By contrast, if the individual fully assumes a non-teleological point of view, he rejects traditional and personal projections so that he can see the truth. The fiction of such writers as Crane, Norris, and Dreiser often suggests that the dream is better than the reality, but that the dream is impossible to hold on to. Steinbeck’s more thoroughly non-teleological perception leads to a fiction in which things simply are “as they are”. The real bitterness lies in man’s attempts to divorce himself from nature and in his attempts to conceal or avoid reality.

In Steinbeck’s work the revelation that the values of a man-centered universe are false—what he came to call the “non-teleological break-through”—is not an occasion for melancholy so much as for celebration in response to a fuller
understanding. I suspect that Steinbeck’s own lack of ego made it easier for him to accept the relative unimportance of man and turn instead to a calm and even joyful realization of man’s interdependence with the whole of nature. Compare this response to that of Dreiser, a naturalistic author with a very large ego, who was almost destroyed by his reading of Thomas Huxley and Herbert Spencer.

Steinbeck’s non-teleological approach is most apparent in his fiction of the mid-thirties and beyond, beginning with *In Dubious Battle*. In this novel Ricketts’s influence would seem to have overt expression in a character, Doc Burton, who is modeled after Ricketts and who in speech and behavior reflects Ricketts’s philosophy. Through Burton the author clearly sets up a non-teleological frame through which the action of the novel is to be viewed. This figure, although compassionate, remains detached. He declares that his main concern is to see, to try to get the whole picture, and this, in turn, is the concern of the book itself, to present the whole picture of man with narrow vision in conflict with each other and to do so without attaching praise or blame. The question is, is Steinbeck reflecting Ricketts’s ideas here, or is he using a Ricketts-like figure to enunciate his own perspective because he found that the biologist in life was a demonstration of those ideas?

I think the latter is probably more true—*In Dubious Battle* does not mark a new direction in Steinbeck’s thought. In his early fiction we also find a non-teleological point of view, but expressed more indirectly.

The world of the *The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown* is a mechanistic one in which there is no ultimate cause or design. While Joseph Wayne’s life in *To a God Unknown* demonstrates the futility of man’s vanity and
the emptiness of his search for ultimate purpose in nature, there is nevertheless, much about Joseph’s character which expresses a non-teleological philosophy. To Lester Jay Marks, Joseph is in several ways a predecessor of this scientist figure or “Doc” character.

Although Joseph personally rejects the rigmarole of formal religion, he remains concerned that each man follows his own belief. His only stipulation is that, he will not interfere in the religious practices of others and they do not interfere with his. Not only is he tolerant and accepting in this regard, but he refuses to condemn or be punitive in response to the killing of his brother Benjy, or to the girdling of his tree by his brother Burton. For Joseph, as for Casy in The Grapes of Wrath, “There ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do.” Furthermore, as Marks points out, there is in Joseph “the same kind of wide vision that is typical of Steinbeck’s later [non-teleological] heroes.”

When he observes the ritual performed by the old hermit on the ocean cliff, he is not repulsed, he does not condemn—he is interested. He observes, “This man has discovered a secret.”

Connected to his breadth of vision is his isolation from humanity. In Steinbeck’s work the non-teleological hero-Doc Burton, Casy, and Doc in Cannery Row—is always something of an outsider, and by being so, he can observe more clearly the entire pattern outside the small preoccupations of individuals. Joseph is never part of the group; he is always somewhat distant, preoccupied with larger concerns than the people about him. After his wife Elizabeth dies, Rama tells him,
You didn’t know her as a person. You never have known a person. You aren’t aware of persons, Joseph; only people. You can’t see units, Joseph, only the whole.9

This was the author’s primary concern and a major theme throughout his fiction—he wanted the reader to discard the blinders of teleology and to see the whole as it really is. Even in short stories, such as “The Chrysanthemums” or “Flight,” he is not just telling us about the frustrations of a rancher’s wife or the tragic initiation into manhood of a Mexican-American boy, he is also—and for him, more importantly—defining the nature of reality.

The character of Joseph Wayne, so long in the making prior to Steinbeck’s relationship with Ricketts, suggests that the role of the non-teleological observer was in progress and created without the input of Ricketts’s philosophy. Indeed, what apparently attracted Steinbeck to Ricketts was that the biologist fitted the role he had already created, and as the friendship progressed, Ricketts became more and more the living model for the role, which in turn was altered to fit the man, so that by *Cannery Row,* the role and the man had become nearly identical. Or at least identical in Steinbeck’s mind—there is the further possibility that he did not always see his friend very clearly, but in “using” him, idealized him by exaggerating in his mind those qualities he valued most.

The two men did not always agree, of course, but even in seeming to agree, they sometimes were talking about different things. One of the most acute perceptions of the relationship between the philosophies of the author biologist has been offered by Richard Albee, George Albee’s younger brother, who came to live in Monterey in the mid-thirties. Having been recently involved in the study of philosophy at U.C.L.A., he became a participant in the serious discussions of
ideas that usually involved only Steinbeck and Ricketts. He remembers sitting in
the lab many times and listening to the two men discuss a subject in very similar
terms. Yet, as Albee observed, although they might be talking about the same
thing and using similar language, and might even feel that they were agreeing
with each other, they were in actuality, Albee feels, talking in parallel, each within
his own frame of reference.

The truth of the matter seems to be that both men came into the
relationship with well-established philosophies, and neither dominated the other
intellectually. One could just as well ask, “How did Steinbeck influence
Ricketts?” as ask the question the other way around. They used each other, as
friends should, and one would be hard pressed to say who got the better of the
bargain. I don’t think that any of the major ideas that find expression in
Steinbeck’s fiction originated with Ricketts, but most were developed and
nurtured in the rich soil of their mutual enthusiasm for exploring ideas and their
implications. They were like two trees of the same species but different varieties,
which grew together, side by side.

Their ideas and interests often overlapped, but their needs were different.
Steinbeck found a deep participation by writing; Ricketts looked toward some
mystical breakthrough to a sense of totally integrated reality. In his essay on
Ricketts, Steinbeck described his friend’s malaise and his search, which often
seemed to be tied up with his relationships with women.

There was a transcendent sadness in his love-something he missed or wanted, a
searching that sometimes approached panic. I don’t know what it was he
wanted that was never there, but I know he always looked for it and never
found it... I think he found some of it in music. It was like a deep and endless nostalgia—a thirst and passion for “going home.”

He was walled off a little, so that he worked at his philosophy of “breaking through” of coming out through the back of the mirror into some kind of reality which would make the day world dreamlike. This thought obsessed him. He found the symbols of “breaking through” in Faust, in Gregorian music, and in the sad, drunken poetry of Li Po.

Part of Ricketts’s mysticism, in apparent conflict with his Faust-like search, was an Oriental acceptance of the many manifestations of reality, whether beautiful or ugly, just or unjust. For Ricketts, acceptance (to quote from one of his unpublished essays) meant “not dirt for dirt’s sake, or grief merely for the sake of grief, but dirt and grief wholly accepted if necessary as struggle vehicles of an emergent joy-achieving things which are not transient by means of things which are.” Such acceptance, which seems passive, was not in his mind in conflict with the struggle toward enlightenment. On the contrary, the two must operate together: “Intense struggle is one of the commonest concomitants to a great emergent ... [But] where there is refusal to accept the hazards of grief and tragedy, as occurs more frequently than not, I should expect to see the struggle belittle rather than deify, since whatever is has to be taken and accepted in order for development to proceed.”

In speaking of one such breakthrough, Ricketts describes a miner’s wife at the scene of a mine disaster, talking on a company phone to her husband, who was one of the survivors down below. She talked to him all during the night as workers dug through the cave-in to reach those trapped on the other side. At last the rescue was made, and when her shocked and emaciated husband was hauled
out of the shaft, dirty, unkempt and unshaven, she broke through into illumination.
For years she had been repelled by his untidiness. She had blunted herself and
him by nagging reform. Now suddenly all that seemed not very important. The
fault was still there. If she paused to look she could realize it now more clearly
than ever before. She was actually less blind than at any time in her life, only now
she saw things in their relation to a far larger picture, a more deeply significant
whole. She genuinely liked him she realized now, neither in spite of nor because
of it; sufficient simply to face the fact that that trait was him whom she loved. She
had accepted fully and without evasion the burden of anxiety, and something
new was born again out of the ashes of struggle.

In such passages as this, the religious quality of Ricketts's thought
becomes clear. To acceptance and the struggle toward spiritual enlightenment add
his philosophy of nonacquisition of material goods and a belief that the pain and
turmoil of daily life are only apparent, hiding from us the true harmony of reality,
and you have assembled the elements of doctrine shared by several Eastern
religions. Ricketts did not convert his friend to a religious point of view—
Steinbeck remained an agnostic and, essentially, a materialist—but Ricketts's
religious acceptance did tend to work on his friend, moderating as I have
mentioned, his rage and persuading him in his daily life to take a larger
prospective.

By his own impetus, Steinbeck did express a degree of acceptance, but it
was of a variety different from Ed's. For him, people were the products of their
environments, and he was curious about the equations expressed in individual
lives. The inductive search became a habit of life, and he cultivated the ability to
get along, even blend in, with a wide range of people. However, he could not forgive certain kinds of behavior, and he could not reach that "tower beyond tragedy" (to use a phrase that Ed adopted from Yeats) that would allow him to ignore injustice as ultimately unimportant.

Just as his personal acceptance was motivated in part by a scientific habit of mind, so the acceptance expressed in his writing was motivated by an effort toward scientific impartiality. In his writings, there are no heroes or villains (even Cathy in East of Eden is simply a product of nature, part of the statistical extreme; indeed, it is out of statistical necessity for such sports that myth is often generated—as in response to "gints"), not even the romanticized we call anti-heroes, just people caught in the web of nature. A striking early example of Steinbeck's brand of acceptance appears in the first pages of To a God Unknown. Joseph Wayne encounters a wild boar eating a little pig. At first Wayne is angered by the sight: "'Damn you', he cried. 'Eat other creatures. Don't eat your own people'". 14 He pulls his rifle from its scabbard hanging from his saddle and almost shoots the boar. But with a sudden realization of the absurdity of his reaction, he laughs and tells himself, "I'm taking too great power into my hands...Why he's the father of fifty pigs and he may be the source of fifty more." 15

His realization is that man must accept events in nature that contradict his values, since the pattern of nature is not only beyond his comprehension, but it is also beyond his power to alter significantly.

This passages is also a good example of Steinbeck's "traditional" type of non-teleological thinking. By contrast, Ed's version, inspired by his struggle to
“break through”, assigned all temporal and material phenomena as perceived by man to the apparent, to the outward, teleological mask over the eternal and real. What was non-teleological was the permanent harmony beyond appearance. Thus Ricketts almost reverses the traditional meaning of the term.

In his discussion of the relationships between the philosophies of Ricketts and Steinbeck, Richard Astro, using Ricketts’s definition of non-teleological thinking, finds that of the two men, only Ricketts’s thought was truly non-teleological. While this assessment may be accurate according to Ricketts’s use of the term, it is also confusing and misleading. In order to appreciate Steinbeck’s unique achievement in fiction, it is necessary to understand just how extremely naturalistic and non-teleological it actually was. Astro goes on to argue that “throughout his career, Steinbeck celebrated man’s singular ability to pursue significant goals and achieve meaningful progress...[He] consistently put the highest premium upon action, conflict, and change.” Again, if we judge Steinbeck within the context of Ricketts’s idea only, we shall hardly get a satisfactory answer. The fabric of Steinbeck’s fiction as a whole tells a somewhat different story.

Seldom in his work does action ever achieve anything or is progress actually made. In many of Steinbeck’s novels a philosophical character with whom the author’s essential sympathy lies is paired with a man of action. The philosophical character seldom acts, while the man of action does not usually act very effectively or very well. Steinbeck’s point seems to be that you don’t act to gain results—a teleological formulation—you look in order to understand.
Steinbeck's interest in non-teleology as a way of approaching life and literature was first stimulated by his association with Ed. Ricketts at the Pacific Biological laboratories, and like the group-man theory, it rapidly moves in the fiction far beyond its scientific sources. Ricketts believed that people in a complex universe tended to search for its purpose before they had any comprehension of what it was—they asked the question "Why?" before they tried to answer the question "how?" Ricketts advocated instead what he called "is" thinking that sought understanding without judgment, and it was therefore "capable of great tenderness, of an all-embracingness which is rare otherwise." ¹⁷

Steinbeck's amateur biology has thrown up certain ideas which provide a key to understanding his art, one such is "is" thinking, which in other words, is artistic objectivity and ethical disinterestedness. Steinbeck is wary of preconceptions and traditional nations. He dispenses with the general tendency for baseless assumptions and presuppositions. Though not profound as philosophy, it is meaningful in unlocking his esthetics. Steinbeck explains it thus:

...through inspection of thinking technique a kind of purity of approach might be consciously achieved—that non-teleology or "is" thinking might be substituted in part for the usual cause-effect methods. ¹⁸

This idea of "is" thinking is important in Steinbeck's image of man. All his ideologues, the leaders and the heroes, are endowed, in different degrees, with this goodlike detachment. His "hero" who is a dressed-up version of his own personality, invariably enjoys this "negative capability". In East of Eden, Lee compliments Samuel Hamilton thus: "you are one of the rare people who can separate your observation from your preconception." ¹⁹ Ed. Ricketts, the original of Doc, has this steady, lonely eye; he contemplates in Olympian isolation,
steinbeck, the artist, in his fiction oscillates between understanding detachment and all too human involvement, thereby informing his novels with the necessary complexity and ambivalence characteristic of life.

“Is” thinking, equated by steinbeck with non-teleological method, is “capable of great tenderness, of an all embracingness which is rare otherwise.” Its advantage is that it helps displaying genuine sympathy without becoming sentimental. The fact, that all his novels exude this kind of disinterested love and compassion, vouchsafes the superiority of this method. His fictional world is peopled with all kind of human beings, ranging from one end of the spectrum to the other. Among them the dispossessed and exploited receive more of his consideration. The patronage which he extends to the underdog, the bums, the idlers, the retarded, pimps whores and misfits of all sorts, helps him to forge an image of man which is characterized by unity in diversity.

steinbeck acquired much of his ideas concerning non-teleological thinking from ed. ricketts. he met ricketts in 1930, while the extensive task of writing and revising to a god unknown was in progress, and in 1940 the two men journeyed together on a zoological collecting trip to the sea of cortez. the results of this trip were published in 1941 as a collaboration by the two entitled sea of cortez: a leisurely journal of travel and research. a great idea of philosophy found in the narrative portion of this book undoubtedly originated in the thoughts and notebooks of ed. ricketts. there can be no doubt that steinbeck was strongly influenced by ricketts’s thinking, however, and that as far as to a god unknown is concerned, steinbeck identified with and assimilated much of ricketts’s non-teleological philosophy. richard astro suggests that
... in *To a God Unknown* ... the impact of the marine biologist's ideas on the novelist's fiction becomes apparent for the first time. And a careful examination of the facts concerning the composition of *To a God Unknown* suggests that by 1932 Steinbeck was already vitally interested in Ricketts's world-view so much so, in fact, that he altered the entire thematic structure in revised version of this philosophical crucial novel in accordance with the kind of thinking he and Ricketts were doing.21

Perhaps the greatest insight into what Steinbeck is attempting in *To a God Unknown* is contained in the definition of religion offered in *The Log*:

> And it is strange thing that most of the feelings we call religious, most of the mystical out crying which is one of the most prized and used and desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, known and unknowable.22

*To a God Unknown* is designed to demonstrate this belief, to show that underlying all religious symbols and all forms of religion is this one element: the attempt to say that man is a part of the “whole”. The common element in all of the religious symbols and references that run through the book is sacrifice, finally self sacrifice, for in sacrifice found the ultimate statement of commitment to the earth and to man “all reality, known and unknowable.”

In *Sea a Cortez* Steinbeck details and defends his non-teleological methods. In the first place, he views theological thinking as misleading and impractical:

> What we personally conceive by the term “teleological thinking”,... is most frequently associated with the evaluating of causes and effects, the purposiveness of events. This kind of thinking considers changes and cures – what “should be” in the terms of an end pattern (which is often a subjective or anthropomorphic projection); it presumes the bettering of conditions, often,
unfortunately, without achieving more than a most superficial understanding of those conditions. In their sometimes intolerant refusal to face facts as they are, teleological notions may substitute a fierce but ineffectual attempt to change conditions which are assumed to be undesirable, in place of the understanding — acceptance which would pave the way for a more sensible attempt at any change which might still be indicated.  

In this last sentence we can begin to see how Steinback does not preclude a kind of “change” taking place within the order of things “as they are”. Infact, only by accepting things as they are can we understand them well enough to take sensible action. The limited nature of such change is implied in Steinback’s following explanation of non–teleological thinking and in his allusion to Darwin:

Non –teleological ideas derive through “is” thinking, associated with natural selection as Darwin seems to have understood it. They imply depth, fundamentalism and clarity — seeing beyond traditional or personal projections. They consider events as outgrowth and expressions rather than as results; conscious acceptance as a desideratum, and certainly as an all – important prerequisite. Non –teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather with what actually “is” — attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how, instead of why. 

So while teleological thinking may help us to see “rational aspects” of a whole picture, we should not do deceived into believing that it leads us to first cause. Events occur and changes take place (as in natural selection), but only dangerously wishful thinking lets us believe that we have the final answer to the question why. “The rational picture,” Steinbeck continues, “should be regarded only as a glimpse—a challenge to consider also the rest of the relations as they are
available to envision the whole picture as well as can be done with given abilities and data.\textsuperscript{25}

Steinbeck anticipates the horrified reactions to such non-causal thinking. He considers the fear of many people that the non teleological approach would leave them “dangling out in space, deprived of such emotional support as had been offered to them by an unthinking belief ...in the institution of traditions; religion; science; in the security of the home or the family; or in a comfortable bank account.”\textsuperscript{26} But he holds that this kind of thinking actually emancipates man from the trap he imposes upon himself by his “partial and biased mental reconstructing”. Causal thinking leads man through a maze where at any bank wall he may stop and accept the illusion that he has finally reached the end. Non-teleological thinking recognizes the illusion for what it is and seeks to understand the whole complex situation, thereby making way for intelligent action. This is kinder, Steinbeck believes, than the false security afforded by the illusion, rather than cruelly depriving man of his foundation for living.

non-teleological methods more than any other seem capable of great tenderness, of an all embracingness which is rarely otherwise. Consider for instance, the fact that, once a given situation is deeply understood, no apologies are required. There are ample difficulties even to understanding conditions “as is”. Once that has been accomplished, the “why” of it (known now to be simply a relation, though probably a near and important one) seems no longer to be preponderantly important. It needn’t be condemned or extenuated, it just “is”. It is seen merely as part of more or less dim whole picture ...with the non-teleological treatment there is only the love and understanding of instant acceptance; after that fundamental has been achieved, the next step, if any should be necessary, can be considered more sensibly.\textsuperscript{27}
Teleological-thinking may even be highly fallacious, especially where it approaches the very superficial but quite common post hoc, ergo propter hoc pattern. Consider the situation with reference to dynamiting in a quarry. Before a charge is set off, the foreman toots warningly on a characteristic whistle. People living in the neighborhood come to associate the one with the other, since the whistle is almost invariably followed within a few seconds by the shock and sound of an explosion for which one automatically prepares oneself. Having experienced this many times without closer contact, a very native and unthinking person might justly conclude not only that there was a cause effect relation but that the whistle actually caused the explosion. A slightly wiser person would insist that the explosion caused the whistle, but would be hard put to explain the transport time element. The normal adult would recognize that the whistle no more caused the explosion than the explosion caused the whistle, but that both were parts of a larger pattern out of which a "why" could be postulated for both, but more immediately and particularly for the whistle. Determined to chase the thing down in a cause-effect sense, an observer would have to be very wise indeed who could follow the intricacies of cause through more fundamental cause to primary cause, even in this largely man-made series about which we presumably know most of the motives, causes, and ramifications. He would eventually find himself in a welter of thoughts on production and ownership of the means of production, and economic whys and wherefores about which there is little agreement.

The example quoted is obvious and simple. Most things are far more subtle than that, and have many of their relations and most of their origins far back in
things more difficult of access than the tooting of a whistle calculated to warm bystanders away from an explosion. We know little enough even of a man-made series like this- how much less of purely natural phenomena about which also there is apt to be teleological pontificating!

Usually it seems to be true that when even the most definitely apparent cause-effect situations are examined in the light of wider knowledge, the cause-effect aspect comes to be seen as less rather than more significant, and the statistical or relational aspects acquire larger importance. It seems safe to assume that non-teleological is more “ultimate” than teleological reasoning. Hence the latter would be expected to prove to be limited and constricting expect when used provisionally. But while it is true that the former is more open, for that very reason its employment necessitates greater discipline and care in order to allow for the dangers of looseness and inadequate control.

Frequently, however, a truly definitive answer seems to arise through teleological methods. Part of this is due to wish-fulfillment delusion. When a person asks “Why?” in a given situation, he usually deeply expects, and in any case receives, only a relational answer in place of the definitive “because” which he thinks he wants. But he customarily accepts the actually relational answer (it couldn’t be anythingelse unless it comprised the whole, which is unknowable except by “living into”) as a definitive “because.” Wishful thinking probably fosters that error, since everyone continually searches for absolutisms (hence the value placed on diamonds, the most permanent physical things in the world) and imagines continually that he finds them. More justly, the relational picture should be regarded only as a glimpse- a challenge to consider also the rest of the relation
as they are available-to envision the whole picture as well as can be done with given abilities and data. But one accepts it instead of a real “because,” considers it settled, and having named it, loses interest and goes on to something else.

Chiefly, however, we seem to arrive occasionally at definitive answers through the working of another primitive principle: the universality of quanta. No one thing ever merges gradually into anything else; the steps are discontinuous, but often so very minute as to seem truly continuous. If the investigation is carried deep enough, the factor in question, instead of being graphable as a continuous process, will be seen to function by discrete quanta with gaps or synapses between, as do quanta of energy, undulations of light. The apparently definitive answer occurs when causes and effects both arise on the same large plateau which is bounded a great way off by the steep rise which announces the next plateau. If the investigation is extended sufficiently, that distant rise will, however, inevitably be encountered.

The answer which formerly seemed definitive now will be seen to be at least slightly inadequate and the picture will have to be enlarged so as to include the plateau next further out. Everything impinges on everything else, often into radically different systems, although in such cases faintly. We doubt very much if there are any truly “closed systems”. Those so called represent kingdoms of a great continuity bounded by the sudden discontinuity of great synapses which eventually must be bridged in any unified-field hypothesis. For instance, the ocean, with reference to waves of water, might be considered as a closed system. But anyone who has lived in Pacific Grove or Carmel during the winter storm will
have felt the house tremble at the impact of waves half a mile or more away
impinging on a totally different "closed" system.

But the greatest fallacy in, or rather the greatest objection to, teleological
thinking is in connection with the emotional content, the belief. People get to
believing and even to professing the apparent answer thus arrived at, suffering
mental constrictions by emotionally closing their minds to any of the further and
possibly opposite "answers" which might otherwise be unearthed by honest effort
— answers which, if faced realistically, would give rise to a struggle and to a
possible rebirth which might place the whole problem in a new and more
significant light. Grant for a moment that among students of endocrinology a
school of thought might arise, centering upon some belief as to etiology upon the
belief, for instance, that all abnormal growth is caused by glandular imbalance.
Such a clique, becoming formalized and powerful, would tend, by scorn and
opposition, to wither any contrary view which, if untrammeled, might discover a
clue to some opposing "causative" factor of equal medical importance. That
situation is most unlikely to arise in a field so lusty as endocrinology, with its
relational insistence, but the principle illustrated by a poor example is thought
nevertheless to be sound.

Significant in this connection is the fact that conflicts may arise between
any two or more of the "answers" brought forth by either of the teleologies, or
between the two teleologies themselves. But there can be no conflict between any
of these and the non-teleological picture. For instance, in the condition called
hyperthyroidism, the treatments advised by believers in the psychic or neurosis
etiology very possibly may conflict with those arising out of a belief in the purely
physical causes. Or even within the physical teleology group there may be conflict between those who believe the condition due to a strictly thyroid upset and those who consider causation derived through a general imbalance of the ductless glands. But there can be no conflict between any or all of these factors and the non-teleological pictures, because the latter includes them-evaluates them rationally or at least attempts to do so, or may be only accepts them as time-place truths. Teleological “answers” necessarily must be included in the non-teleological method- Since they are part of the picture even if only restrictedly true-and as soon as their qualities of relatedness are recognized, even erroneous beliefs are real things, and have to be considered proportional to their spread or intensity. “All-truth” must embrace all extant apropos errors also, and know them as such by relation to the whole, and allow for their effects.

The criterion of validity in the handling of data seems to be this: that the summary shall say in substance, significantly and understandably, “It’s so because it is so.” Unfortunately the very same words might equally derive through a most superficial glance, as any child could learn to repeat from memory the most abstruse of Dirac’s equations. But to know a thing emergently and significantly is something else again, even though the understanding may be expressed in the self-same words that were used superficially. In the following example note the deep significance of the emergent as contrasted with the presumably satisfactory but actually incorrect original naive understanding. At one time an important game bird in Norway, the willow grouse, was so clearly threatened with extinction that it was thought wise to establish protective regulations and to place a bounty on its chief enemy, a hawk which was known to
feed heavily on it. Quantities of the hawks were exterminated, but despite such drastic measures the grouse disappeared actually more rapidly than before. The naively applied customary remedies had obviously failed. But instead of becoming discouraged and quietly letting this bird go the way of the great hawk and the passenger pigeon, the authorities enlarged the scope of their investigations until the anomaly was explained. An ecological analysis into the relational aspects of the situation disclosed that a parasitic disease, coccidiosis, was epizootic among the grouse. In its incipient stages, this disease so reduced the flying speed of the grouse that the mildly ill individuals became easy prey for the hawks. In living largely off the slightly ill birds, the hawks prevented them from developing the disease in its full intensity and so spreading it more widely and quickly to otherwise healthy fowl. Thus the presumed enemies of the grouse, by controlling the epizootic aspects of the disease, proved to be friends in disguise.

In summarizing the above situation, the measure of validity wouldn’t be to assume that, even in the well-understood factor of coccidiosis, we have the real “cause” of any beneficial or untoward condition, but to say, rather, that in this phase we have a highly significant and possibly preponderantly important relational aspect of picture.

However, many people are unwilling to chance the sometimes ruthless-appearing notions which may arise through non-teleological treatments. They fear even to use them in that they may be left dangling out in space, deprived of such emotional support as had been afforded them by an unthinking belief in the proved value of pest control in the conservation of game birds; in the institution of tradition; religion; science; in the security of the home or the family; or in a
comfortable bank account. But for that matter emancipations in general are likely to be held in terror by those who may not yet have achieved them, but whose thresholds in those respects are becoming significantly low. Think of the fascinated horror, or at best tolerance, with which little girls regard their brothers who have dispensed with the Santa Claus belief; or the fear of the devout young churchman for his university senior who has grown away from depending on the security of religion.

As a matter of fact, whoever employs this type of thinking with other than a few close friends will be referred to as detached, hard-hearted, or even cruel. Quite the opposite seems to be true. Non-teleological methods more than any other seems capable of great tenderness, of an all-embracingness which is rare otherwise. Consider, for instance, the fact that, once a given situation is deeply understood, no apologies are required. There are difficulties even to understanding conditions “as is.” Once that has been accomplished, the “why” of it (known now to be simply a relation, though probably a near and important one) seems no longer to be preponderantly important. It needn’t be condoned or extenuated, it just “is.” It is seen merely as part of a more less dim whole picture. As an example: A woman near us in the Carmel woods was upset when her dog was poisoned- frightened at the thought of passing the night alone after years of companionship with the animal. She phoned to ask if, with our windows on that side of the house closed as they were normally, we could hear her ringing a dinner bell as a signal during the night that marauders had cut her phone wires preparatory to robbing her. Of course that was, in fact, an improbably contingency to be provided against; a man would call it a foolish fear, neurotic. And so it was.
But one could say kindly, "We can hear the bell quite plainly, but if desirable we can adjust our sleeping arrangements so as to be able to come over there instantly in case you need us,"\textsuperscript{30} without even stopping to consider whether or not the fear was foolish, or to be concerned about it if it were correctly regarding all that as secondary. And if the woman had said apologetically, "Oh, you must forgive me, I know my fears are foolish, but I am so upset"\textsuperscript{31} the wise reply would have been, "Dear person, nothing to forgive. If you have fears, they are, they are, real things, and to be considered. Whether or not they’re foolish is beside the point. What they are unimportant alongside the fact that they are."\textsuperscript{32} In other words, the badness or goodness, the teleology of the fears, was decidedly secondary. The whole notion could be conveyed by a smile or by a pleasant intonation more readily than by the words themselves. Teleological treatment which one might have been tempted to employ under the circumstances would first have stressed the fact that the fear was foolish—would say with a great show of objective justice, "Well, there’s no use in our doing anything; the fault is that your fear is foolish and improbable. Get over that"\textsuperscript{33} (as a judge would say, "Come into court with clean hands"); "then if there’s anything sensible we can do, we’ll see,"\textsuperscript{34} with smug blame implied in every word. Or more kindly, it would try to reason with the woman in an attempt to help her get over it—the business of propaganda directed towards change even before the situation is fully understood (may be as a lazy substitute for understanding). Or, still more kindly, the teleological method would try to understand the fear casually. But with the non-teleological treatment there is only the love and understanding of instant acceptance; after that
fundamental has been achieved, the next step, if any should be necessary, can be considered more sensibly.

Strictly, the term non-teleological thinking ought not to be applied to what we have in mind. Because it involves more than thinking, that term is inadequate. Modus operandi might be better—a method of handling data of any sort. The example cited just above concerns feeling more than thinking. The method extends beyond thinking even itself; in fact, by inferred definition it transcends the realm of thinking possibilities, it postulates “living into.”

In the destitute-unemployed illustration, thinking, as being the evaluatory function chiefly concerned, was the point of departure, “the crust to break through.” There the “blame approach” considered the situation in the limited and inadequate teleological manner. The non-teleological method included that viewpoint as correct but limited. But when it came to the feeling aspects of a human relation situation, the non-teleological method would probably ameliorate the woman’s fears in a loving, truly mellow, and adequate fashion, whereas the teleological would have tended to bungle things by employing the limited and sophisticated approach.

Incidentally, there is in this connection a remarkable etiological similarity to be noted between cause in thinking and blame in feeling. One feels that one’s neighbors are to be blamed for their hate or anger or fear. One thinks that poor pavements are “caused” by politics. The non-teleological picture in either case is the larger one that goes beyond blame or cause. And the non-causal or non-blaming viewpoint seems to us very often relatively to represent the “new thing” the Hegelian “Christ-child” which arises emergently from the union of two
opposing viewpoints, such as those of physical and spiritual teleologies, especially if there is conflict as to causation between the two or within either. The new viewpoint very frequently sheds light over a larger picture, providing a key which may unlock levels not accessible to either of the teleological viewpoints. There are interesting parallels here: to the triangle, to the Christian ideas of trinity, to Hegel’s dialectic, and to Swedenborg’s metaphysic of divine love (feeling) and divine wisdom (thinking).

The factors we have been considering as “answers” seem to be merely symbols or indices, relational aspects of thing—of which they are integral parts—not to be considered in terms of causes and effects. The truest reason for anything’s being so is that it is. This is actually and truly a reason, more valid and clearer than all the other separate reasons, or than any group of them short of the whole. Anything less than the whole forms part of the picture only, and the infinite whole is unknowable except by being it, by loving into it.

A thing may be so “because” of a thousand and one reasons of greater or lesser importance, such as the man oversized because of glandular insufficiency. The integration of these many reasons which are in the nature of relations rather than reasons is that he is. The separate reasons, no matter how valid, are only fragmentary parts of the picture. And the whole necessarily includes all that it impinges on as object and subject, in ripples fading with distance or depending upon the original intensity of the vortex.

The frequent illusions to an underlying pattern have no implication of mysticism—except inasmuch as a pattern which comprises infinity in factors and symbols might be called mystic. But infinity as here used occurs also in the
mathematical aspects of physiology and physics, both far away from mysticism as the term is ordinarily employed. Actually, the underlying pattern is probably nothing more than an integration of just such symbols and indices and mutual reference points as are already known, except that its power is \( n \). Such an integration might include nothing more spectacular than we already know. But equally, it could include anything even events and entities as different from those already known as the vectors, tensors, scalars, and ideas of electrical charges in mathematical physics are different from the mechanical-model world of the Victorian scientists.

In such a pattern, causality would be merely a name for something that exists only in our partial and biased mental reconstructions. The pattern which it indexes, however, would be real, but not intellectually appreciable because the pattern goes everywhere and is everything and cannot be encompassed by finite mind or by anything short of life—which it is.

The psychic or spiritual residua remaining after the most careful physical analyses, or the physical remnants obvious, particularly to us of the twentieth century, in the most honest and disciplined spiritual speculations of medieval philosophers, all bespeak such a pattern. Those residua, those most minute differentials, the 0.001 percentages which suffice to maintain the races of sea animals, are seen finally to be the most important things in the world, not because of their sizes, but because they are everywhere. The differential is the true universal, the true catalyst, the cosmic solvent. Any investigation carried far enough will bring to light these residua, or rather will leave them still unassailable as Emerson remarked a hundred years ago in “The Oversoul”—will run into the
brick wall of the impossibility of perfection while at the same time insisting on the validity of perfection. Anomalies especially testify to that framework; they are the commonest intellectual vehicles for breaking through; all are solvable in the sense that any one is understandable, but that one leads with the power \( n \) to still more and deeper anomalies.

This deep underlying pattern inferred by non-teleological thinking crops up everywhere—a relational thing, surely, relating opposing factors on different levels, as reality and potential are related. But it must not be considered as causative, it simply exists, it is, things are merely expressions of it as is expressions of it as them. And they are it, also. As Swinburne, extolling Hertha, the earth goddess, makes her say: "Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I."\(^{35}\) so all things which are that—which is all—equally may be extolled. That pattern materializes everywhere in the sense that Eddington finds the non-integer \( q \) "number" appearing everywhere, in the background of all fundamental equations,\(^{36}\) in the sense that the speed of light, constant despite compoundings or subtractions, seemed at one time almost to be conspiring against investigation.

The whole is necessarily everything, the whole world of fact and fancy, body and psyche, physical fact and spiritual truth, individual and collective, life and death, macrocosm and microcosm (the greatest quanta here, the greatest synapse between these two), conscious and unconscious, subject and object. The whole picture is portrayed by is, the deepest word of deep ultimate reality, not shallow or partial as reasons are, but deeper and participating, possibly encompassing the oriental concepts of being.
And all this against the hot beach on an Easter Sunday, with the passing day and the passing time. This little trip of ours was becoming a thing and a dual thing, with collecting and eating and sleeping merging with the thinking—speculating activity. Quality of sunlight, blueness and smoothness of water, boat engines, and ourselves were all parts of a larger whole and we could begin to feel its nature but not its size.

Although “breaking through” has been acknowledged by critics, it has not often been taken seriously as a driving force in John Steinbeck’s literature. Some have said Steinbeck was inconsistent, expressing a belief in the kind of non-teleological thinking necessary for “breaking through”, yet committing on the practical level to the more teleological approach of social activism to bring about real change. Richard Astro, for instance, tries to reconcile this inconsistency by saying that “breaking through” was never Steinbeck’s philosophy in the first place, but that of Ed Ricketts; and, although it attracted Steinbeck because of his great affection for Ricketts, it was discarded when Steinbeck had to come to grips with real social problems. All Steinbeck retained as his own of non-teleological thinking, argues Astro, was its usefulness as a way of approaching a problem.

Yet this view does not explain away the experience that Steinbeck evidently had in *Sea of Cortez* or why this experience makes its way into so many of his works, not just as a method of collecting materials but as a driving force. Nor does it account for the evidence that Steinbeck thought in terms of a greater reality of which he could be a part long before Ed Ricketts became an influence. In April of 1924, for example, Steinbeck wrote to his friend Carl Wilhelmson:-

> It would be desirable to be flung, unfettered by consciousness, into the void, to sail unhindered through eternity, Please do not think that I am riding along on
Other early examples can be found in original versions of *To a God Unknown*, and in the version finally published. For example, at the Indians' festivals, Joseph Wayne thinks to himself: "We have found something here all of us. In some way we've come closer to earth for a moment...Something will come of this....It's a kind of powerful prayer." Later, in explaining to Elizabeth this awe-inspiring experience that unites, yet somehow frightens, he says: "I think there were things hidden today....The dance was timeless, do you know?—a thing eternal, breaking through to vision for a day.

Robert Gentry points out that Steinbeck used non-teleological thinking "before he met Ricketts in the late 1930s and continued after Ricketts's death in 1948." In *Tortilla Flat*, published in 1935, the paisanos characterize the ideas that are reflected in the definition of "is" thinking written much later in *The Log*: the love of freedom, the acceptance of things as they are, living in the present, a rejection of materialism, a oneness with nature, and passion to protect the bonds of friendship.

Although Steinbeck does not claim to be a religious man, there is much evidence that he was, in spite of protestations to the contrary, drawn to this almost religious and certainly mystical insight called "breaking through". Although the term itself had been taken from Robinson Jeffers's "Roan Stallion" and used by Ed Ricketts, John Steinbeck made it his own to describe a philosophy that shaped not only his personal exploration and journey, but his writing as well. It dictated his literary viewpoint, his central motifs, and his social and political passions. It made him kin to other thinkers who, consumed with the brilliance of a new
insight, struggled to invent terms that would, however inadequately, express the inexpressible. This vision of truth, as Steinbeck struggled so hard to communicate it, is most clearly articulated in one of his least understood works, *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, yet it is echoed and “preached” in his novels, as well. Any discussion of Steinbeck the social reformer, Steinbeck the artist/writer, Steinbeck the journeyer, Steinbeck the marine biologist, remains inconclusive without a deep appreciation for and genuine understanding of Steinbeck the philosopher.

To recognize this philosophy in his work, one needs to discuss its principals. “Breaking through” has three stages of development. The first is an awareness of the “connectedness” and “all-embracingness” of all living and nonliving things. This awareness gives an appreciation of the organism and each cell’s function in that larger whole, but soon leads to a second discovery: even the organism is not the whole story. There are contradictions that do not fit the prescribed cataloguing. While observing nature, one finds that systems, theories, and preheld beliefs are paralyzing. What must be found, says Steinbeck, is a new way of thinking that reserves judgment and makes room for seeming contradictions. One must accept only what is without cataloguing—without fitting organism and phenomena into predefined categories—for only them may one move to the third stage, an overwhelming experience of “breaking through the crust” (a phrase Steinbeck and Ricketts borrow from Jeffers) of what is to a realization of a grand and paradoxical Big Picture, a “new thing.”

I believe it is this “breaking through” that gives birth to Steinbeck’s unconquerable belief in the perfectibility of man and his fierce commitment to timshel in spite of his living at a most pessimistic time in history. A more
thorough discussion of each of these three stages of “breaking through” should shed light on much of what has erroneously been called contradictory and even inconsistent in Steinbeck’s writing. Instead, “breaking through” unifies and gives power to Steinbeck’s varied and multidimensional work. Finding strong examples of his philosophy in his work refutes, too, the argument that Steinbeck discarded this belief when faced with real social issues.

Long before Earth Day and the ecological awareness forced upon us by the man-caused illness of our planet, Steinbeck was already preaching the gospel of interrelatedness. Perhaps the greatest early evidence of Steinbeck’s ecological passion and belief in the connectedness of all natural things is his long overlooked second novel, *To a God Unknown*, which has as its central theme man’s union with and responsibility for the earth and, eventually, the necessity of sacrifice and atonement to redeem it.

Far beyond collecting specimens of particular species for observation and cataloguing, Steinbeck and Ricketts in their voyage on the *Sea of Cortez* were drawn by a new awareness of the relationship of animal to animal. Steinbeck writes:

> If one observes in the relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentences, that each species is at once the point if one observes in the relational sense, it seems apparent that species are only commas in a sentence, that each species is at once the point and the base of a pyramid, that all life is relational.... One merges into another, groups melt into ecological groups until the time when what we know as life meets and enters what we think of as non-life: barnacle and rock, rock and earth, earth and tree, tree and rain and air. And the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from it. 43
In *Travels with Charley* Steinbeck prophetically cites the new challenges to Americans as being in “traffic-choked streets, skies nested in smog, choking with acids of industry, the screech of rubber, and houses leashed in against one another while the townlets wither in time and die.”4 According to Steinbeck, then, not only are species and whole animal kingdoms interrelated, but all nature—living and nonliving—is tied together. He recognizes the colony model found in marine life as being analogous to the behavior of man endangered by threatening forces beyond his control; and in *Of Mice and Men, In Dubious Battle, The Red Pony,* and *The Grapes of Wrath* he describes the interrelatedness of human beings and demonstrates their changed behavior when they become not individuals but “cells” in the “organism,” group-man led by a specialized cell called “the leader of the people.” Such characters as Mac, Grandfather, Ma, Will Hamilton, and Mac and Dora typify such concepts.

But beyond the relatedness of members of a particular needy group, Steinbeck seeks an interrelatedness of all groups. Casey in *The Grapes of Wrath,* Juana in *The Pearl,* Doc Burton in *In Dubious Battle,* Slim in *Of Mice and Men,* Joseph in *To a God Unknown,* and Sam Hamilton and Lee in *East of Eden* all give testimony to the connectedness of all things and express an understanding of the concept; the owners of orchards are ultimately themselves hurt by the mistreatment of migrant workers; “using people” for the benefit of the group-man’s cause ultimately will devour the group man and his cause; plowing under sharecroppers’ homes in Oklahomawill eventually inject a toxin into the muscle of America. In the tide pool, on *Cannery Row,* in the ranch house where the Lennies of this world are dispensable, there is an interrelatedness that transcends the immediate social
problem. Greed, destruction, selfishness, pollution, bigotry, violence and waste are self-inflicted wounds that ultimately prove as fatal to the strong as to the weak. Steinbeck makes a distinction between these and "natural selection," which he said is ultimately kind and benevolent.

An important link between his first important concept connectedness—and the next is Steinbeck's recognition of the inconsistencies and contradictions that are found in nature and in human nature. This discovery led him to be suspicious of simplistic systems, rigid dogmas or even "scientific," cataloguing. He developed a healthy cynicism that caused him to reject stereotypical categorizing or any kind of reasoning that begins with as "answer" or an assumption of what "should be." He believed that to suspend such reasoning, thought it offers a "safer" harbor, and only believe what it makes way for the discovery of new truth. To begin with the general assumption and force the specifics into ready-made systems often too hastily ignores the contradictions and tends to reject the paradoxes. Steinbeck calls teleological thinkers "catalogers" who

in their sometimes intolerant refusal to face fact as they are ... may substitute a fierce but ineffectual attempt to change conditions which are assumed to be undesirable, in place of the understanding acceptance which would pave the way for a more sensible attempt at any change which might still be indicated.\textsuperscript{45}

Steinbeck seems to insist in contrast, that non teleological thinking does not force the observer to ignore, twist, or manipulate what is into categories of cause and effect conclusion to fit some predisposed system. It leaves room for a greater truth yet to be revealed and dares to admit and with seeming contradiction because it does not have to answer the question "why" but only "what" and "how". However, says Steinbeck, many people won't dare to risk this kind of
thinking and the sometimes "ruthless-appearing notions which may arise" because of fear of being "left dangling outing space, deprived of emotional support as had been afforded them by unthinking belief" in the tidy assumption and systems thought to be true. This consent to explore the uncharted, unpredictable territory of what is led Steinbeck (and Ricketts) to observe and record, without fitting into moralistic or previously accepted scientific systems, the things they found in nature and in society. Free of the "why" assumptions, they found a sort of compassion, a "great tenderness of an all-embracingness" rare in thought processes that have to make value judgments, prove cause and effect, and fit into systems of dogma.

Steinbeck is able to see in the tide pool the microcosm of all things: individual and interrelated, vicious and kind, paradoxical and compatible. He sees things that had been assumed to be answers as only shallow understandings of surface observation. He learns, instead, that by less secure "is thinking," he is able to accept a depth and clarity beyond personal assumption, and events become not "effect" of some presupposed "cause" but out growths of what is. He sees pattern for which a claim of causality "would be merely a name for something that exists only in our partial and biased reconstructions". He came to believe that everything is an index of everything else.

In studying specifics without cataloguing and teleological assumptions, Steinbeck is led, then, to the final discovery. In accepting what is, he discovers (or is invaded by) a larger is-ness, a realization that there is whole bigger than the sum of all the parts. He gains this realization only partly by observing what is and accepting what is; there comes to him almost a revelation, an insight far grander
that any deductions from his research. He discovers that “anything less than the whole forms part of the picture only, and the infinite whole is unknowable except by being it, by living into it.” He calls this realization “breaking through” in *The Log*, but other terms for it can be found in his other works. In *East of Eden* he calls these moments of insight “a kind of glory that lights up the mind of man.” It is that “something” that is bigger, grander transcendent of persons or the totality of people—bigger than life, yet gives life and people meaning, a glory that “lights up the world and changes it the way a star shell changes a battleground.” The individual is not “it” but is part of it, attests to it, and therefore, of infinite value. Steinbeck differentiates between the collective and the larger realization. He does not call his larger consciousness “God,” but of the “glory” moments and the “breaking through” them he says: “It is the mother of all creativeness, and it sets each man separate from all other men”. Lester Jay Marks points out that in his writing—as in his scientific exploration—Steinbeck’s method is

to create series of relational events that happened. His novels do not say what should be but only what is. But the reader is enabled by this method to see the intrinsic order of life within the novel and is further enabled to perceive how this order is at once a reflection of and is inseparable from the nature of all things.

But this thinking is reflected in more than just Steinbeck’s “method”. In *The Grapes of Wrath* Tom “breaks through” to something bigger than the organized struggle of laborers, something big enough to demand his life, yet so big that loosing his life for it would only multiply his existence. In *Travels with Charley* Steinbeck, like a scientist observing what is in a tide pool, collects his “specimens” humanity without presuppositions until a realization of a greater isness overwhelms him, and he has to admit then that
what I carried in my head and deeper in my perceptions was a barrel of worms.
I discovered long ago in collecting and classifying marine animals that what I
found was closely intermeshed with how I felt at the moment. External reality
has a way of being not so external after all. \(^55\)

In \textit{The Log}, Steinbeck names this Big Thing the “all truth which admits infinite
change or expansion as added relation become apparent.” \(^56\) He talks about the
“deep thing” as a “going home,” terms reminiscent of C. S. Lewis’s, “walking
through the wardrobe” (or Chronicles of Narnia) or Lewis Carroll’s “passing
through the looking glass.” Other philosophers have called that to which
Steinbeck “broke through” the Ground of Being. \(^57\) This term, perhaps more than
others, reflects the depth of Steinbeck’s meaning when he uses the term “is-
thinking”-living and thinking with an awareness of the great \textit{is}-ness beyond what
can be presently observed or understood.

Steinbeck says that the criteria for validity are still best stated, “It’s so
because it’s so.” \(^58\) This statement seems to imply that particulars and specifics,
observations and behaviors are accepted as part of ultimate reality, and viewed as
part of the Big Thing of which we and all things are a part but which is bigger
than the sum of all the parts. A thousand observable things may be related or
even illustrative of the \textit{is}, but they could never cause it or limit it or box it into a
manageable fact; instead, observable facts are only “ripples fading with distance
or depending upon the original intensity of the vortex”. \(^59\) This view lifts thinking
above the “blame approach,” above cataloguing, above established systems. The
“non-causal or non-blaming view point seems to us,” say Steinbeck and Ricketts,
“very often relatively to represent the ‘new thing,’ the Hegelian ‘Christ child’
which arises emergently from the union of two opposing viewpoints, such as those physical and spiritual teleologies."

There is a price to pay for this deifying moment of insight called “breaking through,” this transcendent participation. Richard Astro cites an article by Ed Ricketts in which Ricketts says that “breaking through” must come through intense struggle, that this struggle must be filled with integrity, and that “breaking through requires waiting”—it must come in its own time. In the meantime, the questing, struggling person must live with constant insecurity and cannot place a valid prior evaluation on anything, yet this insecurity must be recognized as a symbol of the eternal struggle that is necessary to the ultimate “breaking through” to that new thing that is “nameless, outside of time” and “near immortality.”

This struggling process can be seen in Steinbeck’s own writing, for in his earlier works there is a starkness—as in *Of Mice and Men* and *In Dubious Battle*—in which we see man as part of the organism; the style of these novels reflects is thinking, but some how we see that men as group-man, driven only by the “conservation and insurance of their own survival,” are really not human, Steinbeck seems to be writing out of that frightening space where one is, for a time, suspended before “breaking through.” But it is not being a part of the group-animal that makes men human, but the “cosmic quest,” the pursuit of that something more to wholistic tenderness. What we feel in *Cannery Row* and *The Pearl* is that man is more than an organism functioning for survival, no matter how unified. In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck seems to have cast his lot for more than just survival, but for compassion and the triumph of the spiritual organism. This new breakthrough as Casy and (later) Tom discover, transcends in
the old laws of right and wrong that a mere organism must have for efficient function and survival, to a cosmic law that offers to a stranger outside the "colony" of the organism the milk of human kindness left overflowing in the human spirit, even in the face of death.

It is typical of Steinbeck-and it is typical of California- that he can study biology and speculate about teleology without losing his interest in, or fellowship with, Mack and the boys. His biggest contribution as a writer may turn out to have been the exploration and colonization of the no-man's land between intellectual and non-intellectual, rational and sub-rational. Undoubtedly Steinbeck's non-teleological speculations serve as an effective instrument to unlock the mysteries of the vast domain of his fictional world.
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